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INNOVATION IN RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the innovation processes taking place in agritourism farming. The evaluation was based on a survey conducted in 2014 in 50 agritourism farms in rural areas of Dolnośląskie voivodeship. These studies focused on innovation as a source of competitive advantage of these facilities. New elements introduced in the last three years to the package of offered services were analyzed. The respondents were asked about the reasons for the introduction of new rural tourism product and the sources of inspiration for these ideas. Studies of analyzed farms show that primarily they introduce innovative products and services. New products and services were very popular among visitors and their introduction has contributed to an increase in the number of clients and income from tourism activities.

Keywords: agritourism, innovation, innovative products and service, rural tourism

INTRODUCTION

After ten years of EU membership, which involves financial support for rural development under the cohesion policy and CAP instruments, regional and intra-regional disparities in standards of living of the rural population continue to affect Poland. According to research[1], higher quality of life and development levels are reported by regions located close to urban agglomerations while remote rural municipalities lag far behind. Although rural areas located away from larger cities usually offer less economic advantages, they have highly valuable natural resources which make them attractive tourist destinations. After 2000, rural areas with characteristics conducive to the development of tourism have witnessed an explosion of agri-tourism facilities. That process was driven by modern tourism trends, low profitability of agricultural production and, first of all, by the financial instruments triggered by the integration with the EU structures. Operating under the Rural Development Program (RDP), these instruments support the investment processes in that area of the rural population's economic activity[2] (2014–2020 Rural Development Program). The numerous agri-tourism facilities, established primarily in attractive tourist destinations[3,4], gave rise to competition and resulted in increasingly higher customer expectations. As a consequence, agri-tourism operators needed to boost their creativity and take measures aimed at making their tourist offering more appealing. The competitiveness of economic operators and tourist destinations is based on various advantages related to

[1] Including that conducted by Rosner and Stanny from the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (Rosner, 2010).

[2] By December 31, 2013, as a part of 2007–2013 RDP, over 23,000 rural tourism and agritourism projects worth PLN 3.28 billion have been implemented with a total investment value of PLN 4.3 billion (Rolnictwo…, 2014).

[3] According to research by the Institute of Tourism (2010), in Poland, there was 5,790 agritourism apartments or homes in 2000. By 2013, that number reached 7,802 (a 36% increase) (Rolnictwo…, 2014).

[4] The largest numbers of agri-tourism farms are recorded in the following voivodeship: Małopolska, Podkarpackie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Pomorskie and Dolnośląskie (Rolnictwo…, 2014).

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the quality of resources owned (Krupa and Dec, 2013). This means, first of all, the touristic, natural and anthropogenic assets of the immediate vicinity, in addition to the farms' resources.

Currently, the EU's rural development policy strongly focuses on innovativeness and creativity. This provides benefits for the rural population and for the consumers of goods offered by modern villages. The EU's rural development programs include multiple measures to boost innovation (2014–2020 RDP). Innovations are believed to be of major importance for the sustainable development of these areas as they enable the delivery of public goods that play an important role in creating packages of rural tourism products (Baum and Śleszyński, 2009; Wilkin, 2007).

THE MEANING OF INNOVATION. INNOVATIONS IN TOURISM

In the economic theory, the concept of "innovation" was introduced in 1912 by J. A. Schumpeter. He defined "innovative activities" as practical use and exploitation of novelty in products and in the supply, manufacturing and production processes (Roman, 2013). Innovative activities are presented as a functional combination of the following five options: – the introduction of a new good or of a new quality of a good, – the introduction of an improved or better method of production, – the opening of a new market, – the use of a new sales or purchasing method, – the conquest of a new source of supply of raw materials or half-manufactured goods, the carrying out of the better organization of production (Schumpeter, 1960). In tourism, innovations may take various forms, including the introduction of new or improved services based on product innovations, new or upgraded customer service processes, or organizational and institutional changes (Ziółkowska-Weiss, 2012[5]; Zontek, 2014). The tourists perceive product innovations to be the ones that largely affect their purchasing decisions. These innovations may extend to goods (e.g. the purchase of tourist equipment that enables new form of tourism and leisure) and services (e.g. innovative services targeted at disabled people; supplementary services, such as organizing various trainings or meetings with interesting people for the tourists). As a consequence, innovativeness modifies the structure, prices and features of the service package. Usually, process innovations in the tourism sector mean increasing the operating efficiency of the base infrastructure for tourist facilities. Also, process innovations extend to introducing new Web solutions for online booking with optional payment.

