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# Tourism development as a determinant of quality of life in rural areas

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to share information on how the advantages of tourism are both a result and a determinant of the quality of life in rural areas. Consequently, it is one of the main factors for sustainable development in the social context.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken of 36 villages that have been developing rural tourism for at least 20 years in Poland. In-depth interviews were conducted with destination management organizations (DMO) leaders and members of the local communities. Direct observation was used to gain an understanding of the realities in the field. Round table discussions with managers of rural tourism and members of the communities helped to perform the cost-benefit analysis of the development of rural tourism. This study was conducted between the years 2009 and 2014.

**Findings** – This study monitored patterns and changes in residents' quality of life and measured their perceptions of rural tourism. The findings showed that negligence and errors during the planning stage results in a negative opinion of tourism, leading to unfavorable effects on future development, causing intolerable material, financial and social costs. Three types of factors influencing tourism were identified: social and technical infrastructure, ecology and lifestyle. These findings are important for local policymakers and rural tourism business.

**Research limitations/implications** – Readers need to remember that only clearly determined population was considered in the research and specific sampling settings; reference to other settings may have produced different results. The extent to which the findings can be generalized certainly requires further investigation.

**Practical implications** – The development of rural tourism is considered a viable means to attract tourists to a destination and to enhance residents' overall quality of life. However, the perception of tourism's influence on the overall quality of life depended on internal marketing and proper communication. This study yielded interesting conclusions that have practical implications for DMO and tourism leaders who continually evaluate rural tourism initiatives.

**Social implications** – The experience of 20 years in the Polish modern agrotourism industry represent a set of observations concerning both the improvement within the quality of life of rural residents, as well as the danger of social conflict, depending on the management tools and practices applied at rural tourist destinations. Negligence and errors during the planning stage may result in a negative opinion of tourism, leading to unfavorable effects on future development of tourism and causing intolerable material, financial and social costs.

**Originality/value** – Although this study referred to communities living in Polish villages, the findings show that detailed planning and the DMO's communication efforts resulted in positive opinions from local residents with regard to tourism, and helped to avoid high material, financial and social costs. The case studies from Poland offer a universal benchmark in managing rural tourism destinations and show the challenges that needed to be addressed for the development of sustainable rural tourist destinations.

**Keywords** Poland, Local development, Rural tourism, Sustainable development, Social capital, Agrotourism

**Paper type** General review



## 1. Introduction

Tourism in rural areas (agrotourism) is considered to be the panacea for the problems encountered by village residents such as growing unemployment, decline in local governments' and farmers' income, lowering of living standards and infrastructure shortcomings. It is often believed that tourism would allow for the establishment of additional sales channels for food producers and various types of service providers and would also attract tourists to less popular regions. Rural tourism is also seen as the most sustainable industry to guarantee the economic activation of local communities with minimum negative social and environmental impacts.

In fact, in some regions of Poland, rural tourism has long assumed commercialized forms. In such places, tourism development is usually relatively spontaneous and uncontrolled, which necessitates a critical approach to its potential impact on rural communities. One of the challenges that need to be considered for the sustainability of responsible rural tourism destinations is the social condition of the local community.

This study performed multi-faceted analyses of the influence of the development of tourism on rural residents. The main assumption of this paper is that the attractiveness of rural tourism might be both a result and a determinant of the quality of life for local residents. Quantitative and qualitative research was carried out in 36 villages that have been in rural tourism for at least 20 years in Poland. In-depth interviews were conducted with destination management organizations' (DMO) leaders and members of the various rural communities. Direct observation was used to gain an understanding of the realities in the field. Round table discussions with rural tourism managers and residents helped in performing a cost-benefit analysis of the development of rural tourism. The following were taken into account in this study:

- infrastructural factors (technical infrastructure, buildings, spatial planning and rural resources);
- social factors (attractiveness of rural life, social capital, social roles and competencies of local residents, feelings of belonging to the region and development of social infrastructure); and
- ecological factors (tourism's influence on the condition of the natural environment).

The results of this study are especially important for local policymakers and practitioners of rural tourism, as the experience of 20 years in the modern Polish agrotourism industry represents a set of observations concerning both the improvement within the quality of life of rural residents, as well as the danger of social conflict, depending on the management tools and practices applied at rural tourist destinations.

## 2. Feedback system between attractiveness of tourism and quality of life in rural areas

*The Limits to Growth* report led to the political, economic and scientific spheres to be dominated by the term *sustainable development*. This concept applies to development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It is believed that the essential feature of sustainability is that of sustained development which does not lead to the degradation of its constituent factors

and mechanisms (Kachniewska, 2006). These are some of the barriers to sustainable growth:

- exhaustible, non-renewable resources (natural environment);
- insufficient reproduction of slowly renewable resources (human capital, including local culture and value system, spatial planning and the settlement network); and
- higher than socially acceptable tensions arising from the unequal meeting of the higher-level needs in the process of economic growth (social exclusion).

