

Innovations in Agritourism Farms in Poland

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to present the importance of innovations in agritourism farms in Poland as a social element of mutual relations and cooperation in local and regional development. The paper describes the concept of innovation in agritourism activity. The main idea of creating innovative solutions was presented. There were also presented examples of innovative farms, which prove the entrepreneurship of their owners. The article was prepared with the use of the desk research method. The classic analysis of documents was used. The selection of methods determined the availability of source materials, some of which were of primary or secondary character. In the article it was indicated that innovations prove the entrepreneurship of farmers, because they offer not only accommodation and food, but also innovative products on their farms. Observing the changes in the tourism market, including the agritourism market, it should be stated that service providers are interested in creating and introducing innovative solutions, and service users are open to new experiences.

Keywords: Innovation, Agritourism, Agritourism Farm.

1 Introduction

In the modern world, agritourism is becoming more and more fashionable in many countries as a form of active recreation in rural areas. The existing competition in this sector makes agritourism farms more and more often provide innovative and specialized services (tourist products). New challenges faced by farms make them start to compete with each other through location, room equipment, price or other attractions. An important condition which creates an interesting and unique offer for recreation in the countryside is the construction and implementation of diversified leisure activities, taking into account natural (natural), recreational, anthropogenic and specialist values of the nearest surroundings. Owners of agritourism farms more and more often, in order to meet the expectations of the market, implement innovative solutions, as the innovativeness in the scope of offered services and products proves the market advantage. Currently, innovativeness in agritourism is treated and understood as a possibility of creating and implementing changes in various spheres of social and economic life, because it enables generating an advantage on the market in the era of high competition [10,3].

Many authors [34, 35, 36, 17, 24, 29, 20, 22, 18, 27, 1, 15] indicate that there are many factors determining the development of agritourism in a given area. The basic factors include the environment and its elements, i.e. natural or landscape values of the region. Numerous studies carried out in this respect [6] indicate that nature and landscape are no longer basic and one of the elements of choosing a holiday destination in the countryside. Agritourists are increasingly interested in specific elements of the local offer. This may indicate that the introduction of innovative solutions is a chance to "attract" more tourists to rural areas. Agritourism in Poland is the most popular non-agricultural business in rural areas. The data showing the state of development of agritourism in Poland are of an estimated nature, as it results primarily from the possibility of conducting agritourism as an additional activity by a farmer (Article 3 of the Act on Freedom of Economic Activity) and heterogeneous interpretation of the provisions, including those concerning the obligation to register this activity. Unfortunately, there is also a lack of continuity of research in this area, and each institution has its own method of estimating this phenomenon [33]. The main source of information for many years have been the studies of the Institute of Tourism, which was based on public statistics and carries out its own research projects. According to the studies of the Institute of Tourism, in 2013 there were 7953 agritourism farms in Poland. According to the Central Statistical Office, in 2015 there were 8012 farms in Poland. Due to the newly emerging agritourism activity in rural areas, there is a lack of clear information on the number of agritourism farms due to the instability of decision-making by farmers in creating agritourism services.

In Poland, rural areas are characterized by exceptional natural wealth, beautiful landscapes and areas of high natural values, folklore and folk tradition, which are conducive to conducting additional activities. Regional diversity as well as natural attractiveness of the areas causes that the largest number of agritourism facilities is created in mountainous areas, lakes and river valleys. The agritourism activity carried out in Poland in most cases complements the basic agricultural activity. For over 40% of farms dealing with agritourism, profits from it constitute from 30 to almost 80% of the total income. Numerous studies and studies of the Institute Geographii and Spatial Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences prove that agritourism services are best developed in 6 regions of Poland: małopolskie, podkarpackie, pomorskie, zachodniopomorskie, podlaskie i warmińsko-mazurskie.

The aim of the article is to present the importance of introducing innovations in agritourism in rural areas in Poland. Selected examples of innovative solutions in the scope of provided services and products were presented. It was assumed that the introduction of innovations contributes to the increase in the number of tourists enjoying leisure time in rural areas, which proves the entrepreneurship of the owners of these facilities.

