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## **AGROTOURIST AS A NEW QUALITY FOR RURAL AREAS. THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIE VOIVODSHIP CASE**

### **Summary**

Since the half of the 1990's, the development of rural areas was directed into a multi-functional form. Apart from main agricultural functions, dominating in the central steering period, different forms of non-agriculture activity started to develop in rural areas. In new conceptions of rural areas development, of important meaning was tourism, including agrotourism.

The main aim of this paper is an attempt to discuss the role of tourism in multi-functional development of rural areas, especially in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship.

In the Świętokrzyskie voivodship, a considerable development of agrotourist farms, with that of cooperating institutions, like agrotourist associations, consultative teams and agrotourist chambers is recently observed. The agrotourism is very important function of this area. First agrotourist farms were organized in 1993. Most of them are small and are not profitable, thus most of their owners became part-time farmers. The income outside the agriculture can be for them just the agrotourism. At present the Świętokrzyskie voivodship is visited by many tourists from various part of Poland. Agrotourism is a real chance for the Świętokrzyskie voivodship farmers, to ameliorate their difficult economic situation.

**Key words:** rural areas, multi-functional development, tourist, agrotourism

## INTRODUCTION

Modern tourism is becoming one of major branches of the world's economy. It provides substantial revenue in budgets of many countries and regions. Additionally, it contributes to the creation of new jobs and stimulates the development of small and medium-sized businesses.

Increasing investment outlays on technical infrastructure, observed in Poland in the first half of the 1990s, have resulted in the development, in many Poland's regions, of a relatively new form of tourist services offered by individual farmers in their farms, which is termed agritourism [Sala, 2005]. A growth of other forms of tourism in rural areas is a dynamic trend that seems to be gathering momentum as well.

A possibility exists that tourism will become a key sector of the economy also in the Świętokrzyskie province. At present it is difficult to predict whether this will actually happen. For tourism to develop, in addition to natural values, it is necessary to possess modern infrastructure, train personnel and provide professional promotion. Structural funds of the EU are becoming the main source of financing for those activities. The examples have shown that success in gaining the funds depends on whether a project is innovative and drawn up in a professional manner. In the years 2004-2006, tourist investments in the Świętokrzyskie province were mostly funded through the Integrated Regional Development Operational Programme. Regional beneficiaries carried out a total of 17 projects in tourism and culture, the co-funding of which from structural funds amounted to 47.5 million Polish zloty.

According to Kowalczyk (2009), the experience from the 2004-2006 programming period shows that regional entities have been successful in gaining aid funds available for the region.

In 2007, the Ministry of Economy generated a voluminous document on tourism development in Poland for the years 2007-2013. The Tourism Development Strategy recommends implementing various activities to stimulate the tourist function in Poland. The document discusses all innovative approaches that can be adopted to eliminate differences in providing tourist services at regional and supraregional levels and to enhance Poland's tourist attractiveness. Modelling a tourism product is considered an important task. All the activities aimed at making tourism products innovative and competitive, and, at the same time, compliant with the principles of sustainable development, will be supported in Poland. The activities will rely of funding from the state's budget, that of territorial self-government units, private resources and the EU funds.

The Tourism Development Strategy stresses the importance of availability of jobs sustained by the tourism sector. As regards human resources, the activities will aim at training employees for the tourism industry, raising qualifications of the managerial staff and operators, introducing the system of profes-

sional qualifications geared towards meeting the needs of this industry, and also training volunteers. Educating the recipients of tourist services is as important as training the staff for tourism. They should be encouraged to seek how to spend their free time in an active way and to adopt a conscious and responsible approach to the use of the cultural and environmental resources. Those undertakings will be funded from the state's budget, that of territorial self-government units, private resources and the EU funds available within operational programmes.

By drawing on an example of the Świętokrzyskie province, the present paper aims at defining the role of tourism in the development of rural areas.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST SECTOR IN RURAL AREAS OF THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKE VOIVODSHIP**

Tourism as a branch of Poland's economy has undergone major changes since 1989. The 1990s saw a great decline in the performance of the tourism industry. Many tourist facilities (both providing accommodation and catering) were closed down, whereas service standards deteriorated in others. Such trends were observed in many regions of Poland.

Beginning from 1996, however, considerable changes started in this sector of economy. The possibility of obtaining the EU aid funds through TOURIN II Programme played a major role in the development of the tourism sector then. In the Świętokrzyskie province, the funds were mainly used to cover the costs of investments in the model agrotourism village in Śladków Mały, in the Chmielnik commune, the first facility of this type to appear in Poland. After the country's administrative reform of 1998 and the formation of sixteen provinces, the process of obtaining funds from the EU gained momentum. A then approaching Poland's accession to the EU accelerated building infrastructure for tourism.