In the tourism sector, innovative activities may also be reflected by the implementation of new management techniques and instruments; the development of an incentive system to trigger the employees' creativity; consistent market research; developing knowledge of customer needs; testing the adaptation of new products; and building the company image. Marketing innovations are based on implementing a new marketing method applicable to product promotion and distribution processes or to the price policy[6]. In turn, institutional innovations mean developing a new organizational structure or legal form that effectively changes or improves business operations. As regards ecology, innovative activity is manifested by developing environmentally-friendly forms of leisure and eliminating the adverse environmental impact of tourism (Zontek, 2014). The level of innovativeness in the tourism sector depends on the access to source of information, defined as the place where the information is created (Zontek, 2014). The sources may be classified into two groups: internal (endogenous) and external (exogenous) sources[7]. However, Drucker (1992) believes that the basic source of information is the market and the customer expectations.

Innovativeness is a major driver of competitiveness in the rural tourism too. In the agri-tourism offerings, the resources of farms are combined with the values offered by the immediate vicinity, and with the owners' competences and collaboration skills. As regards agri-tourism, innovations may extend to product, process, management, marketing and institutional innovations. Agri-tourism is a service offering, and therefore good relationships between the farmer and the guests may become an excellent source of information on their expectations (which means a source of innovation) (Krupa and Dec, 2013). According to Krzyżanowska (2013): „in rural tourism, innovation could mean creating an original tourist product from scratch (e.g. dinosaur

[5] According to Hjalager (2010).

[6] An example of marketing innovations in the tourism sector is the implementation of loyalty programs that establish long-lasting relationships between customers and tourist service providers (Ziółkowska-Weiss, 2012).

[7] Classification proposed by Drucker (Zontek, 2014).

parks or some theme villages where the local features are only a background or inspiration) as well as developing a professional marketing environment for the existing natural or cultural values (e.g. organizing and promoting tourist services and infrastructure around natural and human heritage sites). An innovation may be a tourist product defined as a location (site, area, trail), event (e.g. festival, cultural event), service or service package (e.g. organized tour). Innovative tourism solutions may also mean managing the booking and tourist information processes; deploying innovative promotion channels and instruments; or combining rural tourism with such types of tourism whose products are usually offered in another context (e.g. rural medical tourism)." The author emphasizes the importance of innovativeness for supporting and strengthening the demand for these products while noting that new products cannot be introduced to the detriment of the rural nature of the areas concerned.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

The objective of this study is to assess the innovative processes taking place in agri-tourism farms located in the Dolnośląskie voivodeship. The analysis covers new elements that have extended the existing service portfolio during the last three years. In this study, the following research questions are asked: what were the reasons behind innovations implemented by agri-tourism operators? What kinds of innovations (product, process, marketing, management or organization innovations) have been implemented in tourist facilities? What were the effects of innovations, and what was the source of new solution ideas?

To find the answers, a survey was conducted in 2014 with 50 agri-tourism farms located in rural areas of the Dolnośląskie voivodeship, selected using purposive sampling. The basic criteria were as follows: cooperation of the agri-tourism operators with the Lower Silesia Agricultural Consultancy Center, and the owner's consent to participate in the extensive survey. The facilities were located in the following districts (poviats): Dzierżoniów (4 facilities), Jelenia Góra (8), Kamienna Góra (1), Kłodzko (9), Wałbrzych (9), Ząbkowice (7), Bolesławiec (4), Lwówek, Milicz, Oława, Polkowice, Złotoryja (1 facility each) and Wrocław (3). The facilities considered represented 8% of the total population of Dolnośląskie agri-tourism farms. The survey was very extensive as it included 51 detailed questions. Due to organizational and financial restrictions, only 50 facilities could be covered. In the questionnaire, the vast majority of questions were semi-open questions. The survey was contracted by the Economic and Social Sciences Department of the Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences to local employees of the Lower Silesia Agricultural Consultancy Center based in Wrocław.

