

INNOVATIVE TRENDS IN RURAL TOURISM - SELECTED CASES

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Abstract. *The goal of this paper is to present the latest trends in rural tourism in vicinity of the Kampinos National Park in Mazowieckie Voivodeship in the context of sustainable development. The increase in the living standard of the society and the rich and relatively cheap holiday offer abroad poses challenges for traditional rural tourism. In the article, the authors want to answer the question whether the new directions of rural tourism development in response to these challenges correspond to the standards of sustainable development. The research material was collected in the first half of 2021. The method of the case study survey was chosen as the research method. The results of the research prove that the innovative directions of rural tourism development in the studied area may be part of the concept of sustainable development.*

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, rural tourism, innovations in tourism*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainable tourism was created in 1995 and mentioned in Lanzarot Charter for Sustainable Tourism. It was specified that the development of sustainable tourism should be based on the concept of sustainable development. In the similar way specified the sustainable tourism the European Council [2].

In Polish literature, the concept of sustainable tourism is interpreted in different ways. Most authors, however, agree that the concept has strong connotations with the concept of sustainability. The problem here is not so much the concept of sustainable tourism as the concept of sustainable development itself, which raises more doubts and is interpreted in different ways. That is why some authors identify the concept of sustainable tourism with ecotourism, just as sustainable development has been referred to by some authors in Polish literature, referred to eco-development. An example of a very extensive definition of sustainable tourism is the one proposed by Dominika Zaręba, according to which sustainable tourism: “refers to the broad concept of the development of a tourist-friendly environment in rural areas and cities, in small tourist centres and larger centres of entertainment and leisure, etc., a concept which refers to all known types of tourism after their respective 'greening'”, and also indicates that the very concept of ecotourism itself is much narrower [10]. The author points out that sustainable tourism is in no way the opposite of the so-called hard or mass tourism, which does not meet the requirements of the natural environment in its assumptions. Sustainable tourism manages resources and environmental space sparingly, leveraging the existing tourism infrastructure and strengths of the region. The process of sustainable tourism management should therefore be additionally holistic, which is associated with the development of other branches of the economy in the region.

Janusz Radziejowski suggests this form of tourism, as appropriate for develop in protected areas [8].

In 2010, Polish literature enriched by publication *Sustainable Tourism*, which authors indicate the source of the concept already in 1965. At that time the concept was referred as “responsible tourism”, and then, in the 80s of the twentieth century the term “alternative tourism” was used. According to the authors, the first time the term “sustainable tourism” was used in 1994 to determine the provisions of law and

management methods, indicating the path of development of tourism in areas with rich resources of natural and cultural environment [3].

The specific function of sustainable tourism is its participation in the protection and revitalization of natural and cultural resources of local [7].

Tourism is also a source for measures to protect and revitalize these resources[7,6].

The village has been the site of many revolutionary transformations for many decades. This is due to the nature of socio-economic changes that affect the character of rural life and economic initiatives. By nature, the village is a place associated with nature and peace, which affects the choices of tourists. They are looking for unspoiled surroundings, fresh air and relaxation among the natural landscape. That is why rural tourism has a long tradition, from active forms of recreation combined with cultural inspirations (Tatra tourism), to the relatively cheap opportunity offered by agritourism.

Civilizational changes have significantly affected the natural environment, which is no longer perceived as an inexhaustible resource. The environment in which people exist adversely affects their psychophysical condition. An additional aggravating element is the high pace of life that is stressful.

At the same time, the destruction of the environment forced people to develop ways of existence and economic development that would not deepen the devastation. The concept of sustainable development has become the subject of analysis at various levels. Starting from local and ending with global. Increasing public awareness of environmental protection has also caused consumers to demand products that are environmentally friendly.

Another element forcing the search for new forms in rural tourism was the increase in the standard of living and the emergence of an attractive and relatively inexpensive leisure offer in exotic places.

