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AGRITOURISM AS A WAY OF SPENDING FREE TIME OF URBAN FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Key words: rural tourism, agritourism, families with children, free time

ABSTRACT. The aim of the study is to present agritourism as a way of spending free time with families with children living in cities. The article presents, among others, preferences, behaviour and expectations regarding stay and rest in agritourism farms of this group of visitors. The research was carried out by means of literature analysis and a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was disseminated on social media. The number of respondents was 195. Respondents chose several shorter stays rather than one long one. The most popular were farms located on a lake or river, in mountainous or coastal areas. They were popular mainly in summer. The village was visited mainly due to the possibility of rest in peace and quiet and its pro-health qualities. When selecting a particular object, respondents mainly considered the price. During their stay in the village, respondents were willing to undertake physical activity - bike and walking tours prevailed. Respondents were satisfied with their stay at an agritourism farm. Almost everyone declared that they would like to use this form of tourism again and would be ready to recommend it to their family or friends with children.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the village has ceased to be seen only through a prism of agricultural production. It currently has a number of functions, where, apart from production, social, cultural and natural functions can be mentioned. This is somewhat a result of propagating, from the beginning of the 90s of the 20th century, a model of multifunctional development of agriculture and rural areas. This phenomenon, during the period of its initiation and dissemination, has received a lot of attention in scientific literature [Kłodziński 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999, Skawińska 1994, Wilkin 1997, 1999, Kłodziński, Rosner 1997, Bański, Stola 2002].

One of many elements of multifunctional development is rural tourism, and as part of it, agritourism, which has constantly been developing in Poland since the early 1990s. Today, it plays many important roles in the rural economy, bringing many benefits to local tourism providers and the whole local community. The significant rank of this issue has been reflected in many scientific studies [Sikora 1999, 2000, Kmita 1995, 1997, Dąbrowska 1996, Gannon 1993, Majewski, Lane 2003, Mikuta, Żelazna 2004, Majewski 2000, Drzewiecki 1995, Dębniwska, Tkaczuk 1997, Wiatrak 1996, Balińska 2016, Zawadka 2010].

Agritourism also fulfils many functions and is a source of many benefits in relation to tourists themselves. These include functions and benefits of a recreational, health, educational and cognitive nature. The village and agriculture are perceived by many in a stereotypical and pejorative way. A stay at an agritourism farm is, therefore, an excellent opportunity for cultural education and changing these views. This type of recreation also promotes the formation of ecological awareness, broadening knowledge about the specificity of agricultural production, as well as contact with farm animals. This form of tourism may, therefore, seem particularly attractive to families with children coming from cities. For the young generation, this is often the only opportunity to verify the way of thinking about the countryside and agriculture, as well as gain knowledge and experience in the field of agricultural production, livestock or specific customs and traditions still cultivated in many regions of the country.

MATERIAL AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

The aim of the study is to present agritourism as a way of spending free time for families with children living in cities. Featured, among others, are the preferences, behaviour and expectations regarding stay and rest in agritourism farms of this group of visitors. The research was carried out by means of literature analysis and a diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique. The questionnaire was disseminated at the beginning of 2019 on social media – Facebook. The statistical analysis included answers given by respondents who had rested at least once in an agritourism farm with at least one child under 14 years of age. The number of respondents was 195.

AGRITOURISM AS ONE OF THE FORMS OF RURAL TOURISM

For many years, rural tourism has been treated as an important branch of socio-economic activity of local communities, not only on a regional, but also national scale. The popularization of this form of non-agricultural activity is conducive to the dynamization of development of multifunctional rural areas, which is supported by the opportunity to obtain EU funds, as well as the fact that this type of recreation is popular among tourists. Rural areas constitute an important part of tourism space, not only due to its great territorial extent, but mainly due to the presence of unique natural, cultural, historical and other elements that often make them very attractive and useful for relaxation, recreation, sports or sightseeing [Górz 2007].

