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## AGRITOURISM AS A FORM OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

**Abstract.** Sustainable development is the key component of policies or strategies established at international, domestic, local and industrial levels. The tourism industry has decided to meet the challenge of sustainable development and established sustainable tourism which may take the form of agritourism. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to describe the essence of agritourism as a form of sustainable tourism in the countryside. The main objective is reflected in the structure of this paper. It describes the essence of sustainable tourism aimed at adjusting tourism to the needs and resources of naturally valuable areas, in order to meet the needs of local communities as well as the needs of tourists and the tourism industry. Furthermore, the functioning of sustainable tourism in the countryside is described as such areas are naturally predestined to develop according to the principles and objectives of sustainable development. It also refers to their tourist and the recreation functions. In addition, agritourism is described as a form of sustainable development because its main principle eliminates intensive tourist traffic and additionally does not exert any excessive pressure on the natural and cultural environment.

**Keywords:** agritourism, sustainable development, sustainable tourism

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most thriving sectors of the economy, its share in GDP is at 5–6% (Goodwin and Chaudhary, 2017). It affects many aspects of human life: economic, social and environmental, and may either harm them or contribute to their development. As in the other social and economic spheres, it is crucial that tourism complies with sustainable development principles that are based on the equal existence of three pillars: economic, social and environmental, and where particular attention is paid to the fact that meeting the basic needs of certain communities or citizens of both present and future generations is guaranteed.

Currently, it is crucial to make tourism more sustainable taking into account the international and domestic requirements. When the tourism industry started to follow the principles of sustainable development, it resulted in establishing the sustainable tourism concept. Sustainable tourism may occur in a number of forms. Agritourism is one of them and may be an example of sustainable development measures adopted in rural areas.

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to describe the essence of agritourism as a form of sustainable tourism in the countryside. This paper is conceptual in its nature and is based on the relevant literature as well as on other documents, reports and statistical data.

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## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The concept of sustainable tourism was established when the tourism sector began to implement the principles of sustainable development. It started in 1995 at the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism held on the island of Lanzarote (Spain) when the Charter for Suitable Tourism was adopted by the World Tourism Organization, United Nations Environment Program, UNECSO and the European Commission. Article 1 stipulates that tourism development shall be based on the criteria of sustainability which means that it must be economically bearable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local communities. All the parties involved in tourism have to respect each other and cooperate closely in order to meet the above requirements, which means that it is important that local, regional, domestic and international authorities and institutions cooperate as well (Dudek and Kowalczyk, 2003).

The definitions and principles of sustainable tourism were adopted one year later and were included in the “Agenda 21 for the Travel & Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development” prepared by the World Tourism Organization and the Earth Council.

It was agreed upon that any tourist activity should be within the sustainable development framework and should contribute to the economic, social and environmental development. Sardanou et al. (2016) remind that sustainable tourism development must focus on the four areas of economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability. Therefore, such activities would be aimed at (Panfiluk, 2012):

- complete integration with the natural, cultural and social environment,
- cooperation at all the necessary levels: local, national and international, both vertically and horizontally,
- improving the quality of life of local communities,
- enhancing the cultural experience in each tourist destination,
- restoring the balance in the environment through technical cooperation and financial assistance,
- strengthening and increasing the promotion of environmentally friendly tourism management,
- implementing measures to minimize the adverse effects of transport on the environment,
- implementing measures to minimize resource consumption by the tourism industry.

“Sustainable tourism” is a term widely used in the literature and yet there is no generally accepted definition of it (Breakey and Breakey, 2015, p. 87; Kowalczyk, 2010a). An abundant number and variety of its definitions result in a number of interpretations. Therefore, many views exist on sustainable tourism, and they are often contradicting (cf.: Niezgodna, 2006).

