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Perspectives of Agritourism Development in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine

Abstract. Agritourism is a form of leisure, which is increasingly popular. The aim of the article is to present perspectives on the development of agritourism in three countries: Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The analysis was based on statistical data and the author's own observations. The article also includes a SWOT analysis. The analysis, own observations and observations indicate that in all three countries agritourism has a chance for development. The analysed countries differ in their tourist potential, infrastructure, landscape values, monuments, but one thing they do - tourists want to visit them.

Key words: agritourism, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, perspective, SWOT analysis

JEL Classification: Z32

Introduction

Agritourism is a form of leisure that is inextricably linked with countryside and agriculture. The offer is predominantly aimed at people living in cities, who have to cope with noise, haste, polluted environment on a daily basis, and need peace and quiet, appropriate conditions to relax in the great outdoors. People are drawn from cities to rural areas by the nature of this form of leisure and the possibility of interacting with nature, and by the possibility to consume Earth's produce and to learn about regional cuisine or tradition. Agritourism constitutes an additional source of income for agricultural societies; it allows them to use the surplus workforce, improves the rural infrastructure, reinvigorates rural areas. It is conducive to improving the quality of life of people living in rural areas, helps them make investment decision and enrich life in a village. It enables a very important cultural exchange of thoughts, views, ways of life.

In agritourism, special attention should be paid to the accommodation providers' potential, which cannot be explicitly defined, presented in a list and evaluated. It is the way in which hosts (accommodation providers) wish to welcome their guests; how they want to make each stay special, to satisfy the guests and make them return to a given agritouristic farm—it is the strength of such enterprises.

Agritourism is a subject of study of many authors, very popular in the world of science. It also constitutes an important research issue of a cognitive, as well as applicational nature.

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Data and methods

This article attempts to, on the one hand, show the current agritourism development status and, on the other hand, determine perspectives of its development in the future. The objective of the article was to present the perspectives of agritourism development in three countries: Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The considerations were based on data processing methods, i.e. analysis and synthesis. A SWOT analysis of agritourism development in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine has been prepared for the article. The analysis used data from:

- Central Statistical Office (Poland),
- Statistical Office in Ukraine,
- Statistical Office in Belarus,
- available papers and analyses,
- the Author's own observations conducted in Poland and in Ukraine².

Agritourism: its nature and definition methods

Agritourism began its large-scale development in mid-1990s. Back then, it constituted an alternative or primary source of income for agricultural families. To date, it can provide a possibility of making money by hosts whose agricultural income is insufficient to provide for their families (Roman, Niedziółka, 2017, p. 19).

There are many definitions of agritourism; Drzewiecki's definition appeared first. According to him, agritourism is a form of leisure in rural areas of an agricultural nature, based on accommodation services, and often also on catering. It constitutes a form of recreational activity related to agricultural farms and their environments: natural, production and services (Drzewiecki, 1995, p. 27).

Agritourism is a part of rural tourism. Its offer consists of a stay at a farm (lodging), which can be connected (depending on conditions) with meals throughout the day, or a possibility of buying fresh products from the farm to prepare meals on one's own. Agritourism also involves borrowing a horse, carriage, sports equipment, organizing sleigh rides, selling handicrafts, etc. It also covers enabling tourists to fish, hunt, collect and dry herbs, fruit and mushrooms, ride on horseback, etc. Provided that it's related to agricultural farms (Wiatrak, 1996, p.35).

J. Sikora's definition is different: Agritourism is a specific type of rural (alternative) tourism, organized by agricultural families using housing and vacation resources of an agricultural farm, and environmental, cultural and infrastructural resources of the village and its region (Sikora, 2012, p. 65).

Agritourism is a sector of the tourism industry, focusing on using natural, sociocultural, cultural, historical, and other resources in a village, and taking advantage of its nature to create a comprehensive touristic product (Belova, Komova, 2011, p. 13-16). A complex touristic product is understood as a set of tangible and intangible assets (goods and services) that constitute a particular objective for its guests.

Czerwiński proposes an interesting take; he states that agritourism is a bridge connecting cities and villages, facilitating establishing closer ties with the rural community,

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allowing to explore (guest) and cultivate (host) folk traditions and rural lifestyle, while, for the farms, it is an additional source of income from renting accommodations, feeding tourists, and selling agricultural products (Czerwiński, 2015, p. 193).

