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## **IMPORTANCE OF TOURIST SERVICES IN THE OPINION OF THE INHABITANTS OF SURVEYED GMINAS (COMMUNES)**

### **WAŻNOŚĆ USŁUG TURYSTYCZNYCH W OPINII MIESZKAŃCÓW BADANYCH GMIN**

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**Streszczenie.** Niniejsza publikacja ma na celu przedstawienie opinii mieszkańców gmin wiejskich województwa podlaskiego na temat znaczenia usług turystycznych, z uwzględnieniem ich nastawienia do turystów i właścicieli gospodarstw agroturystycznych oraz oceny atrakcyjności turystycznej regionu. Badanie przeprowadzono w 2014 roku na 79 mieszkańcach gmin wiejskich województwa podlaskiego, tj. Jeleniewa, Suchowoli i Suwałk, którzy sami nie byli zaangażowani w agroturystykę. Wyniki wskazują na to, że mieszkańcy oceniają atrakcyjność regionu pozytywnie, zaś ci z nich, którzy mieli jakiegokolwiek kontakty z turystami, również oceniają je pozytywnie. Większość respondentów (69,6%) ma pozytywny stosunek do turystów. Zwraca uwagę fakt, że młodszy respondenci dużo częściej aniżeli starsi mówili o pozytywnym nastawieniu wobec turystów, podczas gdy starsi respondenci częściej deklarowali obojętność lub negatywny stosunek do turystów. Badania wskazują na to, że w opinii osób starszych tworzenie nowych miejsc pracy na terenie gmin w wyniku rozwoju turystyki jest dużym plusem. Młodszy respondenci doceniali głównie wzrost przychodów i poprawę poziomu życia. Zgodnie z wynikami, 35,4% respondentów pochwała działania rolników związane z agroturystyką, taka sama ilość badanych je podziwiała, zaś co czwartemu badanemu były one zupełnie obojętne. Niewiele osób wyrażało zazdrość w związku z działalnością agroturystyczną lub miało negatywny stosunek do rolników oferujących tego typu usługi.

**Key words:** agritourism, commune, local community, Podlaskie Voivodeship, rural tourism.

**Słowa kluczowe:** agroturystyka, gmina, lokalna społeczność, turystyka wiejska, województwo podlaskie.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is one of the most dynamically developing industries in the world at present (Alejzak 2003). The essence of tourism lies in its heterogeneity because this activity, on the one hand, is an effect of socio-economic changes, and on the other hand, becomes an indispensable element of the development of contemporary societies (Gaworecki 2000). Tourism is a psychological phenomenon (it meets the needs of a contemporary man), a social phenomenon (when travelling, a person changes their social environment, makes new acquaintances), a cultural one (it constitutes an element of contemporary life culture), a spatial one (it influences the spatial management of the area visited by tourists) and an economic one (it affects the size and structure of demand, the structure of outlays on tourism, regional development, creation

of new workplaces, development of entrepreneurship and new types of services) (Kompendium wiedzy... 2005).

Tourism industry is an ecologically desirable alternative to traditional forms of economic activity (e.g. heavy, chemical or electric machinery industry). Its invasive impact on the natural environment is minor in comparison with other industries and the size of revenue which, depending on the region, can be close to the results in those industries (Janiuk 2005).

One of the many forms of tourism is rural tourism, including agritourism (Młynarczyk 2002). It is an extra-agricultural business for farmers' families who decide to organise a stay for tourists on their farms (Lane and Majewski 2001). Agritourism offers board and lodging on a farm or a possibility of buying fresh produce to prepare meals on one's own (Krzyżanowska 1997, Altkorn 2002).

In 1998, Poland had 608 facilities providing agritourism services. They had a total of 5509 beds. In subsequent years, the number of tourist farms, as well as beds increased steadily. In 2009 and 2010 there was an increase in the number of tourist farms from 5473 (57.095 beds) to 7692 (82.750 beds) (Jagusiewicz and Legienis 2007). What is noteworthy, a significant increase in the number of farms in 2005 was the result of Polish accession to the European Union and subsequent access to EU funding (Roman 2014).