An additional difficulty in interpreting the term is making sustainable tourism equal to ecotourism, alternative tourism, responsible tourism, environmentally friendly tourism or green tourism which is not accepted by all the authors. More often, the authors agree that sustainable tourism is completely opposite to mass tourism, but in the case concerned different opinions are also expressed (Niezgodna, 2006). For the purpose of meeting the paper’s objective, the definition of sustainable tourism formulated by the European Council (Rada Europy Komitet Ministrów, 1995) will be used, namely: sustainable tourism is any form of tourist development or activity which respects the environment, ensures long-term conservation of natural and cultural resources, and is socially and economically acceptable and equitable.

The characteristics of sustainable tourism are as follows (Kowalczyk, 2010b following Inskeep, 1991): the necessity to take natural and cultural aspects into account; involvement of host communities; including the cost and profit analysis (not only the current situation but the future consequences), paying particular attention to equal distribution of costs and profits between tourists and host communities, striving to protect the nature for future generations, integrating tourism with other economy sectors; assessing the environmental and cultural impact of tourism; and taking any relevant steps to make such impact positive.

Governance for sustainable tourism must focus on ethics, justice and its functioning within the global and local community (Dangi and Jamal, 2016). This requires challenging societal values of growth and consumerism and the current industry’s pro-economic growth dogma (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009).

Hence, sustainable tourism is based on striving to reach the balance between the needs of tourists, the natural environment and local communities. Sustainable tourist activity, understood as above, should be beneficial to local communities by strengthening the local economy, employing local workforce, using local materials and agricultural produce as well as traditional skills (Cottrell et al., 2013). Thus, implementing

sustainable development principles in tourism at the local level means economic development of municipalities in an ecological manner and establishing the instruments for making economic functions more ecological (Nitkiewicz-Jankowska and Szromek, 2010).

In practice, sustainable tourism may be reflected by certain behaviors of tourist providers e.g. saving natural resources, waste segregation, reducing the amount of exhaust gases in transport, staff training, using ecological office supplies or using eco-friendly heating systems, whereas tourists should use mass transport, save natural resources, and limit and segregate waste (Dembińska-Cyran, 2005).

### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The transformation in Poland at the beginning of the 1990s also took place in rural areas and resulted in altering their function. More non-agricultural functions emerged (industry and services, including tourism and recreation); however, local natural resources continued to be used. It was already in the 1980s that the function of tourism and recreation in the country was considered as “the one for the future” or the “dynamically developing one” (Drzewiecki, 1985).

At present, the change in the nature of rural areas has been visible. Local production has nothing to do with food processing. More and more often, the countryside plays the residential role for people working in the city but living in the country because it is quieter there and residing is simply cheaper. Also, the countryside has tourism and recreation functions. In 2016, rural areas represented 93.1% of the total Polish territory and were inhabited by 39.2% of Poles.

Rural areas are naturally predestined to develop on the basis of sustainable development principles; this is also true for their tourist and recreation role.

The tourist and recreation role in the countryside results from its tourist attractiveness (places of interest to tourists), an uncontaminated natural environment, measures taken to protect the natural environment as well as the ways of access. These are factors important to tourists. The interest of investors has to be taken into account as well as the condition of the technical and service infrastructure (Long and Thanh-Lam, 2018). Human relationships and the local financial situation are the determinants of tourist attractiveness (Gołembski, 1999).

Sustainable tourism may develop successfully in rural areas. It should provide extensive opportunities for changes in the aspects of living in the countryside (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Opportunities for changes in the aspects of living in the countryside caused by the development of sustainable tourism

Aspect	Objective of sustainable tourism
1	2
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>making the economy more diverse rather than replacing agriculture with tourism,</li> <li>result: restricting the dependence on a single type of activity and avoiding destroying tourist values by transforming the countryside into typical holiday destinations</li> </ul>
Environmental and cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>combining tourism with the values of rural areas, namely peace and quietness, opportunity to relax in the fresh air, participating in farm life and local culture,</li> <li>on the one hand, tourism is an economic development tool in a region; on the other hand, it contributes to the region's environmental and cultural protection (major tourism values in the countryside)</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing sustainable tourism,</li> <li>local community benefits from sustainable tourism (it is their income); rural tourism preserves the specific nature of rural areas</li> </ul>
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sustainable tourism and its scale should be adjusted to the local specificities,</li> <li>usually, agritourism is a small-scale business; this allows to remove (or limit) the negative effects of tourism development</li> </ul>