The growing popularity and importance of rural tourism means that this issue is readily undertaken by numerous researchers, which results in an impressive number of scientific studies on this subject. In these works, concepts, in the field of rural tourism, are sometimes defined in an ambiguous way. Especially in colloquial language and everyday life, concepts such as tourism in rural areas, rural tourism and agritourism are confused or misused.

Of the above-mentioned concepts, the widest and most spacious is tourism in rural areas. Its determinant is the administrative classification of the area as rural, i.e. located outside the administrative boundaries of cities – even when in terms of settlement, land-

scape, or even the functional criterion of commonly understood rural areas is not met – we are talking about rural areas, but significantly urbanized in terms of tourism, among others, tourist resorts or conference and congress centres located outside cities or tourist and recreation centres located, for example, in an extra-urban attractive nature space [Wojciechowska 2007]. Marek Kłodziński [2005] rightly points out, therefore, that it is not possible to include all tourist activities in rural areas into rural tourism and gives, as an example, a stay in coastal resorts or ski resorts, where (in spite of their administrative rurality) hotels form a system of mass tourism industry. Limiting ourselves only to the administrative area of tourism functioning when defining a given form is characteristic for the initial period of its development. An example of this is the definition of the Commission of European Communities of 1986 [CEC 1986] and the definition proposed by Myriam Jansen-Verbeke [1990a,b] or Henri Grolleau [1987].

The concept of rural tourism, narrower than tourism in rural areas, appeared in Polish and foreign literature after 1990. It was emphasized that rural tourism (apart from its administrative affiliation) must be supplemented with specific attributes, which include traditional culture, a rural landscape or lifestyle of local communities [Dernoi 1991, Grèffe 1994, Lane 1993, Oppermann 1996, Page, Getz 1997, Perales 2002, Saxena, Ilbery 2008, Sharpley, Sharpley 1997, Roberts, Hall 2001, Wiatrak 1996, Sikora 1999, Majewski 1994, Drzewiecki 1995, Balińska, Sikorska-Wolak 2001, Wojciechowska 2007]. Rural tourism should, therefore, be treated as one of the forms of tourism in rural areas, which is implemented in areas functionally perceived as rural, refers to the specificity of the village in its traditional meaning, based on the cultural heritage and tradition of the village, and is characterized by its small size and close connection with the local population and benefits gained by it [Lane 1994].

A specific form of rural tourism, which appeared in the early 90s of the twentieth century, is agritourism. Reviewing scientific literature on this subject, it can be concluded that its essence is connected with several important attributes and features. These are [Zawadka 2010]:

An inseparable connection with an agricultural holding, involving the use of residential (and sometimes farm) buildings to provide accommodation services;

- spatial restriction to agricultural areas, not rural areas in the administrative sense only;
- the possibility of active rest implemented in the characteristic cultural and natural environment of the farm using plant and / or animal production carried out therein, which facilitates the approximation of visitors to the specificity of the village and agriculture.

It should be noted, however, that despite almost thirty years of agritourism development in Poland, this concept, like rural tourism, has not yet been defined by state bodies in any legal or normative act. As underlined by Agata Balińska [2016] the lack of official clarification of the terms “agritourism” and “rural tourism” and their subjective application may not only cause problems at a market communication level, but also introduce inconsistencies in the comparability of research results.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

The respondents were dominated by women, who accounted for 70.3% of the surveyed group. The age of the respondents was varied. However, due to the character of the group, people between 30 and 50 years old (81.0%) dominated. The surveyed group consisted of relatively well-educated people. 66.7% of them graduated from university and 27.2% from secondary school. The respondents positively assessed their own financial situation - 55.9% of them described it as rather good, and 19.0% as very good. 22.6% perceived it as sufficient. Most of the respondents (49.2%) lived in metropolises (over 200,000 residents). 23.6% of respondents lived in cities counting 50,000 to 200,000. residents, and the remaining part in smaller cities. The respondents came from various provinces. However, the inhabitants of the Mazowieckie, Łódź, Lublin, Podlasie and Lower Silesia voivodships dominated. The families of the respondents mostly consisted of two children (45.6%). Families with one child accounted for 36.4%, and three with 16.4%. Only 1.5% of respondents had 4 or more children.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In the opinion of the majority of respondents (42.6%), tourism was not a widely known or popular form of spending free time in Poland. 34.8% of respondents perceived it as such, and 22.6% had no opinion about it. Interestingly, for 6.7% of respondents, the stay in agritourism farms was the only form of tourism trips. One of the reasons for the relatively low popularity of rural tourism is certainly the stereotypical way of perceiving the village and the mistaken belief in a lack of tourism attractiveness of rural areas. This situation is unlikely to change quickly due to the still ineffective promotion of this form of tourism. Activities in this area are undertaken mainly by the Consortium of Rural Tourism "Rest in the Country" (Konsorcjum Turystyki Wiejskiej «Odpoczywaj na wsi») established in 2015. Unfortunately, their effectiveness remains highly debatable.

