



*Jan Zawadka*⁴⁰

AGRITOURISM IN PERSPECTIVE OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Abstract: The paper presents the reflections on the agritourist product in the context of the current, more and more popular concept of the experience economy. In the first part the concept and essence of agritourism was discussed and the idea of the economy based on experience was characterized. In the following the feelings, impressions and experiences accompanying the tourist when using the different components of the agritourist product and spending holiday in the rural environment were presented.

Key words: the experience economy, agritourism, feelings, experiences, sensations, impressions.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is currently regarded as one of the most important experience markets and is analyzed as an area of consumption of sensations more and more often [Marciszewska 2010]. As was noted by A. Stasiak [2013], travels from the earliest times were accompanied by the element of learning about the unknown, experiencing exciting adventures or gaining new experiences. In this respect tourism can be seen as a perfect exemplification of the experience economy, a specific 'holiday experiences industry'. Such approach is also reflected in the tourist product, which is treated, inter alia, as a whole impression experienced by the tourist. Today's tourists are not satisfied with traditionally understood relaxation, combined with sightseeing. They want to take part in something unusual and unique and be permanently surprised, as the purpose of the trip is to experience exceptional holiday adventure. Travelers expect to stay in a special place that will provide them with authentic, vibrant emotions, engage all their senses, guarantee original personal experiences and unique memories. Therefore it can be said that the source of impressions and sensations is the authenticity of the tourist experience, as well as its original character. As J. Heath and A. Potter [2010] add, 'tourists want to experience authenticity - they look for deep, valuable and unique experiences'. Priority in this case is lack of commodification: authentic items are hand-made, with natural materials and have a traditional (non-commercial) purpose.

One of the forms of tourism that provides many different experiences is agritourism, which has been developing in Poland since the early 1990s. This type of rural tourism, compatible with an idea of alternative tourism and built up on the basis of functioning farms, is also considered relatively non-commercial and characterized by considerable authenticity and naturalness, what brings great value for the conscious traveler. The purpose of this study is therefore to specify and characterize the unique impressions and original experiences of staying in an agritourist farm.

THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF AGRITOURISM

The concept of agritourism in Polish and foreign literature appeared in the late 20th century. It was created from a combination of two words *agro* and *tourism*. The prefix '*agro*' originates from the Greek term '*agros*', meaning cultivating land and '*agronomos*', referring to the management of agricultural property [M. Sznajder, L. Przezbórska 2006].

In everyday life, and sometimes even in the literature, agritourism is often associated with rural tourism. Despite the fact that these concepts are strongly intertwined, it should be emphasized that they are not synonymous, as rural tourism is a much broader idea. A.P. Wiatrak [1996] defines it as a whole of the tourist economy taking place in the countryside. It is equally widely understood also by M. Dębniwska and M. Tkaczuk [1997], who argue that rural tourism is such one, which takes place in the countryside, is adapted to the local conditions and rationally uses local natural values,

⁴⁰ *Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Nowoursynowska 166 St., 02-787 Warsaw, jan_zawadka@sggw.pl.*



as well as J. Sikora [1999], for whom rural tourism covers all the tourist activities organized in the countryside. The main purpose of rural tourism is to oppose the attractions and tourist conditions of the countryside against urban environment. Slightly differently rural tourism is defined by J. Majewski [1994], describing it as an any form of tourism taking place in the rural environment and using its rural values (nature, culture, landscape, buildings, etc.), which are the main attraction there. Moreover, the accommodations in this case are small pensions, hostels, private cottages, guest rooms or small campsites [Majewski 2000]. According to M. Drzewiecki [1995] rural tourism is a form of recreation that takes place in the area of a *real* village and includes many types of recreational activities. As it can be seen, there is no one, generally accepted definition of rural tourism. However, the authors cited above, considered to be an experts in this area, describe it similarly and fairly broadly. Yet, one concept of rural tourism covers all types of tourism in rural areas, while the other emphasizes the values of rusticity.

Agritourism in its assumptions is a form of rural tourism closely related to agriculture and a functioning farm, as was emphasized by J. Majewski [1994], who argues that plant production and animal breeding are one of the attractions for visitors staying at the farm. Also A.P. Wiatrak [1996] notes that this type of tourism involves arranging tourists' stay by the owner and his family in their farm, as well as M. Drzewiecki [1995], who emphasizes the importance of a farm, defining agritourism as a form of leisure in rural areas of an agricultural nature, based on accommodation and leisure activities related to the farm or its equivalent⁴¹, and its surroundings (natural, productive, service). Also J. Sikora [1999] differentiates the concept of rural tourism and agritourism, which involves staying on the farm, as well as various forms of spending free time and tourist services provided within it. M. Sznajder and L. Przezbórska [2006] note that agritourism *de facto* is a term introduced by representatives of supply side, representing the interests of agricultural farms providing tourist services. This has resulted in a significant extension of the concept to all activities related to the service not only for tourists, but also holidaymakers. Hence, the term *agritourism* is often understood differently by tourists and agritourist service providers. For the first the agritourism means the tourist activity of a man who intends to learn about agricultural production and/or rest in a rural and agricultural environment, while the second include into the term *agritourism* various forms of accommodation, gastronomy, recreation, leisure, sports or even treatment and rehabilitation.