**Table 1 – cont.**

1	2
Tourism management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sustainable tourism should encourage the local community to become active and business-oriented, and should enable learning new skills</li> </ul>
Tourist behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tourists should be aware of any risks they may cause and should behave so as not to have any negative impact on regional environment or culture,</li> <li>• tourists should be aware of their needs, prepared for a trip, focused on an active stay and contact with the local community</li> </ul>

Source: Majewski and Lane, 2003.

Sustainable tourism takes a number of forms, such as (Sanagustin-Fons et al., 2018) rural tourism, including all the tourist activities performed in the country; agritourism, i.e. providing tourists with services on the farm; eco-agritourism, providing tourists with services on a farm where organic food is produced; ecotourism i.e. tourism in a naturally valuable area. The above breakdown is not “fixed” because certain types of tourism overlap each other. This is especially true for agritourism which may also take place in naturally valuable areas and sometimes is not related to any actual farm (many facilities in the country advertise themselves as agricultural ones although they have never run any agricultural activity). Rural tourism constitutes a valuable tool for the sustainable development of many rural areas (Scaglione and Mendola, 2017).

### **AGRITOURISM AS A FORM OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

Agritourism is a tourism form aligned with the concepts of sustainable tourism and sustainable development because, according to its underlying principles, it eliminates intensive tourist traffic and additionally does not exert any excessive pressure on the natural and cultural environment. It includes providing tourists with a service by a family living in a real-life farm (Majewski and Lane, 2003); taking part in the family life on a farm is the most important attraction. Additionally, such agritourism activity is based on environmental and cultural values of a given area.

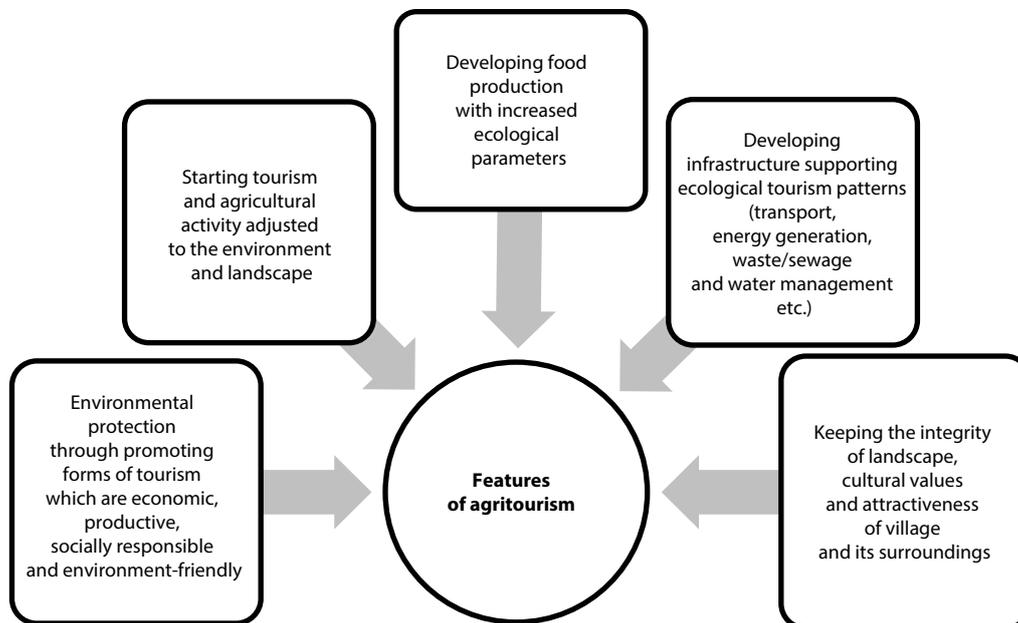
Despite the relevance of agritourism around the world, an agreed upon definition of this phenomenon does not exist in international tourism research. There are many definitions of agritourism. Professionals and researchers have many perspectives in defining