In the Świętokrzyskie province, the EU funds available prior to accession, allocated mainly to support the development of rural areas, produced an outcome of over 100 agrotourism farms. Those financial means also significantly supported the development of new tourism products including, among others, Bałtów Jurassic Park. An event that proved important for the development of tourism infrastructure was establishing the Kielce Trade Fair Centre in 1992.

Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 created a new opportunity to develop tourism in the Świętokrzyskie province. At that time, the EU structural funds became a source of financing for many undertakings in tourism. The funds were managed both at the province level, and also allocated centrally within sector operational programmes.

On the basis of the assessment of tourism development in recent years, it can be stated that the Świętokrzyskie province has become attractive for various investments related to accommodation facilities (including hotels). That resulted from a dynamic growth of Kielce Trade Fairs, emerging of new attractions and

tourism products, and also from marketing the province, both in the country and abroad. The number of accommodation facilities (including hotels) turned out to be insufficient to sleep the visitors. In the years 2000-2006, the number of accommodation facilities in the region increased by 100%. As a result, the Świętokrzyskie province has experienced the most dynamic increase in hotels in Poland. The province is also one of the country's leaders as regards new hotel beds. In the years 2000-2006, the increase was 167%. It is estimated that the trend will continue in the following years.

121 accommodation facilities operated in the Świętokrzyskie province in 2007 (including 99 facilities, i.e., 80.2%, open all the year round). When compared with the previous year, there was a drop in numbers by almost 7% [table 1]. With respect to facility types, hotels (32%), hotel-like facilities (11%), and also school youth hostels (11%) are the most common to find in the province. Youth hostels, campsites and travel lodges, by numbers and percentages, are the least represented (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Accommodation base in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship in 2007

The type of object	The number of objects	Increase of objects in comparing with number of objects in 2006	The number of all-year objects
Hotels	36	5	36
Motels	9	-4	9
Boarding-houses	5	0	5
Other accommodation objects	12	5	12
Excursion houses	2	-2	2
Youth shelter-houses	1	-1	1
School youth hostels	12	2	11
Holiday centres	10	-3	1
Recreation camp objects	0	-2	0
Training and resting objects	6	-3	5
Groups of tourist houses	8	-1	2
Campings	3	0	0
Bivouac camping sites	1	1	0
Health-resort objects	10	0	10
Other objects	6	-5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>99</b>

Source: author's own account /

In 2007, the province's accommodation facilities had 7,861 beds, out of which 73% were in facilities available throughout the year. Almost 41% of all beds were provided by hotels, over 9% - by school youth hostels, and 8.5% - by holiday centres. Youth hostels and campsites could sleep far fewer people.

Taking into account registered accommodation facilities, when compared with 2006, the greatest increase was noted in three- and two-star hotels (by four and three facilities, respectively). Those are the most frequently found in the province, making 80% of all hotels. On the other hand, the number of one-star motels decreased (by three facilities) when compared with 2006.

In 2007, the overall occupancy rate in the province's accommodation facilities was 31.6%. When compared with the previous year, an increase of over 4% was noted. The highest occupancy rates were reported for health resort facilities (nearly 80%), campsites (nearly 68%) and holiday centres (38.6%). Other facilities showed lower occupancy rate, the smallest percentage of which amounted to 8.3%.

According to the statistical data, 391, 615 visitors used the province's accommodation facilities (including 30, 311, i.e. 7.7%, foreign tourists) in 2007. That makes 14.6% increase when compared with the previous year.

A growing interest in visiting the province is confirmed by the 2007 statistical data on accommodation facilities. The total number of visitor nights spent in the province that year was 1,120,000, which meant an increase by 40% when compared with the previous year. The trend was equally advantageous as regards foreign tourists. In 2007, their number grew by 22%, and the number of visitor nights - by 28% when compared with 2006. The data indicate that a growing number of visits to the region under consideration can be expected in the subsequent years.

## **THE AGROTOURIST FARMS IN THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIE VOIVODSHIP**

According to the data collected from field investigations in 2008 and the information provided by the Świętokrzyski Centre of Agricultural Guidance, 418 agrotourism farms were located in the province's area, which meant an increase by 2.2% when compared with the previous year. In total, 2,947 beds were offered in 987 rooms (in farmers' homesteads) and 705 beds in 92 separate (not shared with farmers and their families) houses. On average, a single farm offered 7.6 beds, and a single room could accommodate three visitors.

