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## **AGRITOURISM AND THE SYNERGISM PROCESS – RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT**

### **Introduction**

Tourism and recreation are now amongst the most important social and economic activities in Europe. These activities bring income and jobs, increased understanding of other cultures and promote the preservation of cultural and natural heritage, which in turn brings social and cultural benefits.

Ecotourism can be defined as an active form of resting (i.e. cycling, swimming, skiing), with respect for nature. Agritourism is a way of spending leisure time, in which tourists integrate with rural society. A rural settlement is the main base of accommodation and consumption, which tourists use for repeated excursions [Drzewiecki, 1995]. As an integral part of ecotourism, in order to be successful, agritourism should promote rural sustainable development by establishing a durable production base that allows local inhabitants and agritourism service providers to enjoy a rising standard of living. While offering these services, an agritourism project must incorporate the social dimensions of the organisation of production and environmental conservation. Agritourism, as well as ecotourism, should incorporate local society into service planning and provision, and include programs to meet the fundamental needs for income and employment of all the people in the region.

The development of agritourism in a country like Poland is important in the light of developments during the first ten years of economic and

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political transformation. Most of the economic advance and development has taken place in large urban agglomerations (e.g. Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk, Wrocław), while the countryside in general has stayed behind. Agritourism can be one of the ways of improving the infrastructure and standard of living in the countryside, while preserving its ecological attractiveness. Agritourism can be an example of the synergism process, creating more jobs in the countryside, improving the standard of living of local inhabitants and developing entrepreneurship, while preserving the environment at the same time.

Agritourism must do more than create a series of activities to attract visitors, offering them an opportunity to interact with nature in such a way as to make it possible to preserve or enhance the special qualities of the site and its flora and fauna, while allowing local inhabitants and future visitors to continue to enjoy these attractions.

In Poland the opportunities offered by the environment and landscape are, to a large extent, not utilised. Tourism in general, and agritourism and ecotourism in particular, do not bring the benefits that could be obtained. One question is how this situation can be improved. One question that is addressed in this paper is whether synergy effects from agritourism in Poland are feasible (e.g. low investment projects, co-operation within local areas with respect to agritourism service provision, improving bio-cultivation techniques on a typical small-scale farm, which may find a more stable market for their products, the improvement of education in the necessary basic skills and of the whole process, leading to more sustainable development in rural areas in the face of current problems – the lack of infrastructure, education, co-operation, etc.).

## **Synergy – examples of the synergism process**

First the question of what exactly is the synergism effect and how it can take effect in agritourism (as a part of ecotourism) should be answered. We talk about synergism when two or more (ecological or environmental) processes interact in such a way, that the total effect is bigger than the sum of the parts.

Agritourism can trigger synergism effects by co-operation between local inhabitants, and stimulate local entrepreneurship and conservation of nature-as a natural incentive for tourists. With a relatively small amount of expenditure many positive effects can be obtained. Synergy can be observed almost everywhere, because many processes interact in such a way that the outcome is not additive but multiplica-

tive. Below, three examples are given of synergistic processes in various domains:

- **an environmental example.** “Large-scale tree planting in the humid and sub-humid tropics could generate a sink for atmospheric carbon dioxide to counter global warming; this process could also supply many spin-off benefits through, for instance, commercial forestry plantations that relieve excessive logging pressure on the remaining natural forests. This could help to safeguard birds and other species, as well as genetic resources in tropical forests; sometimes there can be large agricultural benefits as, for example, when the resistance to disease of wild rice in India’s forests saved much of the Asian rice crop from a pandemic blight” [P.,K., Rao, 2000].
- **a financial example.** The strategy of the ING Group (International Netherlands Group) towards Bank Śląski (Silesian Bank) in Poland is a good example of a synergetic strategy on the financial market. Bank Śląski specialises in retail sale, while ING offers services to corporations. It is connected with economies of scope which “... occur, if it is cheaper to produce two or more goods together than it is to produce each separately” [Maunder, p. 553, 2000]. Banking services and insurance services use common inputs (e.g. the office and staff), while there are also cost advantages in marketing – when a customer comes to the bank for a financial transaction, he is also informed about the possibility of buying insurance services (in this case from Nationale Nederlanden, part of the ING group). Bank Śląski and ING complement each other, so a fusion creates measurable savings and synergy-according to Marian Czekajski-chairman of Bank Śląski [*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 09.03.2001].
- **an energy example.** Another example of a synergetic process is utilising renewable energy (energy from renewable resources, e.g. sun energy or wind energy). “The utilization of Renewable Energy Sources (RES) yields many positive results, both in global categories, at the national scale, as well as at regional and local scale and is one of the most important components of the country’s sustainable development, brings measurable ecological and energetic results and improves the condition of the environment by reducing atmospheric and water pollution and the amount of wastes generated” [Bilska and Ulbrich, this volume].” Bilska and Ulbrich estimate that theoretically about 60% of total energy consumption in Poland can be satisfied by the use of renewable energy sources. However, currently only 2.5% of total energy is supplied by renewable energy resources. This shows that there are still great opportunities in this field. In the framework of the synergy process from agritourism, one can think of small-scale projects in the