Sustainable development covers three intertwined dimensions: economic, social and environmental. The last area (the environment) seems to dominate in the literature, probably because non-renewability of natural resources forms the strongest barrier to sustainable growth (Lindsay, 2003). As the possibilities of sustainable tourism development are, to a large extent, dependent on the quality of natural resources, the impact of tourism on the surrounding environment has usually been analyzed in terms of the natural environment. However, space and human capital should also be included in the group of non-renewable and slowly renewable resources that determine tourism development.

It is beyond doubt that the current tourism development model, which also applies to rural tourism, has serious spatial and social consequences. They concern the transformation of the settlement networks and the quality of rural building resources, as well as social changes, often proving irreversible, like waning rural culture and rising social pathologies.

Human capital and social aspects are rarely mentioned in the context of sustainable development. This probably results from the fact that ecology-related threats had been introduced to the discussion much earlier than social ones. However, at the macro and micro scales, the pace and direction of economic development are increasingly dependent upon the quantitative and qualitative parameters of social resources.

The stakeholders concept of dissemination and growing awareness of the complexity of the tourism product have increasingly led to equal importance being given to economic, social and environmental aspects (Kachniewska, 2013). In the field of rural tourism, the stakeholder group includes not only accommodation providers, but also all the groups and individuals directly and indirectly affected by the development of tourism. Each and every stakeholder exerts different influences, and the rights of stakeholders and the urgency of their claims vary. In rural tourism, one can discern at least three major groups with conflicting expectations: tourists, tourism service providers and other local residents, who do not derive direct economic benefits from tourism. Products or services aimed at tourists can be determined on two distinct levels (Kachniewska, 2006):

- (1) a package comprising a combination of all the elements, which a tourist consumes during his/her trip; and
- (2) specific products which are components of the total tourist experience and can be sold as individual offerings such as accommodation, transport, attractions and other facilities for tourists.

From a tourists' perspective, the satisfaction of various needs is possible only after all the goods and services are supplied (i.e. information about the region and the village,

transport and accommodation services, restaurants and recreational services). A tourist product, in the broad sense, is defined as a bundle of real and perceived components, based on an activity at a destination. "It is the consumption of such a bundle that creates the travel experience of each individual" (Medlik, 2003). This definition shows that rural tourism product development is dependent on a number of factors:

- the quality of human resources;
- the entrepreneurship of village residents;
- their hospitality;
- basic tourism-related skills and marketing competence;
- awareness of elements determining rural area attractiveness; and
- the ability to cooperate and shape mutually beneficial relations with their surroundings.

The influence of any type of entrepreneurship undoubtedly contributes to the enrichment of social resources. Moreover, it determines further possibilities of tourism development.

It is quite obvious that the quality of the tourism product is dependent not only on the group of accommodation providers (who are directly interested in deriving economic benefits from tourism), but also on all the remaining residents. The quality of the tourism offer is shaped by their attitude toward visitors, as well as their influence on the natural and social environment. On the other hand, local residents can also benefit from the development of tourism. However, their limited participation in economic benefits makes them particularly critical of, and much more sensitive to, non-economic effects. Thus, it is vital to not allow stratification of the local communities. The opinions of this stakeholder group, to a large extent, determine the economic success of direct beneficiaries (tourism services providers).

To a large extent, the factors influencing tourists' experience of a given rural area are beyond the control of a single service provider. These factors range from attractiveness of tourist resources, through the bunch of services provided by different entrepreneurs, up to the quality of life in a given area, including:

- the availability and quality of social and technical infrastructure;
- the level of safety and friendliness of local residents toward visitors; and
- the number and behavior of tourists.

Tourist products consist of numerous components, with each one playing a distinct functional role in this amalgam of tangible and intangible elements. These components complement each other (i.e. they are functionally interdependent, as each one provides only a part of the total sum of benefits sought by tourists). They also include free (primary) goods, public goods and externalities which are the costs or benefits that affect a party without their choosing (Buchanan and Stubblebine, 1962). They significantly contribute to the quality of the tourist offer for a given locality.

Some of them remain beyond the control of any one entity (e.g. the number of sunny days in a given region). Others result from various combinations of factors that are not always easily identifiable (e.g. the quality of water or air). Consequently, the quality of free and public goods influences not only the overall tourism offer but also the quality of

life of local residents. On the other hand, the quality of public and free goods is exposed to the influence of village residents and external tourism effects, as well as tourism-related business activity. Therefore, the system of mutual feedback between tourism and quality of life in rural areas is closed.