Respondents, together with their children, visited agritourism farms most often twice a year (51.8% of respondents). One visit a year was declared by 26.7% of respondents, three by 18.5%, and others visited even more often. Most respondents preferred short stays – 34.9% came for a weekend or a maximum of two nights. The share of tourists staying on the farm for 4 to 6 days was also significant. They accounted for 32.8% of respondents. 21.5% of respondents decided to stay for a week, and the rest stayed in the countryside for more than 10 days (half of them for 2 weeks). Those who travelled more often declared shorter stay times.

Respondents most often spent their free time in the countryside (except for children) in the company of their spouse or partner (85.1%). They were also willing to travel with friends (37.4%), own parents (14.4%) or only with children (9.7%). Occasionally, there were other indications that mainly concerned other members of closer or extended family.

The most popular, among the respondents, were farms located on a lake or river, in mountainous areas or a short distance from the sea. The most popular period was the summer period (holidays) and the May weekend. Details on this subject are presented in Figure 1.

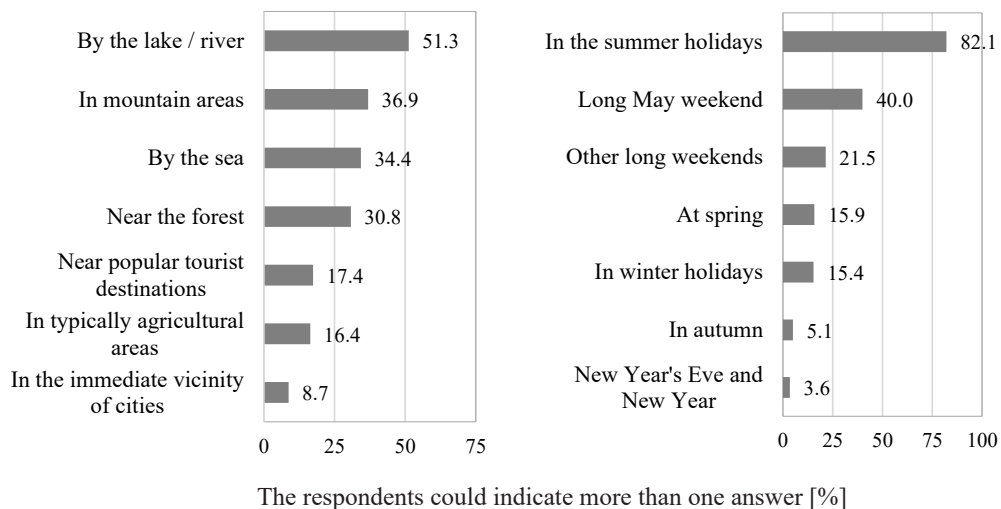


Figure 1. Preferred location of agritourism farms and visit period by the respondents

Source: own research

An important element of the research was to identify the reasons for choosing a village for a place of rest. What was most important for the respondents was the possibility of rest in peace and quiet. They also valued the health benefits of rural areas (e.g. clean air, contact with nature), as well as the hospitality and friendliness of hosts. It is worth noting that a significant number of respondents also indicated the presence of livestock and the possibility of contact with them. In many cases, staying at an agritourism farm is the only opportunity for children to become acquainted with animals bred in rural homesteads. Contact with them is also good fun for the children. Details on this subject are presented in Table 1.