For the purposes of the research, the main research problem was formulated: Are innovative solutions in rural tourism being tried in the context of sustainable development?

On the other hand, detailed research problems are presented in the form of the following detailed research questions:

- What examples of innovative solutions in rural tourism can be found?
- How do they increase the attractiveness of the tourist offer?
- How do they fit into the concept of sustainable development?
- How can they contribute to enriching knowledge about possible innovations in rural tourism in terms of sustainable development?

The research questions were aimed at verifying the hypotheses posed:

Hypothesis 1: The new economic and social reality encourages the search for innovative forms in tourism in rural areas.

Hypothesis 2: Innovative directions of tourism development in rural areas are consistent with the concept of sustainable development.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Preliminary analysis of media reports, official websites of the surveyed enterprises, reports and publications of non-governmental and governmental organizations dealing with the studied subject matter showed a multitude of variables and the lack of repetition of many of the phenomena studied. Therefore, it was decided to use a multiple case study, enriched with an interview in the form of a survey. The main reason for choosing the case study method was the need to examine the uniqueness of the phenomenon under study and its context and possible relationships with other variables, e.g. state or European Union policy related to sustainable development. A consciously chosen method has limitations resulting from the inability to generalize conclusions due to the size of the research sample,

which is only a small part of the studied phenomenon. However, since the aim of the study was to check whether innovative forms are introduced in rural tourism and how they can affect the sustainable development of the region, quantitative methods exclude the possibility of in-depth observation along with its contextual complexity. The empirical research carried out was qualitative research. Due to the purpose of the study, a qualitative case study method was adopted, supported by a questionnaire containing closed, dichotomous questions on the topic in question and open questions, allowing to deepen knowledge about the studied issue.

The selection of the sample for the study was unprobabilistic. The decision to select respondents was based on a subjective assessment of their value as sources of information about the phenomenon under study. An important criterion was the availability of the respondents. In the case of the study in question, it was important that the respondents lived or worked in the surveyed municipalities and had connections with the issue being studied, e.g. they worked in a municipal office or were members of a local community interested in the development of the region, e.g. a local association. In this sense, the choice was deliberate in nature, which, although not representative, makes it possible to formulate answers to the research questions.

Due to the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted by phone. The interview based on the survey form was aimed at broadening knowledge about innovative forms in rural tourism and their impact on the implementation of the sustainable development program.

The collected research material may contribute to the construction of conclusions concerning, for example, the effectiveness, also economic, of innovative forms of rural tourism. Due to the size of the sample, the study does not authorize the formulation of generalized conclusions.

The study was conducted in the municipalities of Brochów and Kampinos.

Gmina Brochów occupies the south-western part of the Masovian Voivodeship, about 50 km from Warsaw. Natural values are determined by the location in the buffer zone of the Kampinos National Park in the arms of the Vistula and Bzura. This creates unique conditions for observing nature and spending free time in an environment conducive to rest. Traditionally, the municipality has a typical agricultural character, with a predominance of arable land and pastures, which favors the breeding of cattle, pigs and the cultivation of grain and potatoes. The draft revitalization program of the Brochów commune for the years 2016-2023 draws attention to the need to create conditions for the development of alternative sources of employment, with poor economic efficiency of agricultural production, which can meet the living needs of residents. The historical values of the region, their cultural aspect and natural and landscape values form the basis for the development of tourism and recreation (Sochaczew district website, access 08/04/2022).

The Municipality of Kampinos is also located within the Kampinos National Park, in the central-western part of the Masovian Voivodeship. Agricultural activity prevails in its area, while small industry is primarily the production of construction and food products. In addition to the advantages of the Kampinos National Park, the municipality has tourist attractions in of Żelazowa Wola and Niepokalanów. Due to the proximity of Warsaw, weekend tourism is particularly popular, which creates opportunities for socio-economic development. Development plans define the directions of expansion of the municipality: "In order for the rapid but sustainable development of the Commune area, it is necessary to develop mechanisms and systems of actions that allow to overcome barriers and overcome natural difficulties, which also result from the fear of changes to be made. On the other hand, the same mechanisms must be aimed at the ability to use the natural and potential

capabilities of the municipality, such as: the proximity of Warsaw, the vicinity of the Kampinos National Park, the environment in its natural state” [11].