2 Materials and Methods

This article is based on the desk research method. The author used secondary data, carefully analyzing and selecting them in order to extract important concepts, to define

the research issues in relation to the issue of innovation of agritourism farms. The analysis of content, statistical data, cross-sectional analyses and comparisons of collected data were used. Such an approach made it possible to obtain a wide context of knowledge in the research project undertaken. The source materials were industry reports, results of scientific research in the area of innovation and the agritourism market.

3 Innovation in Agritourism - Test of the Characteristics of the Phenomenon

An important direction of development of contemporary tourism in Poland is agritourism understood as conducting tourism activity on farms [5,35,36]. Agritourism has a long tradition in the European Union countries and is formally treated as a field of agriculture. It is mainly included in the group of social phenomena shaping the lifestyle and interests of the population [4,7]. Agritourism is addressed mainly to a wide range of tourists, e.g. individual tourists, families or small tourist groups [28,35]. It does not require an extensive accommodation or food base, as it can develop on the basis of the existing housing stock of the hosts [13]. The agricultural holding or other facilities and recreational space within the holding may be used for active leisure. The concept of 'agritourism' can be considered from the point of view of tourists or quaternors. For tourists it is important to be active in tourism, where you can relax in the agricultural environment and learn about agricultural production. For the service provider it means various forms of hotel, gastronomy, leisure, recreation, sport, treatment and rehabilitation [7,28]. Foreign literature also shows that agritourism includes certain services provided by agri-food processing plants, companies trading in agricultural products [13,19]. It should be pointed out that agritourism is distinguished by several important features. Firstly, it should not be equated with rural tourism; secondly, there is a direct link between agritourism and a functioning agricultural holding, consisting in the use of its various resources in the processes of satisfying the needs of tourists; it is not limited to the accommodation of tourists, but offers them a package of attractions for active recreation. Trends observed in Poland indicate a growing interest in agritourism, where rural areas play an increasingly important role, and a well-prepared agritourism offer may be an important competition for mass tourism. The changes taking place on the tourist market cause that tourist entities constantly follow the activities of the competition and try to adapt their offer to the changing needs and expectations of customers. Growing income levels and the mobility of tourists make travel more frequent. The requirements in terms of services provided are also increasing. Currently, tourists are looking for offers that will not only meet their expectations, but at the same time will be innovative. Growing competition on the tourism market results in the owners of tourist entities taking up a wide range of services various activities in order to build competitive advantage. Innovative actions are important tools for building a competitive advantage. They have an important impact on the development of the entire tourism sector [9]. In many publications and reports in the field of tourism, it can be noted that it is often emphasized that currently there

are rarely discoveries in the aspect of innovation in tourism. This is due to the fact that innovation in this area is the result of many costly, long-term research carried out by professionals in this field. Nowadays, innovation is perceived as an entrepreneurial activity of the people or entities that implement it. There are many different approaches to innovation and innovation in the literature, which are constantly evolving. Despite the differences, the majority of those dealing with this issue recognize that effects are the most important in their implementation [27].

To date, reference has been made to the issue of innovativeness in relation to non-agricultural business entities [32]. Nowadays, the introduction of innovations in farms is a market requirement. At the same time, broadening and development of knowledge in the field of innovations in agriculture, the farm takes place with much weaker dynamics than in other sectors of the economy [15]. Problems with introducing innovations in the tourism sector are similar in many countries Zawadka [36] indicate, innovations are rare or absent. There are many reasons for the low level of innovation in tourism. To those that occur in other service industries one should also add some specific for tourism activities, e.g. related to the sphere of human resources: lack of opportunities for professional development, low level of human resources education, high employment fluctuation. Currently, rest in rural areas has become a common form of spending free time, popular among all social groups. Due to the prevalence of this phenomenon, the scope of agritourism activity in rural areas has been extended, as it has become a variable field, developing and using new technologies. It should be stated that in order to talk about innovations in the field of agritourism it is necessary to take a close look at the specific features of tourism which influence its character. Innovations in tourism may concern several elements (Fig. 1). The classic division of innovations in literature indicates that they can be divided into product, process, marketing and organisational innovations. Product innovations refer to the introduction of a new tangible or intangible product on the market or to a significant improvement of the product. Process (technological) innovations are related to the implementation of new or improved methods of production of tangible goods or provision of services, distribution. Marketing innovations concern the introduction of new, improved marketing solutions. They may concern such aspects as: product, brand, packaging, positioning, pricing policy or promotional activity. Organisational innovation means the application of a new concept of business organisation, management methods and work organisation [11].