It is worth noting, at this point, that price competitiveness in choosing a village as a resting place was not treated as a priority. However, it turned out to be extremely important for the selection of a particular farm. The distance and convenience of access, as well as the standard of the facility were also very important. Due to the nature of the research group, a significant number of indications also concerned attractions for children.

The vast majority of respondents, during their stay in the countryside, willingly undertook various forms of physical activity with their children – passive rest was preferred by less than 30% of respondents. The most frequently undertaken forms are shown in Figure 2.

The greatest interest of respondents was cycling and hiking. These activities can be successfully carried out in the place of permanent residence of respondents, i.e. in the city. However, the rural environment is much more beneficial in this respect - for example due to light traffic, attractive and different landscapes, as well as air quality.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the elements of the offer that enjoyed the greatest interest from their children during their stay at an agritourism farm. The leader in this ranking was the possibility of getting to know and staying with farm animals (58.5%).

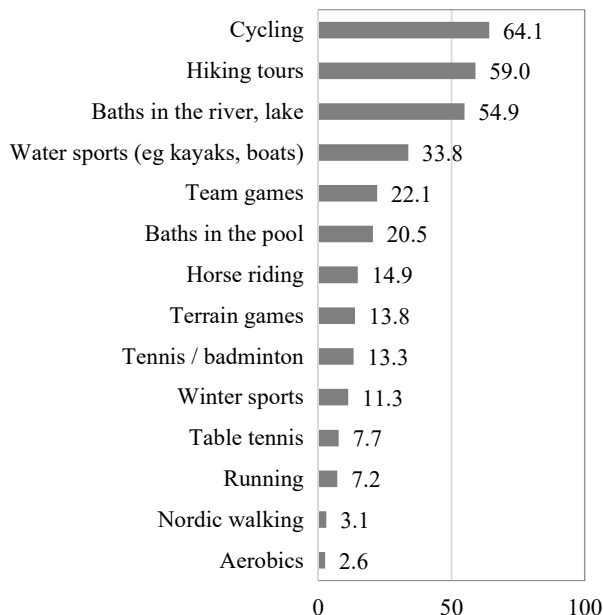
Table 1. Elements important for the respondents during the selection of a village as a resting place and a particular agritourism farm

Elements that are important when choosing a village as a place to rest	%	Elements that are important when choosing a particular agritourism farm	%
The possibility of rest in peace and quiet	62.6	Relatively favourable price	50.8
Health values of rural areas (e.g. clean air, contact with nature)	53.8	Distance and convenience of getting there	48.7
Hospitality and friendliness of the hosts	42.6	The standard of the object	43.1
Presence of livestock and the possibility of contact with them	39.0	Provision of food	42.6
Natural values of rural areas	33.8	A safe place for children to play	36.9
The possibility of using healthy home-made meals	32.8	Offered opportunities for spending free time for the whole family	34.9
Competitive price offer	32.3	Attractive activities for children (workshops, shows)	31.3
Willingness to spend holidays surrounded by a favourite landscape	27.7	Presence of livestock and the possibility of contact with them	30.3
Infrastructure enabling active spending of free time (paths, routes and trails)	23.1	The presence of nearby tourist attractions	27.2
Possibility to implement own hobbies (fishing, mushroom picking)	16.9	Availability of sports and recreational equipment	24.6
Opportunity to learn about customs, traditions and rural folklore	15.4	The opportunity to relax with your own dog / cat	21.0
Material cultural heritage (monuments, former buildings, chapels)	10.3	The opportunity to participate in traditional farm activities	13.3
Opportunity to learn the specifics of the farm and field work	10.8		
Possibility of direct contact with the rural family	9.7		

Respondents could indicate more than one answer

Source: own research

Also, very popular were games on the playground (37.4%), carriage rides, sleigh rides (35.9%), bonfires and barbecues (34.4%), walking and cycling trips (31.3%), visiting the home minizoo (28.7%), as well as activities carried out by the hosts – workshops, educational activities, shows, etc. (27.7%) and participation in traditional farm work (23.1%). The latter allow young tourists to learn more about the specificity of rural life and work on a farm.