## AIM, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND POPULATION FEATURES

The article aims to present the opinion of inhabitants of some rural communes (Kmita 1994, Kołodziejczyk 1999, Prus 2000, Lewandowski 2001, Tyran 2003, Kurtyka 2006) of the Podlaskie Voivodeship<sup>1</sup> on the significance of tourist services, including such factors as attitude to tourists and tourist farms' owners and region's tourist appeal. The paper integrates theoretical and empirical work. Due to the complexity of the subject matter, primary and secondary sources of data are used. The theoretical analysis is conducted based on literature on economics, tourism, marketing and management.

In order to fully and objectively examine these factors, empirical material was collected through a survey questionnaire. The research was conducted in June 2014 during a field trip of three learned societies<sup>2</sup>. The questionnaire was addressed to 79 inhabitants of rural communes of Jeleniewo, Suchowola and Suwałki in the Podlaskie Voivodeship who are not involved in agritourism.

Social and demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

The biggest groups were people aged below 25 (29.1%) and respondents aged between 45 and 54 (27.8%). 86.1% of the inhabitants completed secondary education.

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<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted within a broader project connected with agritourism in Podlaskie Voivodeship.

<sup>2</sup> "Public Relations" Students' Learned Society of Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Ecology and Entrepreneurship Fans' Learned Society of Jadwiga Dziubińska Agricultural Education Centre Schools in Gołdakowo and Tourism Economics Learned Society of the University of Białystok.

Table 1. Social and demographic characteristics of respondents – inhabitants not involved in agritourism

Category	Total	
	N = 79	%
Gender:		
– Female	55	69.6
– Male	24	30.4
Age:		
Below 25	23	29.1
– 25–34	9	11.4
– 35–44	13	16.5
– 45–54	22	27.8
– Above 54	12	15.2
Education:		
– Primary	11	13.9
– Basic vocational	21	26.6
– Secondary	37	46.8
– Higher	10	12.7

Source: author's own research.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The area of Podlaskie Voivodeship is one of the most attractive tourist regions in Poland. The natural environment is characterized by big forest and water areas, national and landscape parks, natural monuments, nature reserves, protected landscape areas, natural and cultural landscape areas, and natural therapeutic resources (peloids, mineral water) which are especially valuable. It is also worth mentioning cultural attractions, including historic-military sites, national heritage sites and religious cult monuments (Wysokiński 2006).

Because of its exceptional natural and cultural values, as well as its border location, the Podlaskie Voivodeship has excellent conditions for the development of tourism – not only the domestic one but also cross-border and international one. The above-mentioned values and the province's location make tourism one of the leading industries in the region.

The forms of tourism for which there are best conditions in the Voivodeship can be divided into two groups. The first group includes the forms that attract a big number of foreign tourists, which has lately been true for nature tourism. There is a chance that multicultural trans-border tourism can also play such a role in the future. The second group, typical of the domestic tourism-oriented Voivodeship, comprises of agritourism and active tourism, including mainly water areas tourism. All these four types should be of primary importance in the Voivodeship.

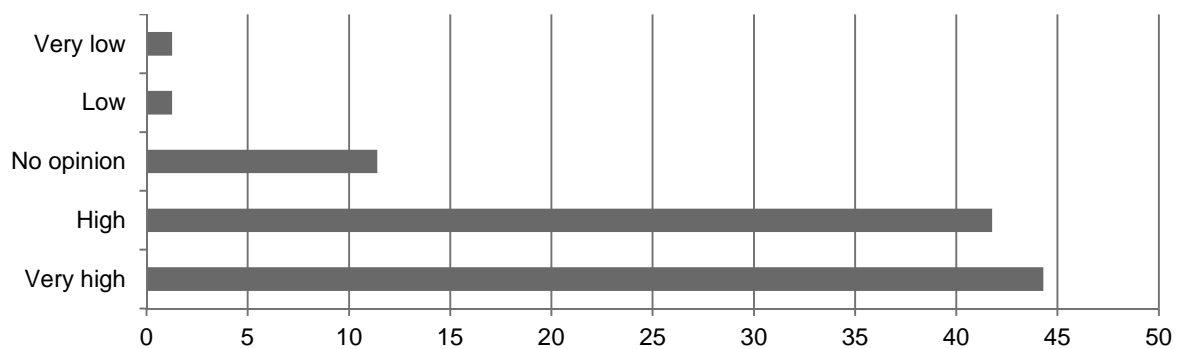
Podlaskie Voivodeship is also a troubled area. A difficult situation of Podlasie rural areas and a limited number of alternative sources of income in agriculture force farmers to seek other job opportunities. One of the forms of agriculture diversification is agritourism. It plays a desired function because it provides inhabitants with an opportunity to raise the level of living. The development of this type of business in the Podlaskie Voivodeship can bring economic and non-economic benefits in the areas where it takes place.