The data collected was developed with the descriptive method. The results are shown in tables and in the figure.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The Dolnośląskie voivodeship, especially the Sudetes region, offer numerous sites of tourist interest, including both natural and anthropogenic sites. The most attractive ones include Kłodzko Valley with picturesque mountains (Stołowe Mountains, Śnieżnik Mountains), health resorts (Kudowa, Polanica, Duszniki) and tourist sites, i.e. Karpacz, Szklarska Poręba, spa treatment facilities (mineral waters) and protected areas abundant in rare fauna and flora species. The attractiveness of these areas is strengthened by numerous cultural heritage resources (architectural sites, urban structures and places for religious worship), intellectual heritage, and a diversified agri-tourism package. All of the above is conducive to the creation and development of agri-tourism farms. In 2014, there were around 630 agri-tourism farms registered in rural areas, including approximately 80% in the Sudetes region (Kowalczuk-Misek, 2013).

In the farms under consideration, the largest part of the respondents were people aged above 45 at secondary (53% of the population) or tertiary (23%) education levels, as also confirmed by previous studies (Kurtyka, 2010). Agri-tourism farms are run by experienced persons with higher education levels than those engaged in traditional farming. Agri-tourism activities are undertaken by owners of both small and large holdings[8]. One third of the respondents farmed 1 to 5 ha of agricultural land while 22% of the population owned farms with an area ranging from 11 ha to 20 ha. Only 4 accommodation providers had large areas of agricultural land (beyond 50 ha).

The structural changes in the 1990s and the subsequent establishment of a market economy, as well as the

[8] As confirmed in studies by Kurtyka, 2011.

low profitability of agricultural production (especially in vulnerable regions) are the factors behind the farmers' decision to engage into additional activities. Approximately 30% of the respondents made that decision in the previous century. The development and the popularity of farm holidays in picturesque natural surroundings has led to an increased interest in this income-earning opportunity. 70% of the respondents initiated their agri-tourism business in the post-2000 period. The key factors behind their decision (both with a share of 64%) were the pursuit of additional incomes and the intent to make use of the available rooms. More than a half of the respondents discovered the opportunities brought by places of interest and tourist attractions in their region. When looking at the author's previous papers based on studies of agri-tourism farms in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2010, it may be concluded that the aforesaid phenomenon has become the rule. In the above studies, the regional tourism potential was cited as the main or the second inspiration (ranked below the pursuit of additional incomes) to engage in the delivery of tourist services.

Nearly all of the respondents (96%) deliver tourist services on a year-round basis. The Dolnośląskie voivodeship has the largest share of year-round agri-tourism offerings (98% approximately) among all Polish voivodeships (Jagusiewicz and Legienis, 2007).

An important driver of competitiveness is the innovativeness level of the undertaking. The commitment to improve the innovativeness and competitiveness of tourist products is one of the key elements in the tourist offering development process (Świtalski, 2005).

A tourism business is innovative if the owner knows how to create, efficiently use and effectively promote new products. Therefore, the owner should be able to raise funds on a continuous basis in line with the evolving situation in his/her environment, and should have the capacity to smoothly implement new technologies and organizational methods, as necessary to pursue the evolving development objectives (Roman, 2013).

Innovative tourist products and specialized services are not a common practice in the Polish rural tourism sector. While the Polish rural tourism covers numerous products which can be regarded as innovative, an innovation-oriented approach is not common among service providers (Turystyka wiejska…, 2012). In the tourist sector, innovativeness faces some obstacles due to specific features of tourism as a sector of the economy. These include business uncertainty which often results in an adaptive rather than proactive approach. While small-scale economic initiatives are able to implement new concepts faster than large enterprises and, thus, gain a competitive edge, they usually tend to follow the others once they are assured that specific changes, e.g. new investments, are viable for them (Czernek, 2014).