### 3. Twenty years of rural tourism experience in Poland

The modern farming model in Europe includes issues related to sustainable development, which is considered to be a necessary condition for achieving economic growth-related objectives. Therefore, apart from its basic function of the production of agricultural products, farming also has a role in environmental protection in rural areas (including water resources and soil protection, landscape architecture, protection and preservation of habitat and biodiversity). Paradoxically, the belated industrialization of some European countries (e.g. Poland), the main culprit for the slow economic development of rural areas, has led to a situation where the natural environment and biodiversity have been preserved and has provided a point of difference to those areas. To close the economic gap and increase entrepreneurial dynamism in rural areas, there was a need to:

- introduce appropriate support mechanisms that would be conducive to preserving and improving the condition of natural habitats and refuges; and
- preserve the cultural diversity of rural areas.

In Poland, all these requirements were introduced into the *Rural Areas Development Program* (2007) including aspects of economic development, competitiveness, environmental protection, improvement of quality of life and rural economic diversification.

It is readily noticeable that positive effects of tourism-related economic activity can be encountered in rural areas. Preservation and good environmental condition of rural areas, including the achievement and maintenance of a good soil and water quality, is connected with maintaining the continuity of land use for agricultural purposes.

However, in rural areas where such a solution is not profitable (lower-quality farming land), it is important to stimulate non-agricultural economic activities. Owing to high unemployment rates, such activities are of special importance in Poland. It is justified to expect that the quality of rural tourism is highly dependent on the success of the program. High unemployment and growing unemployment-related pathology rates have a powerful impact on tourists' impressions. Stimulating entrepreneurship allows for raising income levels, which, in turn, enables improvement to technical and social infrastructure that is used by both visitors and local residents. Instruments employed with a view to improving quality of life of rural residents (village renovation, enhancement of cultural heritage areas and environmental condition) fully incorporate significant social and cultural functions. They are also targeted at shaping structural changes and preventing depopulation due to the stronger identification of residents within a given region, its traditions and values.

The close dependency between these postulates and the attempts to enhance the quality of rural tourism cannot be overlooked. In rural areas, tourists most often seek what is divergent from their urban experiences: rural culture, architecture, customs, traditions, leisure activities and types of employment. This goal can be achieved by direct actions connected with appropriate household-related rural practices such as

promoting sustainable farming practices including appropriate soil use and water protection, landscape architecture and maintaining the condition of valuable habitats surrounding agricultural land.

Preservation of Polish rural traditions and culture can be classed as a positive effect of tourism, provided that they are not deformed by commercial pressures. There have been cases where the development of tourism has led to the destruction of the authenticity of rural culture and traditions. Tourists' demand for rural cultural values has become an important driver for preserving tradition, and concurrently serves as a source of its economic support.

It ought to be noted that the objective of the Rural Activation Program (implemented in Poland in between the years 2001 and 2004) was to create non-agricultural employment opportunities in rural areas by way of investing in tourist infrastructure, education and training, as well as granting micro-loans to village residents. The effects of the Program, especially in terms of technical infrastructure (i.e. local roads, water supply systems, sewage systems, landfills, waste treatment systems and water purification stations), allowed for identifying explicit dependency relations between conditions of entrepreneurship development and quality of life in rural areas. Important outcomes of the Program were revitalization, activation and mobilization of local government authorities and economic entities.

The results of 20 years of Polish experience have been analyzed by the academics and students from the Warsaw School of Economics. In the years between 2013 and 2014, they conducted research to verify a common belief that tourism development in rural areas had a beneficial effect on the residents of these areas. An investigation was conducted on 515 residents of 36 villages. Only those localities with a tourism industry of at least 20 years were included in this study (the date when the first accommodation services were supplied in a given village was taken into account). Half of the respondent groups were people who were not direct economic beneficiaries of tourism services (i.e. farmers or people employed types of businesses). The questionnaire methodology was used to conduct this study. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the DMO leaders. Direct observation was used to gain an understanding of the realities of the field. Round table discussions with rural tourism managers and residents helped to perform the cost-benefit analysis of rural tourism development.

#### **4. Professional activation of rural area residents**

Rural population outflow to cities occurred earlier in Western European states and was more robust than in Poland. However, it is not difficult to find depopulated rural areas in Poland as well. On the other hand, many mountainous areas both in Western Europe and in Poland were revitalized by tourism. While enabling employment and generation of additional income, tourism enables some residents to remain in rural areas, and also attracts new residents. This phenomenon is boosted by attractiveness of villages with a consolidated tourism function, where natural resources, municipal infrastructure and cultural and service infrastructure are of higher quality.

The research confirmed the opinion that tourism, by halting rural population outflow (especially of youth) to cities, has had a favorable effect on the condition and quality of labor resources; 60 per cent of respondents stated that servicing tourism had notably decreased young people's desire to move to cities. The highest percentage of responses (80 per cent) concerned mountainous villages, which is undoubtedly linked to the long

tourist season. The situation is different in the coastal areas. Residents underlined that owing to the short tourist season at the Polish seaside, tourism-generated employment opportunities were seasonal. As a result, the employees of accommodation facilities were not residents of a given locality.