The development of agritourism in the Podlaskie Voivodeship has the potential to boost farmers' income and improve the quality of life on farms with very limited revenue from agricultural production or no revenue at all.

Agritourism can become an important factor in the development of rural areas of the Podlaskie Voivodeship and also act as a stimulator of social development. It can inspire new behaviours and norms of conduct of both service providers and their guests. It is also conducive to the enhancement of the knowledge of history, geography, architecture and cultural customs of places visited. In addition, agritourism is an alternative to mass tourism and commercialised forms of leisure.

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Detailed research results regarding the attractiveness of the examined communes according to local inhabitants' evaluation is presented in Figure 1.

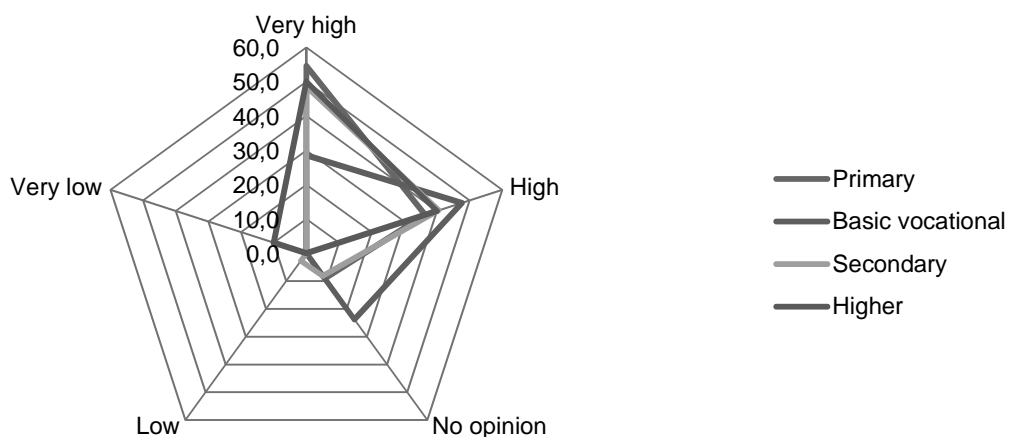


N = 79

Fig. 1. Attractiveness of communes as tourist destinations in the eyes of their inhabitants (%)  
Source: author's own research.

The research shows that inhabitants of the examined communes evaluated tourist attractiveness of their region positively. The communes under examination are undoubtedly unique. These are areas of Suwałki-Masurian Lake District or the Biebrza National Park.

The evaluation of communes' attractiveness depended on the respondents' level of education. The data are shown in Figure 2.



N = 79

Fig. 2. Evaluation of communes' attractiveness depending on the respondents' level of education (%)  
Source: author's own research.

It can be stated that very high opinion of the region's tourist attractiveness did not depend on the respondents' level of education. Both groups of respondents, those who completed primary education and university graduates, appreciated the natural and cultural wealth of their communes.

Inhabitants who had whatever contact with tourists (48 persons) assessed these relationships very highly. Most people demonstrated positive attitude towards tourists (69.6%). Almost one third of the respondents showed a neutral opinion (29.1%) and the smallest group expressed a negative attitude towards visitors. It resulted from tourists' bad conduct and their interference in the local community's life. It must be said that the young respondents more often than the older ones had a positive attitude towards tourists visiting agritourism farms. Older people more often declared indifference or negative attitude towards tourists.