Agritourism differs from other forms of tourism by (Mikuta, Żelazna, 2004, p. 48):

- space – a village provides tourists with: freedom, unpolluted environment, clean water, close contact with nature, first-hand exposure to cultural and historical heritage;
- existence of agricultural farms and the rhythm of life and work therein – a farm offers a possibility of accommodation and living together with the family that runs it. It allows contact with animals, participating in farm activities, gives the possibility to eat healthy food;
- characteristic rural life – each region has a unique nature (monuments, folk artists, specific festivities);
- stay costs – tourists can be offered various discounts (helping at the farm in exchange for discounts, unassisted preparation of meals, buying cheaper food).

Another method of defining agritourism splits the meaning of the term agritourism into an objective one, which treats agritourism as a form of entrepreneurship of farmers providing services for tourists, and a subjective one, which describes agritourism from the point of view of its participants, i.e. customers of agritouristic farms (Czerwińska-Jaśkiewicz, 2013, p.14). Another approach that also splits the definition of agritourism is presented by Balińska, involving the perspective of supply and demand (Balińska, 2016, p. 102). Thus, from the point of view of tourism supply, agritourism is a form of extra-agricultural activity of owners of agricultural or sustainable farms, which consists of equivalent performance of agricultural (production) and touristic functions, and providing tourists and guests with a wide variety of services based on the potential of the farm and its environment. From the point of view of tourism demand, agritourism is spending time at agritouristic farms, enabling us to learn the nature of living and working in a village, experience nature and culture, and perform various forms of leisure.

Agritourism in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine

By analysing the phenomenon of agritourism as exemplified by the three chosen countries, we can unequivocally state that this activity is growing in each country. We will begin analysing this issue with Poland. Table 1. shows agritouristic accommodations by province in 2015, according to the List of Tourism Facilities kept by commune offices. The number of accommodations and their placement indicate that this form of activity is being particularly developed in certain places in the country. These include the provinces: małopolskie (1273), warmińsko-mazurskie (764), pomorskie (687), dolnośląskie (597). There are also provinces with small numbers of agritouristic accommodations. These include: opolskie (107), lubuskie (123), łódzkie (152), kujawsko-pomorskie (211).

Variation in the amount of accommodations depends on various factors. They primarily include: landscape, cultural and historical qualities, motivation of owners of agricultural farms to undertake entrepreneurial activities.

In Poland, it is difficult to specify a precise number of agritouristic farms. This stems from the fact that their definitions are varied and, at the same time, no statistical studies are

conducted in this regard. According to the Central Statistical Office, there were 802 agritouristic farms in 2016 (CSO, 2016).

Table 1. Agritouristic accommodations in Poland by province in 2015, according to the List of Tourism Facilities kept by commune offices.

List	Agritouristic accommodations		Guest rooms	
	Facilities	Beds	Facilities	Beds
Total	7726	78808	16449	236609
Dolnośląskie	597	6463	1073	12772
Kujawsko-pomorskie	211	2297	89	1442
Lubelskie	447	3770	383	5813
Lubuskie	123	1265	109	1637
Łódzkie	152	1475	145	2423
Małopolskie	1273	15012	2961	42808
Mazowieckie	346	3363	456	5291
Opolskie	107	1093	82	1290
Podkarpackie	943	8037	312	3968
Podlaskie	592	5513	159	2392
Pomorskie	687	7500	5512	80477
Śląskie	387	4657	610	10553
Świętokrzyskie	289	2754	115	1484
Warmińsko-mazurskie	764	7092	369	4105
Wielkopolskie	427	4536	317	4474
Zachodniopomorskie	381	3981	3757	55680

Source: Agriculture and Food Economy, Anthology edited by the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics, Warsaw, 2016, p. 128

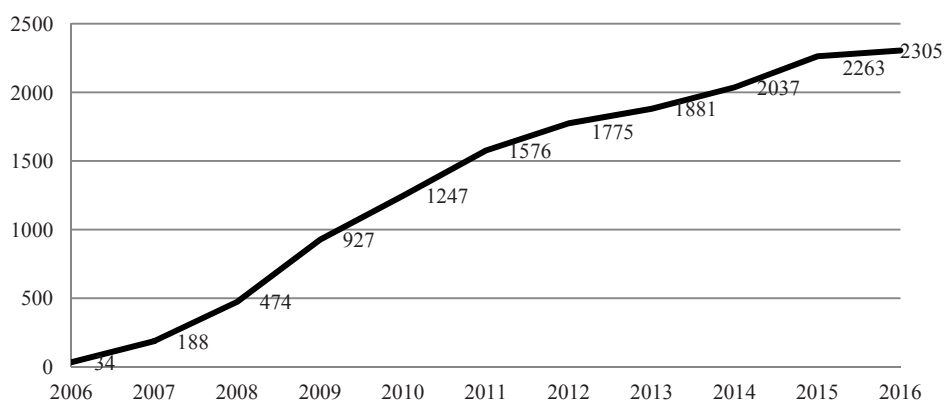


Fig. 1. Number of agritouristic farms in Belarus

Source: own work based on data from belsat.gov.by. Accessed on: 17 November 2017.