All the respondents found it beneficial that tourism generated new jobs. A notable share of respondents (43 per cent) remarked that employment opportunities in tourism motivated people to settle in their village. It is becoming more frequently the case that pursuing tourism-related activities are more attractive (also in economic terms) than farming, especially in small and medium-sized agricultural households. However, in such situations, when the interest in farming drops, high-quality agricultural land is sold off for building development. The more attractive the landscape surrounding a given village, the higher the likelihood that non-agricultural activity will oust farming, even if a given region is especially conducive to the development of agriculture.

This study fully confirmed this observation. More than 70 per cent of the respondents pointed to the notable increase in land prices, and the fact that the location of plots earmarked for second homes and tourism investments is dependent solely on landscape value. Many respondents (68 per cent) noted that the soil quality and attempts at its preservation for agricultural purposes are disregarded. This phenomenon was emphasized with great irritation, especially by residents of villages where high-quality agricultural land is lacking.

The scale of tourism flow depends on the development of services, specifically, tourism facilities (e.g. small hotels, boarding houses and private rooms). This allows for the professional activation of women. An alternative is to combine working at home and at the farm, while simultaneously rendering services to tourists (e.g. eateries and rooms for rent). As a result, women do not need to commute to work beyond their village. Performing work in return for remuneration gives women the opportunity to self-actualize and increase household income. At the same time, female rural residents encounter the same barriers as urban females:

- overburdening housework; and
- drastically lacking institutional support (daycare centers, preschools).

Furthermore, they cannot rely on service infrastructure and their households are seldom furnished with appropriate equipment. Only after these needs are appeased, is it possible to encourage greater activity in, and readiness of, rural women to run additional risks and undertake extra effort.

### **5. Attractiveness of living in tourist villages**

Women are strongly motivated to remain in rural areas if the attractiveness of a given tourist village is above average. Studies show that village residents note numerous changes connected with intensified tourist flow. In the opinion of the respondents, thanks to the organization of tourist events and establishment of new cultural facilities, tourist villages have become merrier and it is easier to find entertainment in such places (82 per cent of respondents).

Contact with visitors eliminate the feeling of isolation (64 per cent) and, as a result, are of great psychological significance. Intensified tourist traffic encourages residents of villages to adopt a more active and informed approach to traditions, cultural heritage, folklore and characteristic rituals of a given region (78 per cent). As tourists express

interest in various aspects of rural life, rural residents realize that their local customs are a potential tourist attraction that can enhance the attractiveness of tourism in their village, and this is conducive to preserving tradition (yielding mutual benefits). Many respondents (56 per cent) underlined that tourist presence alone is a factor that improves the attractiveness of living in rural areas. Local residents observe, and then imitate tourist lifestyles, leisure activities and style of dress.

A lot of residents (62 per cent) indicate that tourists introduce new models of leisure, recreation, entertainment and sports, which are, over time, readily adopted by local residents (mainly the youth). According to 78 per cent of respondents, the presence of visitors enabled investments in sporting, cultural and recreational facilities that would not have been performed without an appropriate increase in demand (e.g. construction of tennis courts, yacht harbors, pedestrian zones, waterfront developments, quays, bowling facilities, summer theatre stages, spas, bathing sites, sports and tourist equipment rentals). Some residents (32 per cent) were discontented that these facilities were available seasonally, although 67 per cent of the respondents indicated that such facilities also operate off-season at lower prices than those charged in the peak season.

As many as 85 per cent of respondents remarked that numerous points of service (not necessarily related to tourism) were launched in their villages only for tourism purposes; however, they improved the attractiveness of living in these villages. It is worth noting that gastronomic facilities and social infrastructure (e.g. pharmaceutical and medical facilities, cosmetic and hairdressing centers, financial service outlets, automatic teller machines and Internet cafés) had been a problem in the villages for years. It was not until tourism intensified, that investments were made in these services.

The tourism function and critical approach to one's own village have led to significant changes in the activity of local authorities in more than ten of the cases. More than three quarters (76 per cent) of the respondents held the opinion that only "for fear of negative visitor opinions" did officials become inclined to accelerate fundamental infrastructural investments (e.g. pavements, roadsides, road surface renovation, demarcation and construction of bicycle lanes, marking walking and bicycle routes, construction of sewage systems and connections to residential buildings and delineating parking spaces). The same factor (fear of negative visitor opinions) also induced local authorities to improve safety (i.e. police patrols, monitoring and lifeguards at bathing sites) and the aesthetics of a given village (revitalization of green spaces and parks, greater care for cleanness, removal of illegal landfills, construction of playgrounds, purchase of park benches, greater care of green areas and the general appearance of a given locality, including planting of flowers, renovation of public-utility buildings).