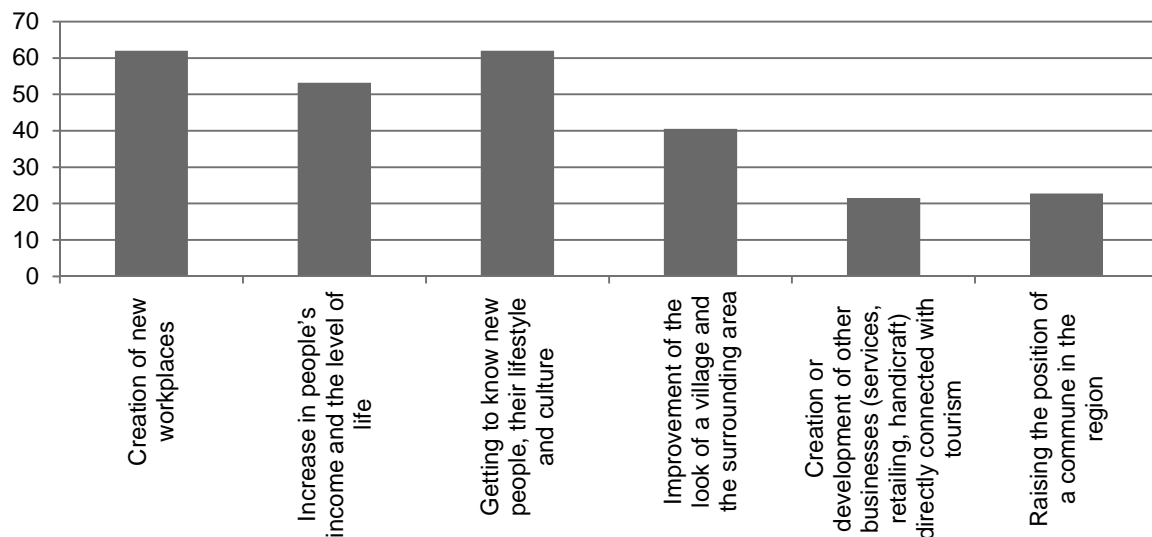
The inhabitants having good feelings about visitors, were of the opinion that tourists were pleasant people (40.3%). One in five respondents believed that tourists' stay was connected with financial benefits. The rest thought that socializing with tourists enriched their personality or broadened their knowledge of various fields. In the inhabitants' opinion, being on good terms with tourists had a significant impact on their way of thinking and perceiving the reality.

According to almost half of the respondents, negative attitude towards tourists resulted from the fact that they set a bad example and created inappropriate patterns of conduct in tourist resorts. A big proportion of respondents stated that holidaymakers were rude and disturbed the peace. Some of the respondents believed that because of tourists' expansion, old cultural sites were no longer different from others and the old folk lifestyle could be only seen in a souvenir shop. This group of respondents thought that dislike of tourists could be observed on agritourism farms.

The research looked for an answer to the question about purposefulness of developing tourism in the examined communes. According to most of the inhabitants (62%), it is worth developing tourism in their communes because the areas are rich in natural and cultural values, it gives financial benefits, creates new workplaces, raises the position of a commune in the region, promotes the region in the county, the voivodeship and the whole country. Every third respondent did not have an opinion on the subject and the rest presented a negative opinion because, according to them, tourism may contribute to the loss of regional culture and creates undesired patterns of conduct. The research shows that the more educated people are, the more they support the development of tourism in their communes.

The research also looked for an answer to the question about the benefits of developing tourism for a commune and its inhabitants. The positive results are presented in Figure 3.

Most of the respondents declared that the development of tourism in their commune has the potential to generate new workplaces (Goluch 2001) and gives them a chance to get know new people. Other inhabitants thought that tourism positively affected their income and standard of life. The advantages of tourism were cross-referenced with age and level of education. The results are presented in Table 2.



N = 79

\* The respondents could give more than one answer.

Fig. 3. Benefits resulting from the development of tourism in a commune according to its inhabitants (%)  
Source: author's own research.