Respondents could indicate more than one answer

Figure 2. Forms of physical activity most often undertaken by respondents together with their children during their rest in the countryside [in%]

Source: own research

SUMMARY

Staying at an agritourism farm brings many benefits. For adults, it is a unique opportunity to effectively relax in a clean and peaceful environment, which is particularly valued by city dwellers. It is also an excellent opportunity to present the specificity of the village and agriculture to the youngest generations, as well as overcome many unfavourable and erroneous stereotypes about the village and its inhabitants. The research allowed to formulate several generalizations and conclusions:

1. Agritourism farms were visited by respondents most often twice a year. These stays were not long – almost 70% of them did not exceed 6 days. They preferred to spend several shorter stays on such a farm rather than one long one.
2. The most popular, among the respondents, were farms located on a lake or river, in mountainous areas or a short distance from the sea. The most frequent period of departure was the summer period (holidays) and the May weekend.
3. Rural tourism and agritourism have ceased to only be treated through a prism of low costs. The reason for the arrival of respondents to a village was the opportunity to relax in peace and quiet, enjoy its health benefits (e.g. clean air, contact with nature), as well as the hospitality and friendliness offered by the hosts. Price issues were a priority for respondents when selecting a particular farm. However, the standard of the object was also important – information about it could be provided by the category given by the Polish Federation of Rural Tourism. “Hospitable Farms” are a part of the categorization system of the rural accommodation base. This initiative, despite its many years of existence, is still unfortunately known to a very narrow group of people, and therefore does not enjoy the interest of tourism service providers.

4. Visitors to agritourism farms are eager to undertake numerous forms of physical activity. Bicycle riding and hiking were the most popular. The behaviour and preferences of visitors should more often be paid attention to by those who are responsible in communes for the development and maintenance of tourist infrastructure – mainly including routes, trails and paths used for practicing various forms of qualified tourism.
5. On the basis of opinions and indications of respondents it can be inferred that the stay at an agritourism farm meets expectations. 97.4% of them declared their intention to re-use this form of rural tourism in the future. What's more, the same percentage of respondents would recommend this form of recreation to family or friends with children. This is a sign of great satisfaction with the stay and is a good predictor of further development of tourist functions of farms and rural areas.

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AGROTURYSTYKA JAKO SPOSÓB SPĘDZANIA WOLNEGO CZASU MIEJSKICH RODZIN Z DZIEĆMI

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka wiejska, agroturystyka, rodziny z dziećmi, czas wolny

ABSTRAKT

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie agroturystyki jako sposobu spędzania czasu wolnego rodzin z dziećmi mieszkających w miastach. Zaprezentowano między innymi preferencje, zachowania i oczekiwania dotyczące pobytu i wypoczynku w gospodarstwach agroturystycznych tej grupy odwiedzających. Badania przeprowadzone zostały metodą analizy literatury oraz sondażu diagnostycznego przy wykorzystaniu techniki ankiety. Kwestionariusz rozpowszechniony został na w mediach społecznościowych. Liczebność badanej grupy wyniosła 195 osób. Wśród badanych dominowało nastawienie na kilka krótszych pobytów niż jeden długi. Największym zainteresowaniem cieszyły się gospodarstwa zlokalizowane nad jeziorem bądź rzeką, na obszarach górskich lub nadmorskich. Miejsca te były odwiedzane głównie latem. Wieś ceniona jest głównie z uwagi na możliwość wypoczynku w ciszy i spokoju oraz za jej walory prozdrowotne. W przypadku wyboru konkretnego obiektu najbardziej istotną była cena. Badani podczas pobytu na wsi chętnie podejmowali aktywność fizyczną – dominowały wycieczki rowerowe oraz piesze. Respondenci byli usatysfakcjonowani pobytem w gospodarstwie agroturystycznym. Prawie wszyscy deklarowali chęć ponownego skorzystania z tej formy turystyki i gotowość polecenia jej rodzinie lub znajomym z dziećmi.

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