Changes for the better were readily identified by parents of small children. Only after the changes were introduced did they realize that their children had simply been bored, especially that nobody ever ventured beyond the village. They viewed positively such initiatives as erecting traffic signs beside pedestrian crossings (especially in the vicinity of schools and playgrounds), and demarcation of walking and bicycle routes. Parents of small children, more often than other respondents, pointed to the fact that tourists' presence made shop owners expand their product range to cater for the new demand.

As many as 85 per cent of respondents emphasized the aforementioned improvement in safety from various perspectives such as police patrols and monitoring and road traffic safety and comfort (better road and roadside surface). However, this study

showed that residents' attitude toward tourism and tourists was not always positive. The number of residents irritated by visitors is growing in villages overburdened with tourist traffic. Such local residents often declare the will to limit tourist activity in their locality (36 per cent). They usually list the following damage caused by visitors: shopping difficulties (insufficient supply in season), overcrowding, dirt and pollution (mainly over-spilling waste containers, car exhaust), inappropriate (arrogant, unkind) visitor behavior toward local residents and damage caused by tourists to agricultural fields. In this context, the influx of culturally divergent visitors entailed the risk of cultural and social conflicts, which, in turn, leads to elevated crime and pathology rates (i.e. mainly theft, mutual battery and alcoholism). Owing to the phenomena listed above, distrust toward visitors is observed among residents of rural areas (especially in the case of accommodating visitors at one's own home). A little more than a quarter (26 per cent) of the respondents "would not like to have anything to do with tourists", and 32 per cent could not imagine putting tourists up in their own home, although they did not exclude the possibility of taking up other forms of tourism-related activity.

## **6. Building resources and communication infrastructure in rural tourism areas**

Changes caused by tourism were most noticeable in house-building and rural aesthetics. First and foremost, the dynamics of growth in housing resources in rural areas varied according to population growth and local income. In tourist villages, both factors tended to be much more favorable for building development than in other types of villages. Hence, increased building activity and greater than average volumes of residential buildings were the most remarkable features of tourist villages. It was also where housing substance exchange took place regularly (i.e. the percentage of old, decaying and badly equipped houses, with sanitary conditions as the main criterion, saw a decrease). In the quoted survey, 83 per cent of respondents indicated a significant improvement in the quality and quantity of residential buildings, as well as in the quality of farm buildings. Almost 90 per cent of respondents attributed these positive changes to the development of tourism, underlining that tourists pay special attention to the aesthetic aspects of surroundings, which usually motivated farmers to extend the scale of their investments to all farm buildings and not only to tourist accommodation. 56 per cent of interviewees mentioned a "contagion effect", which explains why inhabitants who do not engage in providing services for tourists tend to pay more attention to the aesthetics of their own houses and their surroundings over time. However, 34 per cent of respondents emphasized the fact that new buildings conflicted with the architectonic order and spatial layout of the village, or even that they are incompatible with zoning plans, especially with regard to holiday cottages.

Other examples of univocally positive changes stemming from the development of the touristic function of rural areas may be found in the domain of housing. In total, 56 per cent of interviewees pointed out that interests of visitors contributed to restoration and modernization (in regional style) of old residential buildings in well-situated properties; 64 per cent of interviewees admitted that regular inhabitants also benefited from tourism development in definite and measurable ways, as it required providing tourists with proper sanitary and housing conditions. Unfortunately, this necessity was sometimes accompanied by reduced private space of the property inhabitants for the sake of increasing the number of rooms for rent. That often resulted in lowering the

property holder family members' standard of living. It was then difficult to evaluate unambiguously the phenomenon of renting private rooms, although it was certain that such situations occurred mainly during the peak season. It is worth mentioning that 52 per cent of respondents estimated housing resources of the villages to be insufficient in relation to demand; 67 per cent of interviewees stated that the buildings had low technical standard. In both cases, it was emphasized that tourism constituted a powerful trigger for housing development and improved building standards.

One must not forget that the quality of buildings and housing conditions affects the quality of life of both regular inhabitants and visitors. The lack of precise standardization of agrotourism lodgings in Poland resulted in the fact that interests of neither of the two groups were protected. Agrotourism, as it offers individualized forms of recreation, does not require special construction or extension of accommodation space. It may be based on existing housing resources or suitably adapted farm buildings. Some of the recommendations concerning rural tourism accommodation standards present a wider perspective on the organization of kitchens and washing facilities, as well as access to the garden and recreation facilities for guests, but it is the lodging holder who decides whether to apply them. On the other hand, the fire safety, building and environment protection codes are legally binding in Poland. Regulations concerning residential buildings also apply to rural lodgings, as no specific regulations exist.