Selected municipalities are typical examples of rural areas in Mazovia undergoing social and economic transformation, which is why they can serve as a case study.

Two innovative forms of rural tourism were tested, one from the Brochów commune and one from the Kampinos commune. The first is Polo Club Żurawno, the second is the Prof. Jadwiga and Roman Kobendz Didactic and Museum Centre.

Polo Club Żurawno is an example of using natural, cultural and historical values to create an alternative to agricultural form of economic activity. It is located near the bend of the Vistula in the northern part of the Kampinos Forest. As part of the Kampinos National Park and its buffer zone and the Warsaw Protected Landscape Area, it is a protected landscape zone. There is no industry in the municipality, plants emitting pollutants into the atmosphere and emitting noise at a level exceeding the standards. The area is therefore environmentally attractive, which is a prerequisite for the development of tourism in rural areas. This allows you to create a tourist base without violating the natural, social and cultural values that determine economic development. Thus, it fits into the assumptions of the European theory of sustainable development, which assumes the multifunctional use of social capital resources and the introduction of new non-agricultural functions into the rural space, i.e. production, service and trade, causing greater economic diversity of rural areas, reducing the role of agriculture. This is conducive to the creation of new jobs, reducing unemployment, searching for new sources of income using rural productive resources. It can contribute to mitigating the effects of the crisis in rural areas, bringing many economic, social and ecological benefits [9]. Agritourism can be a response to the problems related to the social and economic restructuring of the countryside. However, the growing needs and expectations of customers force potential entrepreneurs to look for a formula that will meet their requirements. In the case of municipalities located in close proximity to Warsaw, there is a clear specificity of groups of potential customers. They expect not only rest in peace and quiet, while maintaining appropriate accommodation conditions, but also additional attractions enriching their free time. Polo Club Żurawno is an example of meeting these needs. Its advantage is its location near Warsaw. Therefore, people who want to take advantage of the offer do not have to spend additional time on moving and can spend it on a longer rest. It also creates the possibility of offering year-round services, not only long, but also short-term, such as weekend services. To meet this requirement, Polo Club Żurawno offers accommodation in an intimate building stylized as an Old Polish manor house. Polo Club Żurawno can be considered an innovative form of rural tourism. Its activity is based on the natural values of the region, cultivating family and, more broadly, national traditions. An interesting proposition and the owners create a unique atmosphere of a place where you can relax among the wonderful nature, meet interesting people, take part in a sports or philanthropic event.

The Prof. Jadwiga and Roman Kobendz Didactic and Museum Centre was established in the village of Granica in 1990 as one of the first in Poland. Next to the Centre there is the Puszczański Construction Open-Air Museum in Granica. The idea of creating an open-air museum dates back to the 70s of the last century. As a result of the efforts made, three farmsteads were created: Widymajera, Wiejcka and Połcia, currently adapted to conduct didactic classes, and being examples of forest construction. The Centre conducts extensive educational and didactic activities addressed to school children and youth. During the classes organized by the staff, students learn about the history of the forest and its functioning as an ecosystem. Older children can take part in workshops that are emotionally engaging, awaken ecological sensitivity, and shape attitudes of respect for nature. Using thematic didactic paths, it is possible to familiarize young people with the