During the last three years, the respondents have implemented many new solutions based on products and services (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4). Most of the examples cited below are based on the imitation pattern which means emulating and repeating the actions of others. The existence of this phenomenon was confirmed in a study

Table 1. Innovations introduced by the respondents in the last three years (products)
Tabela 1. Innowacje wprowadzone przez ankietowanych w ostatnich trzech latach (produkty)

Specification Wyszczególnienie	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%
Products – Produkty		
Regional cuisine Kuchnia regionalna	5	10
Ecological cuisine Kuchnia ekologiczna	7	14
Vegetarian cuisine Kuchnia wegetariańska	6	12
Own fruit and vegetables Własne owoce i warzywa	6	12
Own eggs Własne jaja	7	14
Own smokehouse Własna wędzarnia	6	12
Production of cheese Wyrób sera	6	12
Production of cold cuts Wyrób wędlin	7	14
Bread baking Wypieki chleba	6	12
Beekeeping/own honey Pszczelarstwo/własny miód	6	12
Sales of own products Sprzedaż własnych produktów	7	14

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

Table 2. Innovations introduced by the respondents in the last three years (services)
Tabela 2. Innowacje wprowadzone przez ankietowanych w ostatnich trzech latach (usługi)

Specification Wyszczególnienie	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%
Services – Usługi		
Sightseeing excursions Wycieczki krajoznawcze	5	10
Field trips Wyjazdy terenowe	9	18
Sleigh rides Kulig	6	12
Survival school Szkoła przetrwania	6	12
Integration events Imprezy integracyjne i biesiady	7	14
Regional weddings Wesela regionalne	6	12
Carriage rides Przejażdżki bryczką	8	16
Meditations Medytacje	5	10
Physiotherapy Fizjoterapia	6	12
Wellness Odnowa biologiczna	6	12
Ecological education Edukacja ekologiczna	6	12
Fishing Łowienie ryb	6	12
Horse riding Jazda konna	5	10
Participation in the field works Udział w pracach polowych	5	10
Other (harvesting of wild products) Inne (zbieranie runa leśnego)	2	4

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

Table 3. Innovations introduced by the respondents in the last three years (infrastructure and equipment)
Tabela 3. Innowacje wprowadzone przez ankietowanych w ostatnich trzech latach (infrastruktura i wyposażenie)

Specification Wyszczególnienie	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%
Infrastructure and equipment Infrastruktura i wyposażenie		
Wireless Internet access Bezprzewodowy dostęp do Internetu	17	34
Swimming pool Basen	8	16
Jacuzzi	5	10
The gym Siłownia	6	12
Gymnasium Sala gimnastyczna	5	10
Sports field Boisko sportowe	6	12
Billiards Bilard	5	10
Minigolf	5	10
Sauna	6	12
Paintball	5	10
Rental of sports equipment Wypożyczanie sprzętu sportowego	7	14
Mini zoo Domowe zoo	5	10
Botanical garden and recreation Ogród botaniczno-rekreacyjny	6	12
Fish ponds Stawy rybne	5	10
Museum Muzeum	5	10
Facilities for disabled Udogodnienia dla niepełnosprawnych	6	12
A gazebo with table and benches Altana ze stołem i ławkami	8	16
Children's playground Plac zabaw dla dzieci	11	22
TV in the room Telewizor w pokoju	7	14

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

Table 4. Innovations introduced by the respondents in the last three years (workshops)
Tabela 4. Innowacje wprowadzone przez ankietowanych w ostatnich trzech latach (warsztaty)

Specification Wyszczególnienie	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%
Workshops – Warsztaty		
Handicraft workshops Warsztaty rękodzielnicze	5	10
Painting workshops Warsztaty malarskie	6	12
Theater workshops Warsztaty teatralne	6	12
Ceramic workshop Warsztaty ceramiczne	5	10
Workshops herb Warsztaty zielarskie	6	12
Workshop production of cheese and bread, making sausages traditional Warsztaty wyrobu sera, pieczenia chleba, wyrobu wędlin tradycyjnych	2	4

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

by M. Roman[9]. Innovation, in its simplest form, means improving the quality of tourist services and offering new products. This could extend to improving the technical comfort of guest rooms or introducing a diversified menu (Turystyka wiejska…, 2012, p. 105). Living in a haste, racing against the clock and struggling with excessive workloads are the reasons why many urban dwellers consume unhealthy, highly processed food. For them, countryside means healthy, home-grown plant and animal products. The interviewees noticed the potential behind these modern trends. To meet the tourists' expectations, many of them extended their offering with the sale of eggs from their farm (14%), production of smoked meat products (14%), green cuisine (14%), own fruits and vegetables, own smokehouse, production of cheese, bread baking, and own honey (12% of the population each). The offered leisure services include: field trips (18%), carriage rides (16%), sports gear rental (14%), integration events (14%), sleigh rides (12%), survival schools (12%), regional wedding parties (12%) and horse riding (10%). The offerings also include relaxation for body and soul: biological regeneration therapies, physiotherapy, sauna, fitness rooms (12% each), as well as hot tubs and meditations (10% each).