The question of standardization constitutes a problem, as no legal norms or categories of agrotourism services exist either in Poland or other European Union countries. This gap is only filled by grassroots systems of categorization elaborated by the rural lodgings holders. The arbitrariness of this makes the quality of rural tourism experience unpredictable for the tourist. Additionally, it may not always be cost-effective from the holder's perspective. An important factor conditioning the socio-economic development of rural areas is access to communication. It is important especially in mountainous areas. As a consequence, the quick pace of house building is typical of those villages that are easily accessed from well-connected roads. Villages with limited accessibility, including the most spectacularly situated ones, hardly become the most popular tourist destinations. Less income from tourism inhibited expansion and the standard of housing, served as yet another factor disqualifying a village as a target for tourists. Yet, respondents rarely perceived a correlation between the development of tourism and the improvement in roads in the villages represented. Only 10 per cent of interviewees indicated intensification of tourism as a factor motivating local authorities to invest in roads (including building new roads or repairing existing ones). On the other hand, 43 per cent of respondents stated that intensified traffic (mostly because of tourism) triggered investments such as cycling paths and parking lots. Percentage of such answers was especially high (63 per cent) in seaside villages and towns, in which the flow of visitors literally paralyzes traffic in peak season, making it impossible for pedestrians and cyclists to move freely and provoking chaotic parking of cars even in places inadmissible for parking, or protected natural sites dune forests. Hardly can it be considered as an example of positive impact of tourism. Local authorities had to react after a substantial drop in quality of life in seaside villages.

Apart from housing and the state of roads, many other elements of rural settlement undergo changes provoked by the development of tourism. Modifications in the spatial

structure of settlement, changing the face of villages and the environmental changes caused by those two factors are of particular importance. The phenomena mentioned by respondents include the growing density of rural settlements (indicated by 78 per cent) and the expansion of buildings outside the historically traced boundaries of settlements (92 per cent). In high mountain areas, the spatial development of settlement is limited by steep slopes, which prevents the dispersion of settlement and partially inhibits the degradation of landscape. However, 43 per cent of inhabitants of high mountain villages complained about the excessive height of the new buildings. In lowland areas with no natural limits to building, dispersed settlement was more frequent.

Changes observed in rural settlement are difficult to assess in an unambiguous way. From the perspective of tourism and its needs, the dynamic development of housing is beneficial because new houses built in areas attractive for tourists provide potential lodging resources. On the other hand, the growing density of rural settlement and often chaotic spatial structure decreased the village's potential for tourism development. Those problems gain additional weight given that intense housing development takes place in some of the most attractive regions of Poland. Such areas require optimal land management and maximum protection of the natural resources.

Development of tourism also contributed to changes in physiognomy of villages. In many parts of Poland, traditional wooden constructions, usually one-storey, have been replaced by brick buildings most often two-storey or even multi-storey, where the building was conceived as a tourist base. The new type of construction is often characterized by non-aesthetically pleasing architecture and lacking reference to the building tradition of the region. Yet one of the crucial components of sustainable rural tourism is the strong connection of this form of traditional architecture. Ugly and lacking in style modern houses are devoid of rustic motives and not surrounded by trees are not likely to attract tourists. The lack of awareness in this matter resulted in the fact that most villages already functioning as tourist villages are being covered with architectonic monsters, which are quick and cheap to build. Even though their standard and equipment may be better than in old buildings, that phenomenon can hardly be deemed positive.

### **7. Changes in agriculture and natural environment**

Current problems of rural areas and agriculture, especially the double employment widespread among the rural population, are the reasons why a great number of farms are self-reliant as far as basic food products are concerned, especially vegetables, fruits, poultry, pork and milk production. Apart from this, small scale of production and low profitability are the main factors limiting the productivity of private farms in Poland.

In tourist villages, some features of agriculture have undergone additional transformation under the impact of tourism, serving as the source of income for rural populations. The demand created for agricultural products influences the intensity, structure and level of agricultural activity. Small farms, characterized by low competitiveness, gain an opportunity to engage in additional economic activity (tourism services) and to sell their products (providing supplies for hotels and guesthouses, or selling directly to tourists for profitable retail prices). Large production farms are less interested in providing tourism services, as their activity is remunerative and tend to reach buyers for their products by institutional distribution channels rather than retail. Large farms are subjected to a negative impact of tourism on development opportunities

in agriculture as tourism influences the prices of land and limits the possibilities of extending farming areas. The ever-growing number of plot sellers causes increase in townfolk interested in buying land in rural areas, often with the intension of reselling. Speculation has provoked such a dramatic increase in price of land in tourist villages that the expansion of existing farms still oriented toward agriculture has become unprofitable or even impossible (as noted by 72 per cent of interviewees). In the case of small farms, limited possibilities for increasing income leave no alternative but to engage in providing tourism services.

Another problem related to land trading is the division of land into small plots and fencing the ones reserved for purposes of tourism and recreation. This restricts the movements of farmers and limits possibilities of efficient farming (as noted by 86 per cent of respondents).