agritourism as follows: agritourism means “farming-related activities carried out on a working farm or other agricultural settings for entertainment or education purposes” (Arroyo et al., 2013); agritourism is “any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors” (Barbieri and Mshenga, 2008). Agritourism is practiced in rural areas and involves rural local people and all activities connected with festivals, craft, museums, cultural events, farm events and farm products (Roberts and Hall, 2001). Agritourism activities are initially provided by farmers and a group of local farm producers in a rural area (Ohe and Ciani, 2014).

The main distinguishing feature is the fact that agritourism providers reside permanently in the countryside, their services are an additional activity and they receive remuneration for providing such services (Łazarek and Łazarek, 2002). At the same time, agritourism allows to protect the environmental and cultural heritage and forces people to improve and develop the infrastructure. This is why there are no significant changes in the natural environment and in the way in which local communities operate in the area visited by tourists, which allows to ascribe certain features to agritourism (aimed mainly at the environmental protection) (Fig. 1).

An increased interest in agritourism has been observed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The literature provides a description of a few groups of factors affecting its development, namely (cf. Lijewski et al., 1998):

- landscape/nature: surface water (e.g. lakes, rivers), land (forests, meadows and grazing land, wasteland, hills etc.); environmental protection (e.g. national parks); level of air/water/soil pollution, pollution zones etc.



**Fig. 1.** Features of agritourism  
 Source: Niedziółka and Kowalska, 2006.

- social and cultural: density of the rural population, average size of a village, cultural attractions, architectural attractions, local and regional leaders etc.,
- economic: intensity of using the countryside (population density); income level of the rural population; share of population living on non-agricultural activities, level of urbanization, living conditions, infrastructure and services etc.,
- organizational and legal: activity coordination among municipalities, districts and voivodeships; operation of associates, organization and legal provisions of law.

Due to its nature (e.g. low concentration of agritourism farms, small number of tourists visiting such farms), agritourism does not have any negative impact on the local environment or culture. It is an environmentally friendly form of tourism and one of the methods for sustainable development of naturally valuable areas. It is an opportunity to develop areas which, though naturally attractive, do not offer such standard tourist attractions as sea, lake or mountains. Agritourism may support rural transformation through an alternative use of farms and by providing farmers with an opportunity to earn extra

incomes (Sumantra et al., 2017). Moreover, agritourism development may contribute to making such areas more active economically without the need to make considerable investments (Kiryłuk, 2005; cf. Tew and Barbieri, 2012).

The number of agritourist farms and available accommodation has been increased over the past years. Because the studies on tourism have to be adjusted to European Union legislation, the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) expanded the scope of relevant research to include individual accommodation providers offering 10 or more beds. Therefore, from 2012 onwards, the data provided by GUS also includes information on guest rooms and agritourism accommodation (GUS, 2017). This is why Table 2 includes data starting from 2012.

The following voivodeships are the leaders of agritourism accommodation: Małopolskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Pomorskie, whereas Opolskie, Lubuskie and Łódzkie voivodeships have the smallest number of agritourist accommodation providers.

**Table 2.** Distribution of agritourism farms in Polish voivodeships

Voivodeships	2012		2014		2016	
	n.a.a.	n.b.	n.a.a.	n.b.	n.a.a.	n.b.
Dolnośląskie	62	1,036	64	1,110	71	1,247
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	13	245	19	580	24	477
Lubelskie	21	304	28	1,544	33	528
Lubuskie	22	392	22	293	26	439
Łódzkie	21	295	26	222	26	473
Małopolskie	67	1,111	100	1,520	89	1,466
Mazowieckie	39	609	40	824	44	764
Opolskie	5	70	16	453	16	216
Podkarpackie	56	842	72	2,028	66	1,120
Podlaskie	54	722	56	204	51	757
Pomorskie	87	1,613	89	1,183	85	1,481
Śląskie	37	709	42	1,031	42	798
Świętokrzyskie	28	377	36	711	38	539
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	72	1,082	89	1,656	88	1,366
Wielkopolskie	64	1,060	71	1,718	68	1,248
Zachodniopomorskie	35	657	34	1,573	35	607
Total	683	11,124	804	12,810	802	13,526

n.a.a. – number of agritourism accommodation providers, n.b. – number of beds  
 Source: own compilation based on data provided by GUS (2013, 2015, 2017).