The respondents have made infrastructure investments in the 3-year period: on one hand, they have improved the guest experience and the attractiveness of their offering; on the other, they have introduced physical exercise facilities. In view of the common use of Internet and the large availability of mobile Web access devices, the interviewees decided to install wireless Internet access spots (34% of the population). As the agritourism is highly popular among families with children, the respondents were prompted to organize playgrounds (22%) and mini zoos (10%), and to build a pool (16%) or a sports field (12%). Active tourists may use the fitness room, gymnasium and sauna, or play mini-golf and paintball. Also, various educational workshops are highly enjoyed, both by elementary school children and by adults. To meet the demand for such services, the owners developed tourist products based on history and local tradition. This allowed them to enhance their offerings with various workshops, including painting, theatre and herb workshops (12% each), handicraft and ceramic workshops (10% each), as well as cheese and cold meats manufacturing and bakery workshops (4%).

In small-scale tourist businesses, innovations are not perceived as a revolutionary, dynamic process which leads to rapid transformations. Instead, they are considered to be a continuous process based on consistent refinement, adjustments, upgrades and adaptation of improvements. Innovations are mainly underpinned by experience and by employee skills and ingenuity (Pasterz and Kapusta, 2007). These findings are supported by studies because the main source of innovation (90%) in the facilities under consideration were the providers' own ideas. One third of the interviewees relied on training and on propositions made by a consultancy center or company. One quarter of the owners were motivated by customer feedback, Web information and observations

[9] M. Roman conducted a survey with 42 owners of agri-tourism farms in the Podlaskie voivodeship. The results were presented in a speech by M. Roman: "Innovative leisure services as a component of agri-tourism products, illustrated by the example of the Podlaskie province" during the Rural Tourism and Agritourism Forum conference held in Kielce on April 9, 2015.

and remarks from household members/employees (24% each). Measures taken by the competitors were an inspiration for 8 interviewees only. A group of 6 engaged in innovations as a part of cooperation with industry peers. The impact of media was marginal (4% only).

As mentioned earlier, a tourism business is innovative if the owner knows how to create new products and is able to raise funds on a continuous basis, among other criteria. In the facilities under consideration, new solutions were financed with the service providers' own funds (98%). Only 9 interviewees used a bank loan for that purpose while 7 relied on EU funds.

According to the respondents, the main reasons for taking investment measures include: acquiring new customers (24 answers), the need to organize leisure time activities for the tourists (21), keeping up with the competition (19) or maintaining their current position (12). The direct contact between the service provider and the customer is a highly important source of innovations. This includes not only customer feedback but also customer response and behavior during service delivery (Gallouj, 2002). Therefore, high customer expectations (18) and the need for quality and standards improvement (16) were equally important drivers of innovation.

Rural tourism services are not a typical form of economic activity focused on profit maximization. Instead, they are a combination of passion, hobbies, lifestyle and income-earning opportunities (Turystyka wiejska..., 2012). This is why the pursuit of higher incomes was the objective of innovations for 9 respondents only, while one third of the interviewees were motivated by the intent to put their own ideas into action (Fig. 1).