history associated with the forest. One of the most interesting initiatives is a trip entitled “Kampinos Forest with history every step” or “Nature of the Kampinos Forest with history in the background”. The offer is complemented by thematic workshops, such as baking bread or making Kampinos palms organized by the “Kampinos Society” Association, or e.g. clay making, under the patronage of the “Four Landscapes” Association. The Center also offers workshops for teachers preparing to conduct interesting classes on topics related to the forest. The Center organizes cyclical events, such as the “Science Festival”, the International Festival of Nature Photography “Visions of Nature” and the Knowledge Competition “What squeaks in the grass”. Families and individual tourists visiting the forest can take part in one of the thematic walks offered, such as: “Kampinos history”, “On the trail of the moose king” or “Trail of four landscapes”. The comprehensive offer is complemented by the Avenue of the Third Millennium, which is an initiative of “Ecology beyond divisions”, which results in the solemn planting of trees by important people in the state.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The answer to the main research problem formulated in the form of a research question: Are there attempts at innovative solutions in rural tourism in the context of sustainable development? based on the results of the research, it allows us to conclude that in rural areas there are attempts at innovative solutions in tourism that are related to sustainable development in the region. Detailed research questions were also answered.

Detailed research question No. 1: What examples of innovative solutions can be found in rural tourism? Both the case study based on the analysis of secondary sources and the statements of respondents to the questions contained in the survey allow us to conclude that examples can be found application of innovative solutions in tourism in rural areas. Innovations are understood, according to the results of research, as forms not yet used, introducing new, beneficial solutions in the field of substantive content of the offer as well as its technical methods of implementation.

Detailed research question No. 2: How do they affect the increase in the attractiveness of the tourist offer? The statements of respondents indicate knowledge of the subject. They show that the contemporary recipient of the tourist offer regarding rural areas expects not only appropriate natural and landscape conditions, but also to provide interesting forms of spending free time. The examples of the tourist offer described in the case study confirm its compliance with the needs of customers. Due to the abundance of possibilities of ways of spending free time, also due to the relatively high availability, financial and formal, of the foreign offer, the requirements of the recipients of the service are increasing. This applies to both the standard of benefits and their attractiveness. Therefore, according to the results of research, innovative forms increase the chances of choosing a specific proposal, also multiple. According to respondents, the introduction of innovative forms is conducive to increasing the attractiveness of the region, as it inspires others to imitate. Innovative solutions attract people with a specific worldview, which includes respect for the surrounding nature and regional traditions.

Detailed research question No. 3: How do they fit into the concept of sustainable development? The answer to this question caused some difficulties for the respondents, due to insufficient knowledge about the essence of the concept of sustainable development. People familiar with the term sustainable development saw a correlation between innovation in rural tourism and the improvement of living conditions in the countryside without disturbing the ecological and social balance. They emphasized that the new forms are not only attractive to customers, but also conducive to improving the economic conditions of rural residents. Respondents drew attention to the fact that the differences

between the city and the countryside are being bridged due to the influx of people from different parts of Europe who have the right initiative. Thanks to this, it is possible to create innovative projects, also in the field of tourism. The investigated cases are located a short distance from Warsaw, which determines the type of customers using the tourist offer. A significant part of them appreciate the efforts to maintain balance in the environment in which it thrives. As the respondents emphasized, this is an important element determining the choice of a specific offer. The results of the research indicate a relatively high environmental awareness of the role of cultural heritage. The statement shows that it is important to cultivate it, not only because of its material achievements, but also because of the intangible achievements, which are conducive to building regional identity.

Specific research question No. 4: How can they contribute to enriching knowledge about possible innovations in rural tourism in terms of sustainable development? The results of the research indicate a link between innovative forms of rural tourism and enriching knowledge on this subject. Since most of the innovative projects are carried out taking into account the protection of nature, landscape and local traditions, this is facilitated by the summary of the results of research on detailed research problems allows for verification of the research hypotheses posed at the beginning. sustainable development of the places where they thrive. Although some respondents could not clearly define what sustainable development is, they were very good at defining the idea of the concept and how to implement it.

Summary of the results of research on detailed research problems allows for verification of the research hypotheses put forward at the beginning.

