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Agrotourism as a factor of entrepreneurship to develop Polish rural areas

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Abstract

The article presents the essence of agro-tourism and its socio-economic importance such as professional activation of the country dwellers giving them chances to reduce unemployment and boost living standard. Very special attention has been paid to agro-tourism as a factor of development of small entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Keywords: Agro-tourism, entrepreneurship, rural area

Introduction

In the conditions of market economy going away from agriculture as a predominant economic function in rural areas may occur due to the entrepreneurship of local communities in creating non-agricultural entities and local government activities ^[1].

Political and economic changes started in Poland in period of 1989-1990 led to the inclusion of Poland to the group of countries with market economy. Those changes impacted in an essential way on a variety of social processes and caused unemployment related problems in rural areas. The unemployment rate could be reduced by developing the economic entrepreneurship ^[1].

The farmers with innovative solutions for their own farms constitute an important potential in the field of entrepreneurship development in rural areas. However, they should not only limit to the agricultural production but consider alternative factors of getting additional income, e.g. trade, small services, gastronomy; recreation related services as well as other forms of spending free time.

One of the ways for the farmers and country dwellers to find themselves in new market conditions is agro-tourism as alternative source of income. It may constitute the first and quite easy step toward setting own micro-enterprises.

Agrotourism - Chances for Rural Areas Development

Agro-tourism as a socio-economic phenomenon

Agro-tourism is a form of rural tourism (similar to eco-tourism) that might mean a form of recreation to be delivered in rural and agricultural areas, based on rural accommodation and recreational activities related with agricultural farms and their natural, production and service environment ^[5].

Agro-tourism or rural tourism brings about essential benefits both for region, rural areas, farmers and tourists which could be synthesized as ^[7]:

- Getting other incomes from non-agricultural activities.
- Utilizing free labor resources in the farms and village as well as free living rooms.
- Counteracting depopulation of rural and mountainous areas.
- Creating new jobs in accompanying services (trade, transport, living and social services)
- Multitasking means the appearance of other professions than farmers in the response to the need of tourists.
- Retaining agricultural farm thanks to the use of agricultural products in agro-tourist activities and income from non-agricultural activities.
- Change of the ways of living and living conditions and shaping new model of consumption of local people.
- Acquiring experiences in terms of entrepreneurship due to conducting tourist activities.

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- Development of local initiatives and activities of rural community, including the development of infrastructure supporting ecological tourist patterns such as transport, power generation, waste and sewage management.
- Improvement of local infrastructure.
- Preserving cultural heritage of rural areas and landscape protection.
- Boosting rural aesthetics, contact with other cultural patterns and identities, personal development of rural areas dwellers.
- Development of folk arts and handicrafts.
- Protection of natural environment through promoting such forms of tourism which are economically productive, socially responsible and environmentally friendly.
- Undertaking tourist activities favorable for the environment and landscape.
- Maintaining the integrity of landscape, cultural values and attractiveness of local areas.

Agro-tourism as an entrepreneurship and professional activation factor

From the economic point of view the development of agro-tourism and by that the stimulation of economic development should be done through (Nowakowska, 1982): creating basis and infrastructure meeting the needs of tourists and as a consequence causing socio-economic life activation, creating new jobs for people directly in tourist services or producing tourist devices and souvenirs and as well as in other services and commercial activities.

Whereas from the social point of view the agro-tourism development for farmers and rural dwellers is related with, first and foremost ^[1]: activation of rural community, integration of rural environment and cooperation in realizing tourist undertakings, development of local government and interpersonal cooperation e.g. in the framework of agro-tourist associations, development and promotion of tourist products.

The interest in agro-tourism as a form of rest has been significantly on the rise. The main reason is the worsening income situation of many families both in the cities and country side. For the city dwellers this is relatively cheap form of spending time, close contact with nature, as well as the opportunity to consume healthy less processed foods. The benefits are also on the farmers' side. Offering tourist a wide range of services they increase their income from non-agricultural activities. The country dwellers also benefit from the development of agro-tourism in terms of more jobs are created and more income to support their family. According to estimation of agro-tourism business managers, one farm delivering tourist services contribute to creating several jobs in the local rural area. These are diversified activities (trade, processing, service, and many others). One can talk about multiple benefits starting from the farmer himself or herself through rural dwellers to the local government.