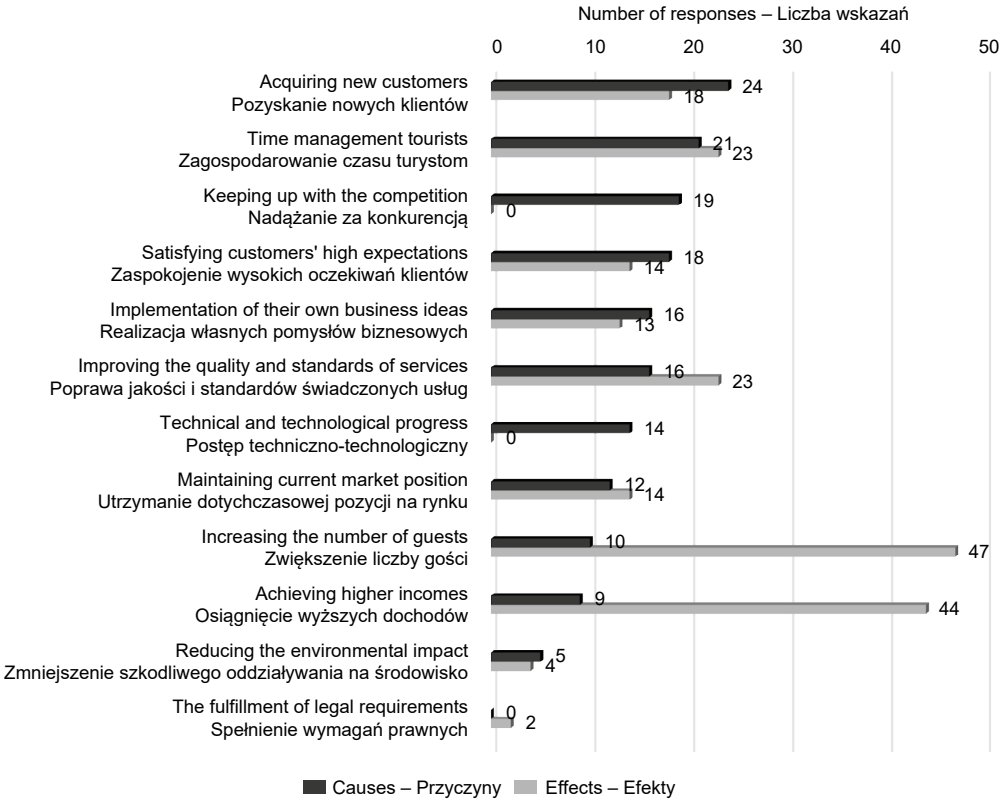

Fig. 1. Causes and effects of introducing innovations in agritourist farms according to respondents' opinion
Source: own research.
Rys. 1. Przyczyny i efekty wprowadzania innowacji w gospodarstwach agroturystycznych wg opinii respondentów
Źródło: badania własne.

Table 5. Effects of the innovative projects on increasing visitor numbers and income
Tabela 5. Efekty wprowadzenia innowacji dotyczące zwiększenia liczby gości i dochodu

Specification Wyszczególnienie	The number of visitors Liczba gości	Income Dochód
	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	
Not increased Nie zwiększył/a się	3	6
Increased to 10% Zwiększył/a się do 10%	27	27
Increased by 10–20% Zwiększył/a się 10–20%	11	11
Increased by 20–30% Zwiększył/a się 20–30%	5	2
Increased by 30–50% Zwiększył/a się 30–50%	4	4
Razem – Total	50	50

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

The interviewees believe that many of the innovative projects have produced the desired outcomes (effects) (Fig. 1). The increased number of guests and greater income was the most frequent answer.

The implemented innovations led to an increase in the number of guests by up to 10% in 27 facilities; by 10 to 20% in 11 facilities; by 20 to 30% in 5 facilities; and by as much as half in 4 facilities. The increase in the volume of tourist services sold is correlated to the increase in incomes. More than a half of the interviewees (54%) experienced a growth of income by up to 10% while one quarter of the interviewees saw their incomes increasing by 10 to 20%. Six facilities reported an income growth ranging from 20 to 50%. The remaining six failed to achieve a financial success (Table 5). Inspired by the outcomes, more than a half of the providers (66%) plan more innovations to be implemented in the future.