Agrotourism farms are not distributed uniformly over the area of the province. The highest number of agrotourism farms is found in the province's most attractive region of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains. They are the communes of Nowa Słupia, Bodzentyn, Bieliny, Łągów, Daleszyce and Górnio, where approximately a hundred agrotourism farms are located. That makes almost 25% of all such farms in the province.

The second largest group of agrotourism farms is located in the region near Chańcza artificial lake. Here, 47 agrotourism farms operate in the communes of Raków and Szydłów. Another group of agrotourism farms can be

found in the Chmielnik commune, where 22 farms are run in a single agri-tourism village of Śladków Mały.

When analysing the distribution of agrotourism farms by districts, the highest density is noted in the district of Kielce, where 54.8% of the total number of the province's agrotourism farms are located [Figure 1]. The lowest number of agrotourism farms, namely only one farm, is found in the Kazimierza district.



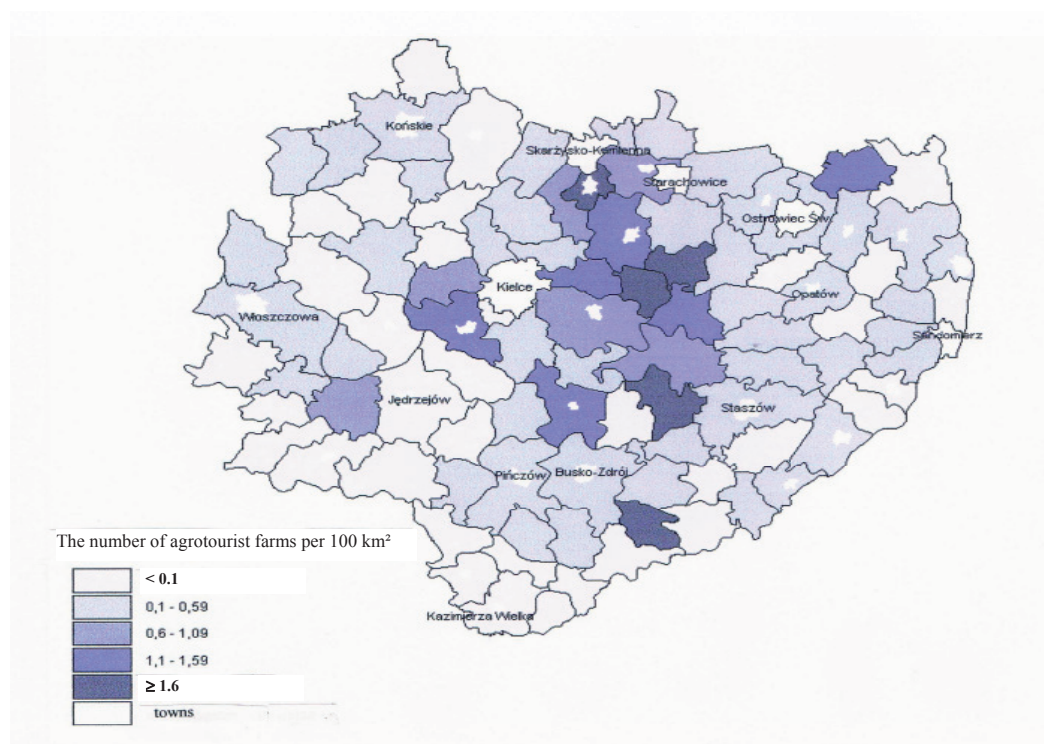
Source: author's own account

**Figure 1.** The localization of agrotourist farms in powiats of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship



A slightly different image is obtained if agrotourism spatial differentiation is taken into account. Generally accepted criteria of assessing agrotourism activities are the number agrotourism farms per 100 km<sup>2</sup> area (farm density index) and a number of beds per 1000 residents (Baretje and Defert index).

In 2008, the average for the province was 3.8 agrotourism farms per 100 km<sup>2</sup> of rural areas. The index was greatly diversified and ranged from 0.5 to 37.5. The highest values of the aforesaid index (above 20) were recorded for a group comprising five communes of Suchedniów, Nowa Słupia, Szydłów, Bieliny and Solec-Zdrój. In total, 91 agrotourism farms operated in that area (21.8% of total), where 4.5% of the province's rural population lived [Table 1, Figure 2]. The ratio of the two percentages gives the location quotient, which equals 4.8 and means overrepresentation of agrotourism farms with respect to the population numbers.