Table 2. Advantages of the development of tourism in the communes in the respondents' opinions in relation with their age and the level of education (%)

Advantages	Total N = 79	Age groups					Education			
		up to 24	25-34	35-44	45-60	Above 60	primary	basic vocational	secondary	higher
Creation of new workplaces	62.0	15.2	10.1	8.9	16.5	11.4	10.1	19.0	22.8	10.1
Increased income and standard of living	53.2	11.4	10.1	7.6	19.0	5.1	5.1	15.2	25.3	7.6
Getting to know new people, their lifestyle and culture	62.0	10.1	11.4	12.7	20.3	7.6	12.7	16.5	22.8	10.1
Improvement of the village landscape and surroundings	40.5	15.2	7.6	6.3	7.6	3.8	2.5	13.9	16.5	7.6
Creation or development of other businesses (services, retailing, handicraft) directly connected with tourism	21.5	6.3	0.0	3.8	6.3	5.1	5.1	6.3	6.3	3.8
Raising the position of a commune in the region	22.8	13.9	0.0	2.5	3.8	2.5	1.3	8.9	12.7	0.0

\* Due to a marginal percentage, the answer 'other' is omitted.

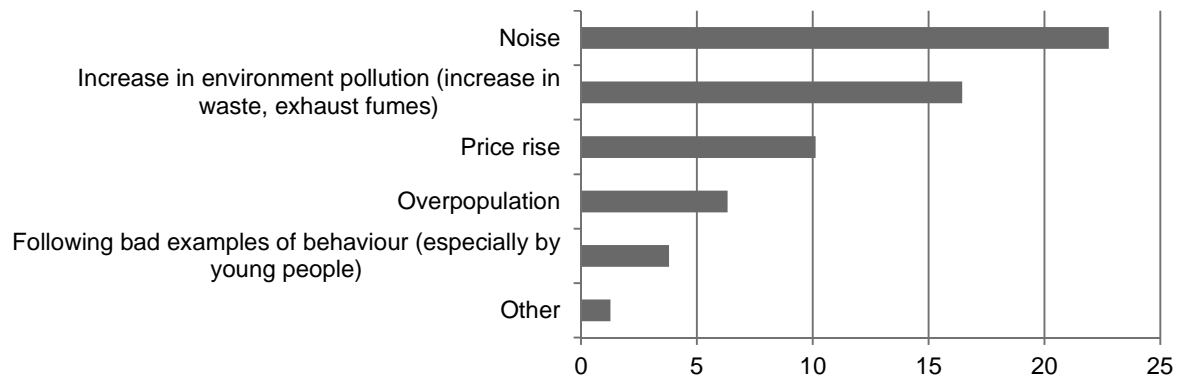
\*\* The respondents could give more than one answer.

Source: author's own research.

The research shows that for older respondents, the creation of new workplaces in the commune was a very important benefit resulting from tourism development. Younger respondents indicated increase in people's income and the standard of life as primary benefits. It can also be stated that the more educated people identified more benefits brought about by tourism development.

Only a little more than one in ten respondents (13.9%) believed that this form of business in rural areas could bring negative results. Most of the respondents expressed positive opinions (57%) and 29.1% of the respondents did not have an opinion.

Development of tourism can provide rural communities with benefits. However, bad tourism organisation and management in the country can produce a negative outcome. These negative aspects identified by inhabitants are presented in Figure 4.



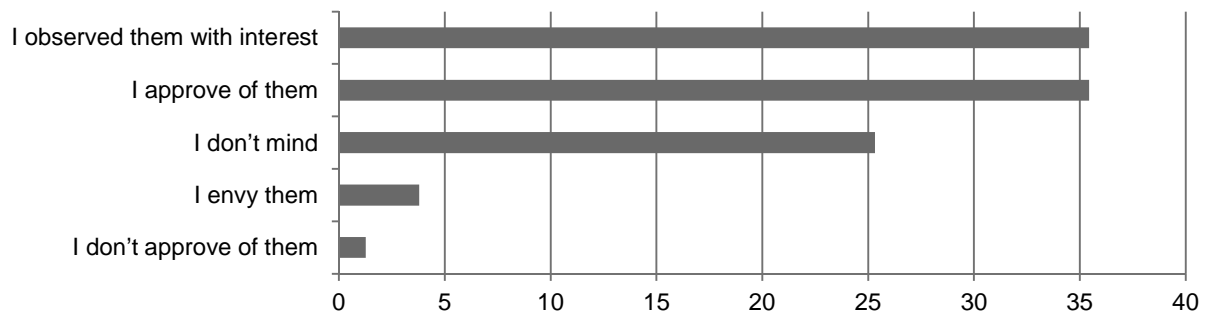
N = 79

Fig. 4. Types of negative outcomes resulting from the development of tourism in rural areas, according to their residents (%)

Source: author's own research.