## RURAL TOURISM: AGRITOURISM IN ZACHODNIOPOMORSKIE VOIVODESHIP

The level of agritourism development in the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship is moderate, though it has access to the Baltic Sea, lakes and naturally valuable areas. There are active agritourism associations in the voivodeship, namely the Koszalińskie Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne “KOSA”, Stowarzyszenie Czaplneckie Gospodarstwa Agroturystyczne “CzaGA”, Barwickie Gospodarstwa Agroturystyczne, Szczecińskie Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne, Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne “Wiatrak”, Nowogardzkie Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne „Strzecha”, Drawieńskie Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne, and Wolińskie Stowarzyszenie Agroturystyczne. The crucial role in rural tourism, including agritourism, is played by Wsie Turystyczne Pomorza Zachodniego (Tourist Villages of West Pomerania). Therefore, in 2010, having

noticed the activity of rural communities and their focus on developing rural tourism services and agritourism products, the Marshal’s Office of the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship, together with the West Pomerania Regional Tourist Organization, initiated the annual certifying competition called “West Pomerania Tourist Village.” Its main objective is to enhance the image of rural tourism in the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship by finding the most interesting tourist villages.

The 2013 tourism audit of the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship addressed the strengths and weaknesses of rural tourism as well as the opportunities and risks involved in its development. Other agritourism aspects were also covered (Audyt turystyczny..., 2013) (Table 3).

A general conclusion may be drawn based on the example of Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship: rural tourism, including agritourism, mainly suffers from the lack of well-promoted, comprehensive information

**Table 3.** SWOT analysis for the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• favorable and diverse natural conditions, numerous lakes, ponds, forests and natural landscape parks etc.</li> <li>• cultural heritage: interesting architectural monuments, a number of cultural attractions in the region,</li> <li>• folk art in municipalities,</li> <li>• active farms (mostly using near-organic methods) and people performing traditional jobs,</li> <li>• customized services offered (baking bread, pig roasting, making own butter or cheese),</li> <li>• numerous historical places of interest and tourist routes linked to certain European routes,</li> <li>• good cooperation between active agritourist farms (well-organized association)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• underdeveloped technical infrastructure in some municipalities, especially as regards quality of drinking water and sewage treatment plants,</li> <li>• unsatisfactory sanitary condition of some farms and entire villages,</li> <li>• not enough compartmentalized agritourism farms in the province,</li> <li>• poor additional tourist offer (farms often offer accommodation and full board only),</li> <li>• the rural population's insufficient awareness of available funds and alternative ways of earning money (including agritourism activity) is a barrier to the development of rural tourism services,</li> <li>• lack of any distinctive features in the regional agritourism offer,</li> <li>• scarce offers targeted at certain types of tourists, e.g. weekend tourists, families with children or the elderly,</li> <li>• lack of a coherent system for the promotion and distribution of offerings in the voivodeship (including participation and fairs and similar events),</li> <li>• lack of a comprehensive catalog of agritourism services provided in the voivodeship</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU accession: increased amounts and accessibility of rural development funding,</li> <li>• growing demand from tourists for visiting a clean and "healthy" environment,</li> <li>• increasing interest in alternative tourism, including cultural tourism, active tourism and agritourism,</li> <li>• increased interest of foreign tourists in agri- and ecotourism,</li> <li>• increasing number of weekend trips,</li> <li>• healthy/organic food becomes trendy,</li> <li>• rural population becomes increasingly aware of the tourists' needs and of how to use the existing facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• growing impoverishment of the Polish countryside,</li> <li>• delayed and unstable EU funding,</li> <li>• intergenerational transmission of poverty, especially in the former state farms; social exclusion may become more pronounced; the rural population may become more passive,</li> <li>• the rural municipalities' limited financial potential is a barrier to necessary public investments (e.g. sewage treatment plants, local roads etc.),</li> <li>• relatively low profits from agritourism discourage from investing in upgrading the facilities in order to meet the growing needs of tourists</li> </ul>