Source: author's own account

**Figure 2.** The number of agrotourist farms per 100 km<sup>2</sup> in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship in 2008

Another group is composed of communes, in which there are 11-15 agrotourism farms per 100 km<sup>2</sup> area. They are the communes of Chmielnik, Bodzentyn, Górnio, Bałtów, Chęciny, Łagów. Those have 23.2% (97 facilities) of the total number of the province's agrotourism farms and 7.4% of the rural population. The location quotient equals 3.1, which is high, but lower than in the first group.

The third group is made up of six communes (Piekoszów, Raków, Daleszyce, Wąchock, Łączna, Nagłowice), which have the index of 6-11 agrotourism farms per 100 km<sup>2</sup> area. In all, 63 agrotourism farms, that is 15.1% of the total number, operate in the area of those communes, the population of which constitutes 6.9% of the province's rural population. The location quotient equals 2.2.

The three groups of communes mentioned above have altogether 60% (251 facilities) of the province's agrotourism farms and 18.9% of the rural population. The location quotient equals 3.2.

In all remaining communes the agrotourism farm density index is very low and it does not exceed 6. There are 52 such communes, which have 40% of the total number of the province's agrotourism farms (167 facilities) and 56.6% of the rural population. The location quotient equals 0.7.

In 28 communes no agrotourism farms can be found. Those communes lie at the outskirts of the province and they demonstrate disadvantageous demographic characteristics (population aging and decline).

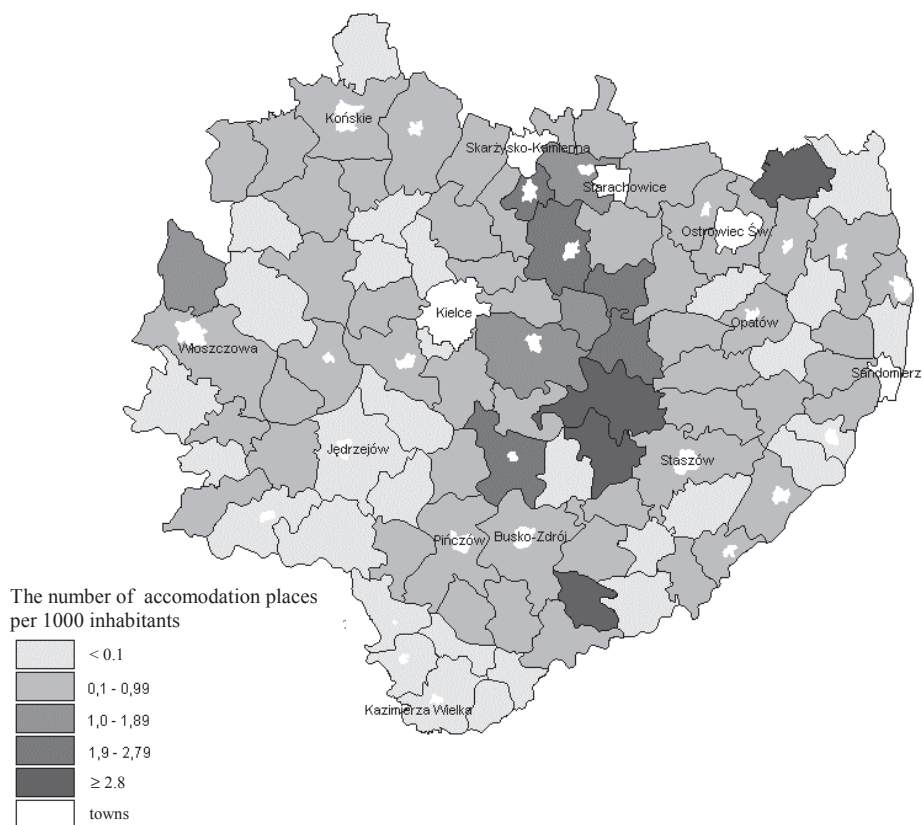
In 2008, in the Świętokrzyskie province there were, on average, 5.24 beds in an agrotourism farm per 1000 rural residents. This index was also greatly diversified and ranged from 0.5 to 45.7. The highest values of the index (above 30) were noted for a group of four communes: Szydłów, Bałtów, Solec-Zdrój and Raków [Table 2, Figure 3]. The communes had 78 agrotourism farms altogether (18.7% of the total), with 682 beds (18.7% of the total). In those communes, on average, there were 8.7 beds per one agrotourism farm. 2.8% of the province's rural population lived in those communes.