countryside. The fact that the EU wants to increase energy from renewable sources to 12% of total use by 2010 is interesting in this respect.

Table 1.

EU energy production from renewable energy sources (RES)					
	1995	1996	1997	1998	2010
Primary production	10.0	10.0	10.8	11.3	—
Share in electricity	13.8	13.5	14.0	14.2	22.1
Gross domestic consumption	5.3	5.4	5.8	5.9	12.0

Source: EUROSTAT (2010 figures are targets)

Increasing energy from renewable sources could limit global warming, which is thought to be caused by the burning of fossil fuels—oil, gas and coal—which emit gases into the atmosphere and form a heat trapping layer keeping the sun's warmth from escaping back out into space.

Global warming may bring about a lot of grave effects like an increased risk of flooding, with tens of millions of people potentially affected, reduction of crop yields in tropical and sub-tropical regions and decreased water availability in water scarce regions. Scientists predict greater mortality due to heat stress and the disappearance of most of the coral reefs within 30 to 50 years due to increasingly warm oceans.

An interesting example about renewable energy in Poland was mentioned in "Wprost" weekly magazine [Wprost, 11.02.2001]. The biggest wind power station in Poland (18 MW-megawatts), is being built near Darlowo – between Koszalin and Slupsk – in northern Poland. It will cost about 100 million zł; but 31 million zł. is to be obtained from an EcoFund grant. The investment will bring profits within five years. It is interesting because the global market for wind energy is developing as dynamical as e.g. the market for mobile phones. By 2020 the market for wind energy will have an estimated value of \$80 billion. It may be a very lucrative business at the moment, because in 2001 EcoFund will assign 70 million zł. to wind power investments in Poland. Also regulations favour building wind power stations, because energy plants must buy a set proportion of their energy from renewable sources—now 2.4%, under the threat of financial sanctions. By 2010 this index is expected to rise to 7.5% in Poland. So there are bright perspectives for the wind energy market.

RES are very important for the development of rural areas with an underdeveloped technical infrastructure. The implementation of use of

RES could cause synergism effects through creating new employment and development of small and medium-sized companies.

## **Agritourism and Ecotourism versus Commercial Tourism**

The term 'tourism', as used by the WTO (World Trade Organisation), includes all travel by people to destinations outside the place they normally live, for any purpose (including pleasure, professional, educational and health), but excluding excursions (i.e. those visiting for less than 24 hours), so we can include here the flow of people having a potentially significant impact on the environment.

Agritourism can be an example of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism covers the development of tourism and the whole economy in the long term. Sustainable tourism confers an economic value to the natural environment and together with growth of the economy the regions develop in the right proportion. Ecotourism is widely believed to be a perfect economic activity promoting both sustainability and development.

In terms of the number of journeys, worldwide tourism almost tripled between 1970 and 1992, growing at nearly 5 per cent each year, whereas revenues from tourism increased almost sixteen-fold, and is currently the third most important economic international export earner in the world, surpassed only by oil and motor vehicles (WTO/UNCTAD data in WTO, 1993a). In Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey, as well as some other countries such as Ireland, tourism makes a major contribution to the national economy. In 1990 for the EU, income from tourism as a contribution to GDP was 5.5 per cent, ranging from 1.3 per cent in The Netherlands to 9.4 per cent in Spain (CEC, DG XI, elaboration (1993) of WTO and Eurostat data).

Agritourism could ensure a lot of opportunities for Poland, but a lot of work has to be done in order to boost agritourism as a type of REAL tourism (experience and adventure). Poland should improve the basic infrastructure needed to visit agritourism households and advertise this kind of tourism as a different, alternative sort of holiday.