The research shows that noise and high level of pollution probably caused by thoughtless littering are the biggest concerns. The development of rural tourism can lead to both the natural and man-made environment deterioration. Tourists' visits contribute to the creation of negative behavioural patterns, especially among youth.

Inhabitants of the examined communes also had an opportunity to express their opinions on service providers and their activities. The detailed data on this topic are presented in Figure 5.



N = 79

Fig. 5. Inhabitants' attitude towards farmers involved in agritourism (%)

Source: author's own research.

The research shows that 35.4% of the respondents approved of the people involved in agritourism and the same percentage looked at them with interest. One in four was indifferent. Some of the respondents envied such opportunity for making extra income or were of negative opinion about service providers.

Only 16.5% of the respondents stated that they benefited financially from tourists' stay. In most cases, it resulted from retailing, sports and tourist equipment rental (bicycles, canoes, boats, pontoons, rafts) as well as transport services (horse riding, car driving) and selling their produce (bread, milk, eggs, meat, cream, cheese, honey, liqueur) and souvenirs.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research and the author's own observations, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Local communities' positive attitude towards tourists is also a crucial factor in agritourism development. Local communities' attitudes are important social conditions for agritourism growth.
2. The inhabitants of the examined communes evaluated the attractiveness of their regions positively. The respondents, regardless of their level of education, appreciated the natural and cultural wealth of their communes.
3. The inhabitants who came into whatever contact with tourists had a high opinion of those contacts. Most of the respondents (69.6%) demonstrated a positive attitude towards tourists. It must be said that younger respondents more often than older ones showed a positive attitude towards tourists visiting agritourism farms. Older respondents more often declared indifferent or negative attitude towards tourists.
4. The inhabitants who felt positive about tourists visiting and holidaying in their communes believed that tourists were pleasant people (40.3%). One person in five said that tourists' stay was connected with financial benefits.
5. According to almost half of the respondents, negative opinion about tourists resulted from the fact that they set a bad example and created inappropriate patterns of behaviour in holiday resorts. A big part of the respondents said that holidaymakers were rude and disturbed the peace. The rest of them believed that tourists' visits also triggered cultural changes in local communities.
6. The research looked for an answer to the question about the purposefulness of developing tourism in the examined communes. In most inhabitants' opinion (62%), it is worth developing tourism in their communes because these are areas rich in natural and cultural values, it gives financial benefits, creates new workplaces and raises the position of the given region in the county, the voivodeship and the whole country. The research findings show that university graduates more often realized the purposefulness of developing tourism in their communes.
7. The research shows that for older people the creation of new workplaces in the commune is an important benefit of tourism development, whereas younger people support the development for other reasons – increase in income and standard of living. It can be also said that university graduates see more benefits of tourism development.
8. Only a little more than one in ten respondents (13.9%) believe that this form of business in rural areas can bring negative results. Most of the respondents were of a positive opinion (57%) and 29.1% of the respondents did not have an opinion.
9. The research shows that noise and high level of pollution caused by littering are serious downsides related to tourism. The development of rural tourism can lead to natural and man-made environment deterioration. Tourists' visits are conducive to the development of negative patterns of behaviour, especially among youth.



10. The research shows that as many as 34.4% of the respondents approved of owners of agritourism farms and the same proportion admired them. One in four respondents presented an indifferent opinion about that business. Very few envied them or demonstrated a negative attitude towards those service providers.
11. Only 16.5% of the inhabitants of the examined communes said that they derived profits from tourists' stay. In most cases these resulted from food retailing, rental of sports and tourist equipment, transport services and selling their produce to tourists.

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