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# ARGUMENTA OECONOMICAE

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*Marian Kachniarz*

## **AGROTOURISM AS AN ELEMENT OF RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE SUDETY MOUNTAINS**

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The concentration of tourist traffic in parts of Sudety Mountains means that the development of tourism in large areas of region is poor. This is so although the advantages of the geographic environment are not worse.

The author analyses several factors conditioning the development of agrotourism (environment, social-economic, infrastructure) and in the end gives a thesis that as element of regional economy it would play important role in Regional Development Policy.

### **1. GENERAL DEFINITION OF AGROTOURISM**

The notion of agrotourism is understood in many ways in Poland. In its broad sense it refers to vacation in the country (rural tourism), which in the 80's was popularized as the so-called „vacation under a pear tree”. In its narrower sense it is defined as a holiday at a farmhouse that is adopted to the needs of receiving guests who pay for the services provided by the host (*Dane o gospodarstwach...* 1993). This paper focuses on agrotourism in its narrower sense.

### **2. AGROTOURISM AS A FORM OF UTILIZING ADVANTAGES OF GEOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT**

**Environmental factors conditioning  
the development of agrotourism**

The concentration of tourist traffic in the Karkonosze Mountains, northern part of the Rudawy Janowickie Mountains, and the border parts of the

Izerskie Mountains means that the development of tourism on large areas of Jelenia Góra region is poor. This is so although the advantages of the geographic environment are not worse (Kozłowski 1983). The present situation is the result of, among other things, faulty post-war settlement policy, when farmers from non-tourist regions were encouraged to settle in summer resorts. The development of tourism depended on FWP's capacity, which favoured mass holiday events. On the areas with no FWP's holiday houses tourist-holiday tradition steadily died out, making room for agriculture and industry. Such processes could be observed in the eastern part of the Karkonosze Mountains (Jarkowice), border parts of the Rudawy Janowickie Mountains, central part of the Izerskie Mountains, and in the Kaczawskie Mountains. These areas are the subject of our interest. They boast picturesque landscapes and interesting natural environment (protected plants, wildlife refuges, etc.). Due to the low intensiveness of agriculture, large complexes of the natural landscape have been preserved with which farmlands are scenically harmonized.

The system of settlement, different from that in the Karpaty Mountains, is also of a certain importance. Towns are located on the floors of valleys and characterized by relatively compact settlement along the axes of the valleys. Owing to this, the dispersed development has been avoided, as is so typical of mountain areas and the highlands of Małopolska. In this way, large areas with insignificant anthropopressure have been preserved. This factor makes them highly attractive for consumers of agrotourism.

Those areas also abound in vast complexes of lower subalpine forests with enclaves of Sudety beech woods (*fagetum sudeticum*). The average rate of woodland on these areas amounts to about 50% (Rocznik statystyczny woj. jeleniogórskiego 1992). The relatively good condition of the forest ecosystems is an important aspect, which, in the face of ecological catastrophe on the areas at which the tourist traffic is concentrated at present (the Karkonosze Mountains, the Izerskie Mountains), will cause an increase in demand for the areas characterized by proper natural and aesthetic relations.

### Social-economic factors

First of all, the positive process of checking the ageing of population in higher situated towns and villages should be mentioned. It can be seen, for instance, in that on the turn of the 80's and the 90's the emigration of young, energetic people was stopped. They constitute a sociale group able to look for alternative sources of income.

On the other hand, awakening the ecological consciousness of the society is essential and, relatedly, changing the preferences relative to the choice of place for a holiday. Especially in certain western Europe countries (Germany, Benelux, France, Scandinavia) it has recently become unusually fashionable to spend holidays in the country. It is estimated that in France 30% of tourist traffic is made up of agrotourism (Barbier 1991).

Direct contact with nature, vast areas of natural landscape and no mass tourism decidedly predispose the above-named regions to the development of agrotourism. As already mentioned, economic factors are here particularly important. Weak and non-invested-in agriculture in unfavourable soil-climate conditions (90% of soils fall between IV and VI class; growing season lasts less than 200 days) cannot fulfil farmers' needs and makes them look for other sources of income. A farmer's expense for starting agrotourist service is one of the cheapest forms of capital investments. Renovation works can be carried out by farmers themselves, the more they usually have the necessary tools. Such investment can quickly pay off due to the return brought by the rendered services. The structure of these services varies from providing a night's lodging to complex services for guests (accommodation, catering, tour guidance, horse riding etc.) (*Dane o gospodarstwach...* 1993). Creating a local agricultural products market that fulfils the tourists' needs is of great importance.

Profits from agrotourist services often dominate the structure of a farm's income. In this way it undergoes a function transformation. Detailed investigation into this matter was conducted in the Karpaty Mountains (Jackowski 1971; Kurek 1985; Kurek 1990). It showed that some farms get over 50% of their income from agrotourism. However, even a lesser contribution of tourism to the structure of income causes significant function transformation of a farm (Kurek 1990).