In Belarus, agritourism is being revived. Since 2006, the number of agritouristic farms increased significantly, which is clearly shown on graph 1. It's clear that in the last 10 years their number has increased significantly, from 34 farms in 2006 to 2305 in 2016.

Table 2 presents the number of agritouristic farms by region. It can be clearly seen that this number has increased by several hundred percent. The largest growth is in the Minsk region: from 7 agritouristic farms in 2006 to 613 in 2016, and in the Vitebsk region, correspondingly, from 5 to 612.

In Belarus agritourism, as a relatively new business, will rise from a promising level to a developed level, assuming a normally functioning legislation. Especially since the interest in rural tourism does not fade on the side of both owners of agritouristic farms and the country's guests and eager Belarusians. (Klicunova, 2014, p. 41).

Table 2. Number of agritouristic farms in Belarus by region

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Brest	4	32	75	146	151	178	199	253	296	346	353
Vitebsk	5	50	157	273	322	359	401	449	502	605	612
Gomel	5	11	31	60	131	332	358	289	228	196	189
Grodno	11	33	70	156	180	185	229	246	281	303	315
Minsk	7	48	125	214	255	304	412	482	541	597	613
Mogilev	2	14	16	78	208	218	176	162	189	216	223
Total	34	188	474	927	1247	1576	1775	1881	2037	2263	2305

Source: own work based on data from belsat.gov.by. Accessed on: 17 November 2017.

Agritourism is also being developed in Ukraine (Zaburanna, 2012, p. 409-413). According to the sources (Lytvyn, Nek, 2013, p. 81-88), main regions with concentration of agritourism are in the Carpathians, Crimea, and in Kyiv and Poltava regions. In 2012, their number equalled 1187 and is still rising. A big role is played by regional and local leisure centres in rural areas. Their tasks focus on providing information about the possibilities of leisure in rural areas, creating a positive image of the region, controlling the quality of touristic services in the region (Marina, 2015, s. 119-122). A significant part of them have been categorized. The total categorization in Ukraine included 193 farms from 18 areas, including, with the basic certificate (the lowest): 83 farms, the first certificate: 19 farms, the second certificate: 37, the third (highest) certificate: 54 (www.greentour.com.ua).

Comparison of agritourism development capabilities in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine

In order to fully present the development capabilities of agritourism in the selected countries, a SWOT analysis was prepared, specifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the development of agritourism in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine.

Table 3. SWOT analysis for the development of agritourism in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine

STRENGTHS		
Belarus	Poland	Ukraine
Farms situated in touristically attractive regions, large environment and landscape diversity		
Interesting monuments of culture and pieces of folk art		
Help in expanding the farm	Constantly developing transport, social and economic infrastructure	Favourable geopolitical location
Clean natural environment		Ukrainian cuisine
Relatively simple visa rules	Increased interest in regional culture	
Development of rural areas and renovation of villages		
Growing entrepreneurship among people living in rural areas	Dynamically growing accommodation services	Possibilities of development of many forms of tourism
Possibility of taking advantage of forest and water resources (country-wide)	Quality of accommodation services in line with global standards	Historical and cognitive value of the area
Possibility of obtaining a low-interest loan	State policy fostering the growth of small enterprises and EU help	Significant resources of the workforce
	Openness to change among people living in rural areas	
Rich cultural heritage (numerous monuments, archaeological sites, cultivating folk traditions)	Appropriate education of people living in rural areas	Resources of investment areas
	Possibility of joining agritouristic associations	
Very good soil and water conditions and climate for the development of agriculture	Increasingly better awareness of the necessity to categorize rural accommodation services	Rich cultural heritage
	Simple procedure for establishing an agritouristic farm	
WEAKNESSES		
Belarus	Poland	Ukraine
Focus on agritouristic product only on the country level	Insufficient level of tourism infrastructure in rural areas	
No agritouristic associations	Increasingly large number of people outside agriculture decide to run a tourism business	Slow investment speed
Partial depopulation of villages	Slightly detrimental demographic situation in the country	Tourism is not financed by the state
Complex visa system	Insufficient experience of accommodation providers	Low development level of IT
Weak promotion and marketing, both domestic and international		Unfavourable impact of political and economic conditions
Poor acquisition of EU funds		
Low development level of IT	Not all farms belong to associations	Large disproportion between the price and the quality of service
Uneven development of rural areas on the national level		
Poor knowledge of foreign languages among accommodation providers		
Still insufficient desire to care about service quality (categorization)		
Insufficient use of accommodations outside the season		
High level of unemployment in rural areas		
No openness to disabled tourists		
Insufficient qualifications to run such business		
OPPORTUNITIES		
Belarus	Poland	Ukraine
Rapid development of technical, social, economic and tourism infrastructure		
Ability to receive additional income from selling farm produce		
Preserving rural heritage (traditions, culture, craftsmanship)		
Ability to expand the offer		
Ability to improve the offer (benchmarking)		
Increased interest of city dwellers in the offer of agritourism farms		
Ability to develop many forms of tourism		
Investments in expanding tourism business	Creation of many complex rural tourism products (thematic villages)	Increased number of tourist trails
Reduction in unemployment		
The possibility of obtaining external funds for the development of tourism	New trends in rural and agri-tourism (e.g. herbalism, health tourism)	Using the Internet as a source of sales, promotion and distribution of the offer

THREATS

Belarus	Poland	Ukraine
Low demand for agritouristic products	Lack of faith in abilities to run an agritourism farm, despite the existing potential	Unfavourable economic and political situation
Reluctance of residents towards innovative ideas	Competition from the tourist side regional centers	Increased price for services that is inadequate to the quality decreases demand
Marazm of the local community	Young emigrating and educated residents	Insufficient number of leisure offers for low-income people
Low quality of touristic products	Increase in the popularity of forms of tourist activities interfering with the environment	Low quality of touristic products
Poor creativity and innovativeness in action		
Increase in competitiveness through the availability of better offers		
Relatively high costs related to maintaining appropriate standards		
Difficult financial and political situation		
Threat to the natural environment by tourist interference		

Source: Own work.

Summary

The article presents the current status and agritourism development capabilities in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The paper uses statistical data, as well as a SWOT analysis, which enables us to easily formulate conclusions.

In Poland, agritourism has great development chances, because it constitutes an additional source of income, gives the possibility of using already owned resources, reinvigorates rural areas, “opens” native citizens through tourists to new cultures, teaches them acceptance of tourists on their territory and, through new relationships, opens to the world.

In the future this form of activity will develop if:

1. Activities will be focused on building partnerships, large-scale cooperation;
2. Care for the quality of the services provided will be a priority which will contribute to greater opportunity for foreign guests to be interested in the offer;
3. The councilors will pay more attention to the use of programs and assistance that is offered in the country (PROW, Funds);
4. Accommodation providers will meet the market's expectations and start specializing, for example, in the development of health tourism - currently very popular - through the production of healthy, organic food, preparations, cosmetics, aromatherapy, hippotherapy and others;
5. The councilors will pay attention to an important group of recipients, such as older people, for whom the offer should be tailored to their needs.

In Belarus, agritourism has begun to revive in recent years. Everything is possible thanks to beneficial loan conditions, possibility of taking advantage of already owned potential, obtaining additional sources of income, which reduces unemployment. For further dynamic development, farmers need to:

1. Pay attention to the basic recipient which is the domestic customer;
2. Ensure continuous education for people doing agritourism activities, which will strengthen their potential and contribute to greater openness to tourists;
3. To create information centers in the field of agritourism;
4. Take care to improve the quality of services offered that will contribute to interest from foreign tourists.

In Ukraine, agritourism is also capable of being developed. Despite difficulties resulting from political conditions, it allows farmers to generate income, provides jobs, develops people living in rural areas. For this growth to continue, farmers need to:

5. Pay attention to the basic group of consumers: residents of industrial centers, indigenous inhabitants of cities, lovers of Ukrainian folk traditions, people of medium and low wealth;
6. Include local authorities in supporting this form of activity;
7. Promote this form of tourism;
8. Ensure the quality and categorization of the services provided;
9. Encourage cooperation in the development of agritourism.

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