Source: own compilation based on: *Audyty turystyczny...*, 2013.

campaigns targeted at a large tourist audience. Additionally, catering issues need to be resolved as well. Though the Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship boasts significant natural values, it is unable to leverage them.

It should be noted that small facilities with up to 9 beds represent an important share in the structure of accommodation providers (cf. Uglis and Jęczynek, 2015). In 2016, the number of accommodation facilities with up to 9 beds amounted to 7512 (7876 in 2014), including 3276 in agritourism lodgings (3538 in 2014). Small facilities offered a total of 58,300 beds (61,600 in 2014), while agritourism lodgings offered 24,900 beds (26,000 in 2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

The common framework for sustainable development and tourism operates in parallel in the economic, social

and environmental dimension. It will result in developing tourism based on the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable tourism was established when the tourist industry started to implement the principles of sustainable development. Agritourism, as a form of tourism, is particularly important due to the high share of rural areas in the total territory of Poland. The promotion of agritourism makes tourism development an environmentally friendly process which is impacted by, and provides benefits to, the rural population. Hence, agritourism contributes both to the development of sustainable tourism and to implementing the concept of sustainable rural development.

An increase in the number of agritourism farms and accommodation facilities has been observed in Poland in this century. The leaders of agritourism accommodation are the following voivodeships: Małopolskie,

Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Pomorskie, whereas Opolskie, Lubuskie, and Łódzkie voivodeships have the smallest number of agritourism accommodation facilities.

The development of agritourism should be taken care of as it makes the economically neglected rural areas thrive through increasing entrepreneurship and boosting the activity of the rural population. Also, it is a way to improve the physical appearance of farms and surrounding facilities, to develop the local infrastructure and to preserve local culture. It is an opportunity to develop areas which, though naturally attractive, do not offer such standard tourist attractions as sea, lake or mountains.

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## AGROTURYSTYKA JAKO FORMA ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ TURYSTYKI

**Abstrakt.** Zrównoważony rozwój stanowi podstawowy element uwzględniany przy formułowaniu polityk i strategii, tak w wymiarze międzynarodowym, krajowym, lokalnym, jak i branżowym. Odpowiedzią turystyki na wyzwania związane z koncepcją zrównoważonego rozwoju jest rozwój turystyki zrównoważonej, w tym jednej z form – agroturystyki. Wobec powyższego za cel artykułu przyjęto ukazanie istoty agroturystyki jako jednej z form turystyki zrównoważonej na obszarach wiejskich. Jego realizacji podporządkowano poszczególne części artykułu. Przybliżono istotę turystyki zrównoważonej, wskazując, że ma ona być zgodna z potrzebami i zasobami naturalnymi obszarów przyrodniczo cennych, potrzebami miejscowej ludności, a także z potrzebami turystów i sektora turystycznego. Następnie przedstawiono funkcjonowanie turystyki zrównoważonej na obszarach wiejskich, gdyż są one naturalnie predestynowane do tego, aby rozwijały się zgodnie z założeniami i zasadami zrównoważonego rozwoju – dotyczy to także pełnionej przez nie funkcji turystyczno-rekreacyjnej. Następnie ukazano agroturystykę jest formę turystyki zrównoważonej. Z założenia wyklucza ona intensywny ruch turystyczny, a poza tym nie powoduje nadmiernej presji na środowisko przyrodnicze i kulturowe.

**Słowa kluczowe:** agroturystyka, zrównoważony rozwój, turystyka zrównoważona