In agro-tourism in the rural areas benefits have been seen in form of factor activating entrepreneurship amongst country dwellers. That leads to lowering or even liquidating unemployment whose rate has been peaking up very high in recent years.

High unemployment rate is taking place frequently and

especially in the rural areas in which state farms have been dominating in land usage and management. Getting income from other non-agricultural sources enables them also to invest without the need of borrowing and lending. These investments might be in the form of construction of new buildings or renovation or major overhaul of the old ones.

In conditions of free market farmers are frequently complaining about the lack of demand for their products. To meet the taste of the consumers they are pushed to take care about the quality of the products. Certain encouragement and incentive for customers, including tourists is the healthy food. This inspires producers to develop ecological production without using mineral fertilizers and plants protection substances.

The most important effects and hopes related with the tourist development in rural areas are following ^[2]:

- Delivering services for tourists as an essential source of farmers' income; this additional income should activate farmers to invest more in their own farms.
- Increase of scale of investment in rural areas. Investment undertakings of the farmers may lead to total transformation of rural area. As a result, the development of technical infrastructure and the improvement of its functioning (water supply, sewerage system, gas main) and better equipment in communal infrastructure (the trade and service, the cultural and educational outposts).
- The direct increase of certain agricultural products' distribution which may contribute to maintaining current production, extending assortment, improving quality and other benefits.
- More jobs and professions are created such as gastronomy, small service establishments, souvenirs industry. All of that leads to the professional urbanization of the country dwellers; enrich the labor market and thanks to that it is now easier to keep the youngster living in the countryside.
- Creating chances for people outside who do not possess any piece of land but what they have are material, financial resources and entrepreneurship spirit. Their initiatives will cause a revival of rural environment and provide support for agriculture.
- Getting the rural community out from certain civilization isolation will shape the new society more progressive and modern.

Conclusion

In order for the agro-tourism to develop properly the financial, advisory support and help of different government centers are much needed. Much will undoubtedly depend on the local programs and engagement of local governments and municipalities. The basic development direction is nothing but agriculture.

Not all the farmers possessing farmland situated in attractive landscape region are predisposed to conduct agro-tourist activities. To do that, they should possess not only knowledge and skills but also very special personal qualities. They should treat people well, have a friendly approach and are willing to listen to people, always smiling and have a great sense of humor. Moreover, they should also have a thorough knowledge of the region and capable to interest the people with this local history and culture

sharing interesting information as much as possible. Additionally, agro-tourism business managers should always take care about the cleanliness and order in the farm and at home, able to cook and prepare a diversity of meals regarding guests' tastes and regional cuisine. So, the human factor in development of agro-tourism is unquestionable.

Agro-tourism managers as well as other business managers should possess certain management skills such as cooperation, teamwork, ingenious decision making, consistency in pursuing own goals, learning by mistakes, dutifulness, solidarity and finally being acquainted with rules and regulations of law, tax and accounting.

Agro-tourism development and related increase of local people's income may impact positively by means of taxes on municipalities' budget. In effect, municipalities will be able to allocate more funds to carry out own tasks including construction and maintenance of infrastructure (roads and waterways, sewage and gas main). It should also be remembered that several municipalities seeing potential in agro-tourism development in their own areas undertake all possible activities to create and improve infrastructure devices.

The integration of farmers, the connection and forming different kinds of associations certainly benefit all. Their mutual cooperation and cooperation with other local subjects leads to positive final results. This is a proof of mentality change of this social and professional group. Farmers are so far distrustful of this kind of collective cooperation. Things are changing now and together they can do more.

Acknowledgment

Dr Nguyen Hoang Tien is a graduate of master study at the Helena Chodkowska University in Warsaw (2002) and a graduate of PhD study at the Warsaw School of Economics in Poland (2006). He specializes in change management and competitiveness of enterprises, international relations and security issues, strategic and human resource management, marketing management, higher education management, leadership and entrepreneurship, international business. He is an author of over 300 scientific publications published worldwide.

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