This study confirms the role of innovative activities in the development of rural tourism (Table 6), including as a driver of the growing demand for that type of leisure. Most of the respondents agreed that the innovations

Table 6. Opinions of respondents on the effects of innovation
Tabela 6. Opinie respondentów na temat skutków wprowadzenia innowacji

Specification Wyszczególnienie	New solutions have contributed to the development of tourism activities Nowe rozwiązania przyczyniły się do rozwoju działalności turystycznej		New or improved products/services/attractions are popular visitor Nowe lub ulepszone produkty/usługi/atrakcje cieszą się zainteresowaniem gości		The introduction of innovations increased the interest of tourists offer Wprowadzenie innowacji zwiększyło zainteresowanie turystów ofertą	
	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%	The number of indications Liczba wskazań	%
Definitely yes Zdecydowanie tak	12	24	24	48	15	30
Probably yes Raczej tak	32	64	22	44	26	52
Probably not Raczej nie	6	12	4	8	6	12
Definitely not Zdecydowanie nie	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hard to say Trudno powiedzieć	0	0	0	0	3	6

Source: own research.
Źródło: badania własne.

proved to be effective and declared that the new attractions have contributed to the development of the tourism business (definitely yes: 24%; probably yes: 64% of the population). Only 6 owners did not notice any changes compared to the condition prior to innovation implementation. According to 92% of the interviewees, the new or improved products/services/attractions are enjoyed by the tourists while 82% saw an increasing interest in their tourist offering. Inspired by the outcomes of changes, more than a half of the providers (66%) plan more attractions to be launched in the future.

SUMMARY

Innovativeness is a determinant of the competitiveness of service providers, especially when it comes to tourist businesses. Not all market operators are fully aware of the importance of innovativeness in gaining a competitive edge (Krupa and Dec, 2013).

With reference to the question asked in this paper, it was concluded that innovative activities were made on the initiative of agri-tourism farmers in order to face increased competition, meet customer expectations and gain new customers. It follows that the service providers recognize the need for continuous change as stabilization leads to a loss of competitiveness. Changes are a part of today's globalization trends. In the era of increased competition, there is only one way to survive: a leap into the future. In that context, crucial factors are not only the agri-tourism farm's financial resources but mainly the human and social capital (Sala, 2015). The importance of human capital in the farms under consideration is manifested by the fact that the farms succeeded in increasing the number of guests and incomes as a part of innovative activities resulting from the providers' own visions.

Note also that while most of the providers cited additional incomes as the main reason for engaging into tourist activities, that motive inspired only 9 farmers to implement innovations. This behavior indicates a strong market orientation of the respondents.

Although not every innovation brings value to the customer, the customer usefulness criterion remains crucial in the service sector. Therefore, customer-oriented product innovations are readily identifiable. According to research, the most common innovation was providing WiFi Internet access on all premises. Many of the new attractions involved aligning the offering with the customer group who are most frequent visitors of agri-tourism farms, i.e. families with children. The tourist products introduced by the providers were based on local traditions. Also, various educational workshops were organized by many farms. To meet the customer's needs, the farmers turned to products made with healthy ingredients originating from their own plant and animal production. The vast majority of products, services and attractions offered are not new to the agri-tourism service market but result from emulating other providers. However, they meet the innovation criterion as they are introduced for the first time in the farm considered. The economic initiatives taken by accommodation providers, motivated by the pursuit of competitive advantage and new customers, tend to emulate (repeat) the actions of others.

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Streszczenie. Celem opracowania jest ocena procesów innowacyjnych zachodzących w gospodarstwach agroturystycznych. Opracowanie powstało na podstawie badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych w roku 2014 w 50 gospodarstwach agroturystycznych z obszarów wiejskich województwa dolnośląskiego. Badania te dotyczyły innowacyjności jako źródła przewag konkurencyjności tych obiektów. Przeanalizowano nowe elementy, wprowadzone w ciągu ostatnich trzech lat do pakietu oferowanych dotychczas usług. Zasięgnięto opinii wśród respondentów o powody wprowadzenia nowości do produktu turystyki wiejskiej oraz zapytano o źródła inspiracji tych pomysłów. Badania wykazały, że w analizowanych gospodarstwach wprowadzono przede wszystkim innowacje produktowe i usługowe. Nie dostrzeżono innowacji w organizacji i zarządzaniu ani marketingowych i instytucjonalnych. Nowe produkty i usługi cieszyły się dużym zainteresowaniem gości, a ich wprowadzenie przyczyniło się do zwiększenia liczby klientów i dochodu z działalności turystycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: agroturystyka, innowacyjność, innowacyjne produkty i usługi, turystyka wiejska

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