Agritourism could be an alternative for global, commercial tourism, which offers fast sightseeing and a timetable of our sojourn. Commercial tourism requires a lot of infrastructure investments, which very often damage the natural environment. On the other hand, agritourism prefers individual tourism and assures close connections between tourists and a local society and the sustainable use of the environmental attractions of the region instead of infrastructure investments, in order to

keep the environment intact. Individual recreation, authentic sojourn, new, personal experience, healthy food, silence and peace – this could be an offer for people who have seen almost everything. This Alternative Tourism [Jansen-Verbeke, 1990] could replace commercial tourism. The 4S of Alternative Tourism (sport, sightseeing, shopping, sound) could replace the 4S of commercial tourism (sun, sea, sand, sex).

The question is whether it is possible to obtain synergy effects from agritourism and ecotourism in Poland, taking into consideration the threat that such tourism needs a mass tourism industry, as well as construction, real estate and other industries. When such industries are needed most of the benefits will be obtained by large companies providing most of the physical infrastructure, facilities and services that make ecotourism possible [<http://www.ens-news.com>]. Thus, for the synergy effect of agritourism to be the biggest, it is important that there is a large local component in industries and services facilitating such tourism.

A good example of large corporations earning the most from ecotourism is given by research conducted by Bernd Stecker – a forestry expert – on an ecotourism project in Taman Negara, a national park in western Malaysia. He concludes that only a tiny proportion of the income from tourism actually reaches the ecotourism destination. In the case of European and North American ecotourists, Stecker found that about two-thirds of the expenditure goes to foreign airlines and travel agencies, and a large proportion of the rest is spent, before and after the visit to an ecotourism destination, in large cities and well-established tourist centres.

The problems of ecotourism in Poland greatly differ from the problems of ecotourism in the rest of the world. In Poland the main problem is a lack of infrastructure, co-operation within local areas and improving education in the basic skills needed to manage agritourism households. Research shows that when given the chance and access to resources, the poor are more likely than other groups to engage in direct action to protect and improve the environment. From this perspective, an alternative development model requires new ways to encouraging the direct participation of peasant and indigenous communities in a program of job creation in rural areas to increase incomes and improve living standards. An example of infrastructure problems regards an entrepreneur from a former collective farm (unemployment rate about 30%). She wanted to open an agritourism household, but the roads were so bad that she quickly decided that nobody would come to her household although the neighbourhood was very pleasant, the environment was clean and the landscape was beautiful. Another feature of agritourism that we should consider, besides the level of infrastructure indispensable for the deve-

lopment of agritourism, is agritourism as an package offer of services. Agritourism households should specialise in offering their own package for tourists, i.e. rides by chaise, welcome dinners, strolls through the forest with a guide, animal watching, bonfires. Sometimes it is not necessary to create a very broad offer for tourists, because it is better to focus on resources and possibilities already possessed.

Agritourism as a proposal for individuals (using small households instead of big hotels) could assure people new experiences, new adventures and preserve the natural environment as the biggest virtue. A very interesting point of view about the problems of ecotourism in the world is given by Dieter Brauer [<http://www.ens-news.com>, 09/102000]. His argument is that if more and more tourists decide that travelling through a country's villages and protected areas is more desirable than staying in the existing tourist centres, then it would soon turn out that such a form of tourism was more damaging than organised travel in its present form. This means that although agritourism can be a good option for stimulating sustainable rural development, its scale is limited.

Global integration is creating opportunities for some and nightmares for many. In this juxtaposition of winners and losers, a new strategy for rural development is required: a strategy that revalues the contribution of traditional production strategies. In the present world economy, the vast majority of rural producers in the third world cannot compete on world markets. Unless insulated in some way, their traditional products only have ready markets within the narrow confines of poor communities suffering a similar fate [Barkin, 1996]. The same can be said for a large part of Polish agriculture.

But these marginal rural producers offer an important promise: they can support themselves and make important contributions to the rest of society. Incorporating agritourism households with the production of organic, healthy food could bring about another synergism effect.

Organic farming could be one example of supporting sound development. Organic farming is a method seen by many as the best solution for Poland's small, inefficient farms, which are largely untouched by chemicals. Poland, which may have joined the EU by 2004, faces a daunting task of bringing its huge and inefficient farm sector in line with EU regulations. Poland has almost two million farms, many of them working at a subsistence level and lacking the money to modernise.