**Table 2.** The number of agrotourist farms into 100 km<sup>2</sup> in communes of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship in 2008

Number of agrotourist farms per 100 km <sup>2</sup>	Number of communes	Number of agrotourist farms	Population	% of communes	% of farms	% of population
Over 16.0	5	91	31,285	5.2	21.8	4.5
11.0-15.9	6	97	51,493	6.2	23.2	7.4
6.0 -11.0	6	63	48,174	6.2	15.1	6.9
1.0-5.9	45	160	336,666	46.4	38.3	48.3
0.0 - 1.0	7	7	58,117	7.2	1.7	8.3
Non exist	28	0	170,817	28.9	0.0	24.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>696,552</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: author's own account.





Source: author's own account.

**Figure 3.** The number of places per 1000 inhabitants in rural areas of the Świętokrzyskie voivodship in 2008

A relatively high value of the index (19-27.9) (Table 3) was recorded for the following five communes: Bodzentyn, Chmielnik, Nowa Słupia, Suchedniów, Łagów. In all, 86 agrotourism farms with 878 beds operate in those communes. On average, a single agrotourism farm had 10.2 beds. The share of the communes in the total rural population was 5.1%.

The third group comprised the communes with the above-mentioned index ranging from 10 to 18.9. The group was made up of five communes, namely, Bieliny, Wąchock, Kluczewsko, Daleszyce, Chęciny. They had 11.2% of the province's agrotourism farms with 12.9% of all beds and 4.5% of the rural population. On average, one agrotourism farm had 7.8 beds.

**Table 3.** The number of accommodation places in agrotourist farms per 1000 inhabitants in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship in 2008

Index	Number of communes	Population	Number of agrotourist farms	Number of accommodation places	% of communes	% of population	% of agrotourist farms	% of accommodation places
over 28	4	19,456	78	682	4.1	2.8	18.7	18.7
19- 27.9	5	35,298	86	878	5.2	5.1	20.6	24.0
10-18.9	5	31,482	47	472	5.2	4.5	11.2	12.9
1-9.9	51	398,843	203	1 590	52.6	57.3	48.6	43.5
Under 1	4	40,656	4	30	4.1	5.8	1.0	0.8
Non exist	28	170,817	0	0	28.9	24.5	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>696,552</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>3 652</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: author's own account

All the fourteen communes listed above proved the most attractive in the Świętokrzyskie province for establishing agrotourism farms. In total, those had 50.5% of agrotourism farms, 55.6% of beds and 12.4% of the rural population. The communes are situated in the areas that offer most interesting tourist features [Pałka 2004]. On average, an agrotourism farm had 9.6 beds.

Decidedly lower values of Baretje and Defert indexes were reported for 55 communes, which had a total of 49.6% of the province's agritourism farms, 44.3% of beds and 63.1% of the rural population. One agritourism farm had 7.8 beds.

Generally, it can be stated that a strong correlation holds between agrotourism farm density index and Baretje and Defert index. The correlation coefficient equalled 0.827, which is logical as both indexes under consideration were the highest in the communes offering quality leisure, excellent natural resources and specialist features. A high number of tourist visits to those areas contributed to developing new accommodation facilities.

On the basis of the assessment of agrotourism development in the Świętokrzyskie province in the years 1993-2002, a conclusion can be drawn that this sector of economy shows a dynamic increase in its performance [Pałka 2004].

## CONCLUSIONS

Further development of tourism in Poland's rural areas will considerably depend on, among others, upgrading infrastructure, enhancing the quality of accommodation offered and extending the range of services related to tourism in

those regions. The examples of other EU countries show that tourism provides a stimulus to the regional development. Therefore, the development of tourism services in rural areas of Poland should be compliant with regional development strategies because tourism not only intensifies the attractiveness of the region but also substantially contributes to economy recovery. Achieving such a goal, which makes it possible to introduce structural changes, should be considered one of the major tasks of the policy aimed at developing villages and rural areas.

All the recent changes observed in the Świętokrzyskie province that involve improving the region's accessibility by various means of transport, higher quality and diversity of tourism services provided, increasing the competence and dedication of the staff in services, and, finally, enhancing the population's awareness of potential benefits related to tourism, make it possible for this branch of economy to develop. It is only the beginning of treating tourist attractions as professionally developed, competitive products. The product-oriented approach has already been seen in a number of projects implemented in the region, e.g., Bałtów Jurassic Park and Bałtów Zoo, the adapting of the Kurozwęki palace, Malinowy Zdrój Hotel in Solec Zdrój, the Country of Świętokrzyskie Legends in Bieliny, European Fairytale Centre in Pacanów. Co-funding of tourism investments from structural funds of the EU will make it possible to create a stay offer that will be competitive in a domestic and international market.

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