So far, in the area of the Sudety Mountains only random polls have been made. Still, they show that even in the initial phase of development agrotourism can already bring considerable economic effects. Some farmers consider the return on agrotourism equal to the return on agricultural production (*Dane z badań...* 1992).

Agrotourism is also one of the cheapest ways of spending leisure time for consumers. From the analysis of cost calculation it appears that a night's lodging in a double room cost ca. zł 40 thousand per person in 1993 (*Dane o gospodarstwach...* 1993). In case when a whole flat was rented (three rooms, kitchen, bathroom) the costs amounted on average to 70 thousand per person. Board is also cheaper, as a result of food sold directly by the producer.

The above-mentioned prices in comparison with those offered by tourist facilities in Karpacz, Szklarska Poręba, or Swieradów Zdrój appear exceptio-

nally attractive: in 1993 agrotourist facilities were on average 50% cheaper than those in the above named towns.

### Infrastructural factors

Infrastructural conditions favour this kind of tourism. Although the number of rooms per person is below the national average, the general cubage of facilities is much above it (*Dane z badań...* 1992). Adaptational flexibility of a farm's rooms, together with small expenditure on investment, also in this regard make this region suitable for the development of agrotourism.

Transport accessibility of the towns and villages on the area of the Sudety Mountains is good. It must be mentioned that, despite the diversification of this area's surface features, it is characterized by a high density of road and railway networks compared to the rest of the country. The former usually has good quality surfaces which creates the possibility of intensifying motorized tourism, for most sections of the roads (especially those leading to and through mountain passes) boast extraordinary scenic qualities (for example the so-called "Droga Sudecka", at present designed as a car tourist route).

### Assessment of the status quo

Despite the attractiveness of this region, no agrotourist traditions were created here during the postwar period (contrary to the summer resorts that mushroomed in the Karpaty Mountains). Only recent years have brought about radical changes. An international consumers market is being created, which induces the development of this kind of tourism. The possible demand for agrotourist services, chiefly on the part of German, Dutch, and Danish tourists, was the direct impulse for the development of the first agrotourist farms. Their profitability and the increase in the demand for this kind of services among home consumers contribute to the development of agrotourism. In the period from 1990 till the end of 1993 the number of registered agrotourist farms in the area of the western Sudety Mountains rose from 3 to 28 (*Dane o gospodarstwach...* 1993). Presumably this number is bigger, because not all farms are registered, creating in this way a black market in agrotourism.

Agrotourist farms offer a wide range of services. Night's lodgings and board are the basic ones. Only 10% of farms confine themselves solely to them. Other farms' offer includes, among other things, small, domestic zoos,



equestrian therapy, fishing, etc. There are also such unique offers as a painting workshop for children, or work in a cowshed.

About 10% of the farms have the status of ecological farms which adds significantly to their offer. As a rule, besides the basic services (lodging and board), the guests learn about the principles of eco-farming, which is of great educational importance, especially with the youth. This branch of tourism, called "eco-agrotourism", is becoming more and more prominent.

Many farms participate in promotional programmes on the absorptive tourist market of western Europe. Their appearance in specialist catalogues makes them better known abroad than among home consumers.

The coordination of the farms' activities and their co-operation with other organizations (WODR, PTTK, research institutes) resulted in the creation of a couple of interesting projects. A special tourist route, with agrotourist farms as its links, is being organized. Two variants of it are planned to be made: one for hikers and one for motorists.

### 3. THE ROLE OF AGROTOURISM IN THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

#### Compliance with the principles of sustainable development

Agrotourism is a form of tourism that fully utilizes local resources, rather than causing their deterioration. It creates a market for healthy agricultural products and is an alternative for human's activities that poorly fit in environmental resources. Through the consumer's contact with the laws of nature, agrotourism has a certain educational value. These remarks, de facto, prove the compatibility of agrotourism with the principles of sustainable development. Agrotourism can become an important factor in creating new regional policy (Kozłowski 1993).

The realization of this is necessary, as the areas in which it could possibly develop comprise a number of zones of protected landscape ("Karkonosze - Góry Izerskie" Zone of Protected Landscape, "Rudawy" Landscape Park). As a result of this, the development of farming in these areas has to comply with the laws on protected areas. It seems that in this regard agrotourism is the most suitable form of mountain tourism (Kozłowski 1983).

## Stimulating economic development

The importance of agrotourism as a complementary form of tourism will steadily grow in the area of the Sudety Mountains. Research carried out in 1992 showed that only 15% of all the farmers from the western Sudety Mountains were interested in agrotourism. The large majority of those offering their agrotourist services in the near future were below forty years of age, had at least secondary school education, and their farms were in a good economic state. Those parameters guarantee the development of agrotourism. If the above-mentioned 15% of farmers implemented their plans, facilities for several thousand tourists would come into being (*Dane z badań...* 1992).

Agrotourism can, therefore, act as a stimulus for regional development. Its influence can reveal itself in:

- creating local market of agricultural and craft products,
- increasing farms' profitability,
- activating attractive tourist areas that have not been much used so far,
- transforming towns and villages into resorts as a form of tourist development.

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