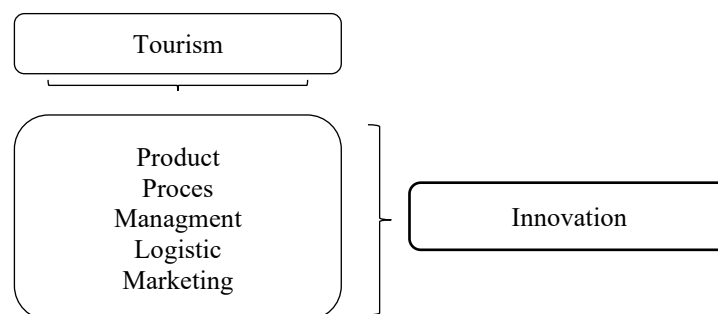


Fig 1: Innovation of tourism.

In the case of innovations in agritourism, innovations in product, process, management, logistics and marketing can be distinguished. Innovation in tourism can be the creation of a new, unique product "from scratch". (e.g. thematic villages), as well as creating a professional marketing environment for the existing natural or cultural values (e.g. organising services around folk culture objects). An innovation may also be a product in the form of a place (e.g. Ślęża mountains). In order to create an innovative product in agritourism, it is necessary to use many resources. These are material resources related to e.g. culture, passion, profession, but also to owned facilities (farms). More and more people offering rest in the countryside create a branded product, e.g. wickerwork, pottery, herbalism, sculpture, culinary art. Innovations in agri-tourism determine the strength of a given farm and its entrepreneurship and ability to cooperate in many undertakings [14,15,16]. The process of creating innovations in tourism is based on a number of factors. The most important factors include: competence, creativity, ability to use one's potential, appropriate collection of information about the market. Apart from factors supporting the development of innovativeness in agritourism, there are also barriers hindering it. One of them may be lack of capital, reluctance to innovate or lack of knowledge in their scope. Another important aspect in which a number of innovations are implemented is the area related to logistics. Building a well-functioning logistics determines the competence of a given facility and proves the high quality of services provided. Also, the marketing activities and an appropriate policy in this respect contribute to the growth of competitiveness of the economy on the market. The simplest form of innovation in tourism, including agritourism, is to improve the quality of tourist services and offer new products. It consists in increasing the technical comfort of rooms or introducing variety of food. The quality of services offered on farms is important in terms of the tourist's decision to choose a given accommodation unit. Nowadays it can be noticed that a tourist is not enough to create a specific offer related to rest in rural areas, but is looking for new experiences, experiences, opportunities to experience something new. Shaping the offer of rest in rural areas is determined by presenting something new, unique based on local branding giving market advantage [13]. Innovation on the market of agritourism services has a heterogeneous and diverse character. This is mainly due to the expectations of customers in relation to the offered products. The most "pro-innovative" are business tourists who expect attractive and modern services. On the other hand, foreign tourists and weekend tourists are the least interested in innovators, as improving products may cause disruption in meeting the needs reported by them, causing lack of satisfaction with the products and services purchased [19]. An important aspect of innovation in agritourism activity it is undertaking cooperation with other entities. Building a network of products, culinary trails, educational farms, clusters allows for the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences. Pałka-Lebek, and Brambert [16] indicate that such cooperation may take place on the basis of the innovation model, referred to as the triple helix, i.e. the creation of knowledge and experience between the three spheres. The first sphere is enterprises (agritourism sector), the second is the research and development sphere (supporting institutions) and the sphere of public authorities. Thanks to this approach, it is possible to achieve a synergy effect, as it is based on interactions, connections and cooperation in the network [4, 2]. The introduction of innovations in agritourism farms is an unquestionably important factor influencing their development. In order to be competitive on the market, owners of tourist facilities take

the trouble of implementing innovations, which is to reflect their advantage on the market.