Big agricultural producers judged negatively the fact that the period of the most intense work in the fields, during which demand for seasonal workers is increased, coincides with the peak of tourist season. It is of lesser importance in villages where cheap labor from the East is employed to work in the fields. On small and medium-sized farms, tourism has a significant impact on the profile of agricultural production, especially where tourism services constitute a major part of the income. It has been observed that they are characterized by a bigger share of the species of plants and animals preferred by tourists. It concerns particularly vegetables, potatoes, poultry, cattle and pigs. Changing the structure of cultivation and breeding is not necessarily a positive phenomenon. It is understandable that farmers find it more profitable to supply to tourists (direct sale for retail prices), but it often causes significant loss related to earlier cultivations being discontinued, improper soil exploitation and decreasing interest in particular directions of cultivation and breeding (often having an effect on entire villages).

In some tourist regions, favorable changes in land use were observed such as decreasing waste surface, increasing surface covered by forests and farmland, increasing intensity of agriculture and the growing level of production for global sales. Nevertheless, it was difficult to effectively estimate the impact of tourism on those phenomena, distinguishing it from the impact of European Union subsidies (which brought numerous constraints). Undoubtedly, though, the interest in purchasing wasteland and adapting it for tourism is growing (a fact pointed out by 73 per cent of respondents); some inhabitants considered that a negative aspect of tourism development and expressed concerns about the space to be left available for local inhabitants. Fencing plots with access to lakes and rivers is perceived in a particularly negative way. It is usually done by lodgings holders, who thus intend to raise the standard of service provided to tourists. By doing so, they often provoke conflict with inhabitants who are accustomed to accessing the lake or rivers via the fenced plot.

The detrimental impact of tourism on agriculture consisted of the occupation of farmland for tourist lodgings (especially in the case of building large tourist complexes) and draining the workforce from agriculture. The research showed that among the various ways of profiting from tourism (e.g. room rental, providing meals and selling plots for building holiday houses), the most frequently chosen option of selling land was also the least profitable one (both from individual and macroeconomic points of view). The reason for this is the character as a one-time transaction, permanent exclusion of land from other uses and the separation (social, cultural and economic) of new owners

from the previous ones and from the entire village as an organism. Furthermore, once the holiday houses are built, their owners satisfy most of their vital needs from their place of permanent residence, bringing necessary food supplies and industrial products from the city. It means that the village as an economic organism does not participate in satisfying the increased demand (for increased number of residents). On the contrary, it sustains losses caused by the lack of permanent financial transfer from urban to rural areas. The research confirmed that 68 per cent of farmers who disposed of agricultural surplus by selling to tourists state that tourists were decreasingly interested in buying agricultural products from the villages. This mainly concerned tourists who rented houses for vacation. Even during long-term vacations, they preferred to get supplies in large shops or, less willingly, in village shops, and not directly from farmers. Their choice was usually motivated by high prices of agricultural products. In contrast, 71 per cent of respondents indicated the continued possibility of selling their agricultural surplus to tourist lodgings and hotels.

It is difficult to identify the problem of environment protection as playing a positive or negative role in tourist villages. Local inhabitants point both to negative (51 per cent of respondents) and positive (54 per cent) influence of tourism on the environment. Among the examples of deterioration they listed include increased noise from tourist flow, scaring of forest and farm animals, contamination of water reservoirs and air pollution (e.g. more sewage and exhaust fumes and excessive traffic). Supporters of the development of tourism point out that many investments in favor of environmental protection have been carried out thanks to tourism (e.g. sewage treatment plants, drinking water intake stations and sewer systems). It is underlined that it was not until tourists appreciated the value of the natural environment that local inhabitants started to pay attention to several aspects of the attractiveness of environment, and only then could they be formally protected.

### **8. Rural tourism and sustainable development – recommendations for local tourism policies**

Notions such as ecotourism, agrotourism, tourism in rural areas and sustainable tourism are often merged into one mental stereotype. As a matter of fact, ecotourism can be any kind of tourism which:

[...] is adequate to appropriate tourist values – especially environmental values, complies to binding regulations of land management and to the technological state of art while following ecological ethics, both at the stage of adapting an area for tourist function and during its exploitation (Szwichtenberg, 1993).

Ecotourism should enable contact with nature and the local community, the interests of which should be attributed higher priority than those of newcomers. It is also supposed to minimize social and ecological losses, and also ensure intensified contact with nature. This perspective is legitimately associated with sustainable tourism. Yet the basis for sustainability is not (social and natural) environment protection, but ensuring (also in economic sense) conditions for social development. The development of local community requires, among others, a suitable level of economic resources, which often cannot be produced and multiplied without compromising needs in the domains of protection and entrepreneurship. As a principle, rural tourism should facilitate meeting the requirements mentioned above. Unfortunately, unlike agrotourism, based on resources of small and still agriculturally active farms, rural tourism tends to

increasingly resemble mass tourism in its scale and uncontrollable pace of growth. The notion of tourist village is less and less frequently related to the authentic image of rural farming, and instead is replaced by a vision settlement, recalling the character of suburban residential estates (i.e. in architectural design, choice of plants and aesthetics of surroundings).