Hypothesis 1: The new economic and social reality prompts the search for innovative forms in tourism in rural areas – a hypothesis confirmed. In the light of the research results obtained, it can be assumed that tourism in rural areas is developing using innovative solutions. This is conducive to both improving the economic situation of residents and maintaining ecological and social balance.

Hypothesis 2: Innovative directions of tourism development in rural areas are consistent with the concept of sustainable development – a hypothesis confirmed. According to the results of the research, regardless of the level of formal knowledge on sustainable development, innovations in rural tourism are part of its essence and are in line with national, European and finally global plans, which are formulated by the government, the European Union and international organisations, e.g. the United Nations.

The case study and the respondents' statements are consistent in the most important aspects. They confirm that sustainable development is the subject of attention of entrepreneurs who are implementers of tourism development in rural areas. The specificity of rural areas requires an appropriate approach to natural resources. This affects the forms of tourism that follow this approach without disturbing the ecological and social balance. The conditions in which innovative forms of tourism are created are conducive to their development. These forms, in order to be attractive to customers, must fit into the expectations of clean air, water, food, etc., which is why their condition is a matter of concern for entrepreneurs. The results of the research also showed that it is important for the prosperity of the tourism business to maintain landscape balance.

An interesting thread that emerged during the research was the stimulating role of innovation in rural tourism. It turned out that it inspires other entrepreneurs and has a positive effect on improving the economic conditions of the surrounding population. The development of a tourism enterprise increases the possibility of employment. Additionally stimulates economic development, because it promotes the creation of new ventures supporting existing ones.

The results of the research entitle to the conclusion that innovative directions of tourism development in rural areas are related to the principles of sustainable development and are a prerequisite for local economic and social development.

CONCLUSIONS

The research allowed to obtain answers to the research problems posed and to try to formulate conclusions that can contribute to the enrichment of knowledge, indicate the directions of further research and provide tips that may have practical application. This may be important due to the relatively little scientific research on innovative directions of tourism development in rural areas in the context of sustainable development. A summary of literature research supported by empirical research may be a contribution to the development of knowledge in this area.

The considerations made it possible to formulate the following implications for economic practice:

- A real prerequisite for achieving economic success may be the introduction of innovative forms in the tourist offer in the countryside
- Implementation of a business venture that is part of the sustainable development program is consistent with the preferences of a relatively large number of potential customers
- Drawing inspiration from existing tourism ventures in rural areas can help optimize the financial result
- Entrepreneurs must take into account competitive offers and introduce innovative forms of spending free time
- Sustainability is an idea permanently embedded in rural development plans and cannot be underestimated

Due to the limitations resulting from the adopted research methodology, it was not possible to obtain comprehensive answers to all the problems posed. Two entities were subjected to the study, so their results may indicate the occurrence of certain phenomena, but it is not possible to generalize the conclusions drawn from them. The limitation of the use of the case study method is the low representativeness of the results obtained and the relativity of opinions. The barrier to exploring more cases was the high time-consuming and cost of conducting research. On the other hand, this method allowed for preliminary verification of the hypotheses formulated for the purposes of the work.

The qualitative research was also limited by the selection of the sample based on the criterion of availability, which results in a relatively low representativeness of the studied population. In addition, the duration of the interviews was limited, sometimes insufficient to exhaust the examined issue. The material obtained from the research indicates the breadth of the issue at hand, and therefore requires further exploration. The imperfection of the qualitative method of the studied phenomena was compensated by the research technique (case study, survey), which allowed to deepen the knowledge about the studied phenomena.

Therefore, an indication for further directions of research may be to explore examples of innovative directions of development in tourism in rural areas in a sustainable context. In addition to qualitative research, it is worth undertaking quantitative research that will allow you to draw more generalized conclusions. Comparative analyses, also based on cases outside Poland, can contribute to the formulation of conclusions that will be practical guidelines.

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