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4 Examples of Innovative Solutions in Rural Areas in Poland

The development of rural areas in Poland is undoubtedly influenced by agritourism. The multifunctional development of rural areas and the development of non-agricultural functions of rural areas is conducive to conducting agritourism activities. Farms engaged in this type of activity acquire new skills, which undoubtedly have a positive impact on the local tourism market. Owners of agritourism facilities often collide with trends on the tourism market. In order to meet these trends and expectations, the owners of these facilities should introduce innovations. In the development of agritourism, innovation is undoubtedly of fundamental and key importance for success, as competitiveness depends on them [9,3,26]. As the Tew and Barberi [30] emphasizes, the key importance then is the human and social capital held. Moreover, farms should constantly change and surprise tourists with new products and services. The agritourism farms in Poland are characterized by different operating conditions and these are natural, natural and socio-economic conditions. Many authors point out that innovation in agritourism does not come into being on its own. Certain conditions have to be met in order for it to exist. They are often a consequence of network connections between specific elements of the agritourism environment that make up the system. Sources of innovative systems in agritourism are universities, innovative companies, local governments, whose task is to create hard and soft competences [20,21,18,12]. Undoubtedly, the introduction of innovations in agritourism should be one of the basic assumptions of national and regional policy. It results mainly from the fact that in order to counteract numerous barriers limiting the introduction of innovations in agritourism, which include: insufficient farm budget (financial barriers), institutional and legal aspects, still too limited cooperation with organisations implementing innovations. In Poland, examples of innovative solutions in the field of agritourism can be distinguished by: tourist clusters, educational farms, villages, thematic clusters, offered agritourism packages and care farms (tab.1).

Table 1. Selected examples of innovative services in agritourism activities.

Product/service	Short characteristics
Tourist clusters	From the data contained in the studies in 2014, it results from the fact that 14 clusters operate in the area of tourism in Poland. Their idea is to build a regional agritourism product. Agritourism farms, which cooperate with each other, can provide the tourist with a package of appropriate products. In Poland, a very frequent example is offering customers food products, such as honey, fruit and vegetables.

Educational homesteads	<p>Studies and reports show that there are currently 245 educational homesteads in Poland. An educational homestead is a rural holding with farm animals or agricultural crops intended for presentation to groups of children and adolescents accepted as part of school programmes or made available as a tourist attraction for families with children and adults travelling individually and implementing educational programmes in at least two fields:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -plant production, -animal production, -processing of agricultural products, awareness, -ecological and consumer education, -heritage of rural material culture, traditional professions, handicraft and folk creativity. <p>The idea of educational homesteads in Poland is primarily to promote tradition and folk culture, getting to know Polish food and disseminating the idea of education on a farm.</p>
Agritourism packages - thematic	<p>Concentrated package consisting of several services or products, addressed to tourists interested in a particular topic. The selection of elements of the package is aimed at satisfying the basic needs of the tourist, and meeting his or her targeted expectations through the</p>

The presented examples of innovative services (products) in agritourism are an important element in the structure of the tourism market. Their development and dynamics depend on the quality of services provided and on the innovative approach to meeting the evolving needs of tourists, which is possible thanks to the introduction of changes and innovations in this area. Utilising an attractive idea and building an original theme undoubtedly influences also the integration of the local environment. The discovery of rural areas is a unique and important attraction, which will increase the interest in rural areas and influence the further development of the tourist function.

5 Conclusions

Innovations are an important element of competition on the tourist market. The idea of their implementation and application makes it possible to increase the ability to adapt the activity, services and product offer to changes in trends in the market environment and contributes to a better competitive position. The presented examples of tourist innovations confirm that the owners of tourist facilities, in order to be competitive, in a rational way try to present the advantages of existing assets in rural areas, which include: landscape, silence, peace, clean air, climate, rural architecture, art and folk culture, customs and customs. Many researchers emphasize that the introduction of innovations in agritourism activity is crucial as it proves the strength and advantage of a given farm on the local tourist market [28, 26,25,19,17,6,4,5,29]. In Poland, agritourism farms, despite many barriers, undertake the effort of introducing various types of innovations, whether in terms of products or services. Undoubtedly, many more actions are still needed in this aspect in order for the owners of these facilities to be

competitive on the tourist market. The presented innovative measures implemented by agritourism farms in Poland may stimulate the introduction of new products, services and solutions by other farms. The emerging new directions of provided solutions reflect the global trends in the directions of innovation in tourism services. Observing the changes taking place on the tourism market, including agritourism, it should be stated that service providers are interested in creating and introducing innovative solutions, and service users are open to new experiences.

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