In many cases, the justifiable local inhabitants' dislike of the newcomers challenges the view that this type of tourism should "protect social and cultural environment". The situation of the natural environment seems even worse. In the most popular villages and tourist sites, which experience dynamic and uncontrolled development of individual holiday housing, increasing levels of air, soil and water pollution was observed (very often due to discharge of sewage into lakes). Those phenomena are usually caused by inefficient technology and service infrastructure and are accompanied by the general degradation of the environment, including crowdedness, noise, flow of people exceeding local capacity and the self-recovery potential of the area in question.

Unfavorable transformations of landscape and the disappearance of traditional rural lifestyle raise doubts concerning the declared lack of intervention in local communities' ways and lifestyles. Hence, rational management of natural resources supporting tourism requires transforming the spatial structure of tourism by inhibiting and precisely controlling its development in villages where the natural environment is threatened and, simultaneously, stimulating its development in areas that have not been exploited before.

Without any doubt, tourism development can contribute positively to shaping village aesthetics for pretty and neat villages, as they are more likely to attract tourists. Regrettably, those changes are superficial. Incoming tourists bring about augmented contamination of reservoirs (related to water gear used by tourists, often motorized) and amount of waste, the necessity to raise expenditure on village cleansing services and to employ appropriate protection personnel. Developing a system of tourism supply constitutes the key task of local tourism policies. Regional and local tourism organizations should undertake action in the domains of zoning, economic planning, vocational training and tourism marketing. Realizing those tasks requires the following:

- constant observation of the socio-economic consequences of tourism development;
- systematic and holistic penetration of local tourism market;
- diversification of the local economy;
- identification of target capacity of tourist villages;
- networking service suppliers in local structures;
- inspiring pro-tourism legal, tax and business solutions;
- selective expansion of tourism infrastructure;
- adjusting housing development to natural and architectonic village landscape;
- extending recreational areas free of car traffic;
- running consistent internal and external marketing;
- prioritizing local community as beneficiaries of tourism development;
- informing rural dwellers in due time on plans for tourism development and possibilities of cooperation;

- mindfully supporting cultural diversity in tourist villages and towns;
- undertaking actions for lengthening the tourist season;
- supporting tourism as a key source of income in rural areas; and
- emphasizing and enhancing the employment potential of tourism on the local labor market.

Rational use of a village's natural resources, traditions and customs for preserving its individual character is a crucial recommendation concerning local tourism policy implementation. Another important task consists of elaborating a relatively flexible program for tourism development, which allows for extending complementary tourist assets, and guarantees the preservation of tourist values that are subject to exploitation. The program may not restrict the rural dwellers' right and access to tourist values or treat tourists in a privileged manner.

The aims of tourism cannot be reduced to economic stimulation of rural areas, providing additional income for farmers and creating attractive possibilities of recreation for tourists, but also protecting nature and culture as resources vital to tourism development and, at the same time, determining the quality of life in rural areas. Those objectives often seem to be out of balance. It is erroneous to concentrate solely on financial benefit gained by farmers. A clean and non-degraded environment as well as preservation of local culture and traditions are among the greatest assets of tourism in rural areas. Overpopulation during tourist season, dynamic growth of housing and transformation of space are factors diminishing the value of particular areas and lowering the quality of life. To guarantee appropriate conditions for tourism development and all economic, social and environmental benefits that tourist function offers to rural dwellers, action must be taken toward restricting uncontrollable socio-economic transformation in tourist villages. Special attention should be paid to allotting specific plots of land for tourist housing and to the style of housing. Other requirements relate to adequate financing for accompanying equipment and services, as well as active participation of local authorities in building infrastructure.

Yet the most important issue is that of informing local authorities and tourism organizers the character of product that tourists expected. It is worth mentioning that the qualities that make tourism most attractive are also factors determining quality of life in rural areas. Preserving a clean environment, rural traditions and cultural diversity along with focusing on village aesthetics and functionality, entrepreneurship, wealth and the dynamics of growth are all factors fostering local dwellers' quality of life improvement and optimizing conditions of the visitors' rest.

## 9. Summary

This study presented selected effects tourism had on demographic relationships, housing conditions and agriculture in villages developed into tourist destinations. The objective of this study was to identify examples of negative influences on both rural areas and tourist values. While planning developments for tourism in rural areas, policymakers should not only define and audit factors determining the quality requirements of the rural areas in question, but also identify positive and negative effects of developing the facilities in the first place and their impact on the quality of life of the members of those communities. The state of tourism development and the technical and social potential of a particular rural area are mutually dependent.

Omissions at the planning stage for the development of facilities for tourism may contribute to negative perception of its effects by village inhabitants, causing negative repercussions for any further development of tourism. It also entails additional costs (material, social and environmental). The risk of not properly identifying and promoting the positive impacts of tourism could result in insufficient involvement from local communities leading to a loss of economic activity and profit.

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