Analysts say, however, that the development of environmentally sensitive farming techniques hinges on aid from the government, which has so far been lukewarm about eco-foods. If Poland increases promotion and financial aid to bio-farms, the number of ecological farms can increase by up to 50 percent in five or six years- according to Mieczysław Górny,

a professor at the Warsaw Agriculture Academy. Of course there are a lot of obstacles from scientists and politicians. Farmers should display activity, but they also need financial and political help, he added. Analysts point out that while domestic sales of organic food in Central Europe are marginal, mainly because of low consumer awareness, the EU with its surging demand for bio products may offer great opportunities for Polish and Hungarian farmers. Poland exports virtually no ecological foods, but Hungary has already found a way to western markets, with 95 percent of its bio farm output being sent abroad. Hungarian bio product exports rose to 3.3 billion forints (\$11.36 million) last year from 2.5 billion in 1999 and are forecasted to grow about 20 percent this year. To promote organic farming, the Hungarian state agriculture marketing centre introduced „ecobranding” last year. Now about 300-400 bio products carry this brand. Organic farming is carried out on a total of 45,000 hectares (111,200 acres) in Hungary, which the farming ministry wants to boost to 350,000 hectares (864,900 acres) within five years. Analysts say that once the organic farming bill is passed and Poland sets up a certification system in line with EU rules, exports to the rich West could surge [Krukowska, Mimeo].

A problem for introducing organic farming in Poland, which could enrich the offer for agritourists, is labelling. Many farm products are produced in a way that is close to organic, but these products have to be verified. For this a whole institutional infrastructure has to be developed to guarantee the product. On the demand side there may be great opportunities, especially now when the industrial way of farming, like in Great Britain, is discredited by BSE and foot and mouth disease. The current problem is: how can the consumer be sure to have an organic or bio-dynamic product. Old ladies often sell free-range eggs at the market. However, there have been cases where they just went to the local hyper-market for eggs, and sold them as if they were fresh from the countryside.

## **International Year of Ecotourism (IYE)**

Problems of ecotourism, in particular, are very important, when we take into consideration that the UN has proclaimed 2002 year as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE). This proclamation has created a major debate, because on one hand ecotourism promotes conservation of nature and cultures, education, material benefits to local inhabitants and local participation, but on the other hand there are grave concerns that it will result in mass nature tourism, degradation of ecosystems, displacement and dispossession.



Many NGOs claim that "as it stands, the WTO and UNEP's call for the celebration of the IYE and for increased promotion and marketing of ecotourism destinations and products is very untimely and controversial. Without a more organised, reasonable and creative approach, the IYE risks becoming a non-starter, unresponsive to people's concerns and incapable of rallying public trust and support" [<http://www.ens-news.com>].

Of course there is a threat that „a mountain of money will be spent and a flood of projects initiated in the IYE in order to boost the ecotourism industry. In contrast to advocates of the IYE, who tend to portray ecotourism development as a „win-win" approach, as well as a means of protecting biodiversity and enhance the well-being of local people, a lot of NGOs are gravely concerned that this IYE will result in a „lose-lose" situation for communities and the environment in destination countries.

That is why they have appealed to the UN to re-focus the programme and change the name IYE into the International Year of Reviewing Ecotourism, because the year 2002 is not the time for celebrating the ecotourism industry, but is primarily meant as period of reflection, learning and an intensive search for solutions to the various problems associated with ecotourism.

## Concluding remarks

To summarise, agritourism should make the most of a country's resources for complete development and strengthen individual features of the Polish countryside, but on the other hand we should consider, that understanding the role of entrepreneurship, agritourism will not come into existence without aid from the state, tax incentives etc. When agritourism creates more jobs in the countryside, such a situation will lead to synergy effects. The involvement of local authorities is also of great importance, being an intermediate between the potential "agri-entrepreneurs" and institutions that can provide funds. For example, the European Union has funds available for local development, waste management, etc. In order to obtain such funds the involvement of local authorities is indispensable. With regard to problems of infrastructure in Poland, the state must take into consideration that without financial aid agritourism households will not come into existence, because local inhabitants cannot afford the investment.

In my opinion, due to the debate of the IYE the implementation of individual agrotourism households will not change into mass travel tourism because of the very specific and unique character of Polish sites of environmental interest. There will always be a lot of people who prefer

the Mediterranean Sea, crowded cities and big hotels instead of a quiet, pleasant neighbourhood and incredible landscape. Poland's gorgeous landscapes and untamed nature, so different from Western Europe's, could charm foreigners.

It is hard to predict how the preferences of tourists will change in the near future, but it is safe to say that agritourism and ecotourism in Poland will not be a direct competitor of commercial tourism, because of the completely different character of these two kinds of tourism, which mutually exclude each other.

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