It is also worth noting that the essence of agritourism can be seen in several meanings:

- ✓ as a form of rural and countryside development towards a multifunctional model, especially the development of the reception function;
- ✓ as a non-agricultural activity, concentrated on hosting guests in a farmer's household, bringing income and giving jobs to the host and the whole sphere of services and production in the countryside;
- ✓ as a certain way of travel and spending free time in a true village environment; its purpose is to provide attractive leisure, improve health, especially mental and physical fitness, explore the culture of the region, life and work in the countryside, meet new people [Mikuta, Żelazna 2004].

The presented agritourism definitions obviously do not cover all of terms that can be found in the rich literature of the subject. On the basis of these, however, list of several important features, characteristic for a tourist destination, which should be fulfilled by this kind of tourism, may be mentioned - and these will be:

- ✓ limit to agricultural areas, instead of rural ones in an administrative sense only;

⁴¹ Equivalent activities are understood as, inter alia, gardening, orchard activities, beekeeping, fish farming, production of seeds, tree nursery, production of ornamental plants, cultivating mushrooms, breeding and production of animals' seed material, birds and utility insects farming.



- ✓ strong connection with the farm, understood as a use of residential and/or farm buildings to provide the accommodation services;
- ✓ enabling active leisure in the natural environment of the farm, including plant and/or animal production.

Therefore to sum up considerations about the concept of agritourism, the author defines it as a form of rural tourism closely related to a functioning farm, while the agritourism farm is a farm where tourism is conducted next to the agricultural activities.

ECONOMY BASED ON EXPERIENCE

Contemporary economy is an extremely complex, complicated and dynamic domain. The phenomena that occur in it are more and more often coming out of frames of the theories, which so far were successfully used to characterize and explain conventional mechanisms. These types of trends certainly include consumerism, which essence should be seen in the ritualization of the consumption process - apart from utilitarian value, goods and services become carriers of experiences and the consumer is their active seeker. Also new type of consumer has appeared, referred to as a prosumer, who actively and consciously participates in the design and manufacture of the products and services that he will use, which in turn leads to a widespread customization of the offer [Dziewanowska, Kacprzak-Choińska 2012], what means its adapting to the needs of the user.

Another, characteristic for today's economy trend is the commodification of the offer, which source should be seen in intense competition observed at the level of particular types of goods and services, as well as brands. The effect of this process is the improve of the quality of the offered products, as well as aligning their standards, what results in almost total lack of ability to distinguish a particular offer on the market and forces manufacturers to compete primarily by price policy. An example could be the 'no limit' offer, proposed by various mobile operators, which gives buyers the ability to send unlimited text messages and allow long-lasting calls. The offer of particular service providers is similar one to another, and the only criterion of their choice is often just price.

Recognizing these trends, B.J. Pine and J.H. Gilmore [1999] in the late 1990s have published a book titled *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage*. They prove that in the course of history the market is constantly evolving and the reasons of that can be found, among other things, in technological progress, competition (as a determinant of innovation) and the continuous economic and social development of societies, reflecting the increase of their wealth. The essence of Pine and Gilmore's approach is that the dominant on market object of exchange is constantly evolving. On this basis, they distinguish four main types of markets, referring historically to the different stages of the world economy's development.

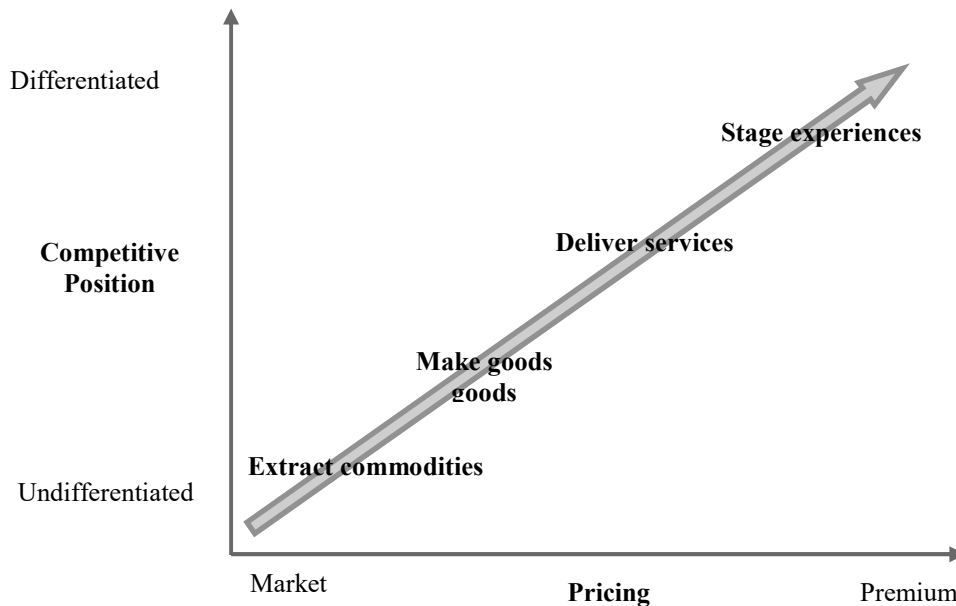
Initially, the essence of the economy was mainly the exchange of raw materials and simple agricultural products. Subsequently, the goods that was produced in workshops and factories as a result of the processing of raw materials became objects of exchange, and their production was characterized by large scale and repeatability. The next stage in the evolution of the economy was related to services that became highly personalized (customized) at the end of this period, by their significant individualization and adaptation to the needs of individual buyers. Now, as Pine and Gilmore point out, the economy is based on the experiences and impressions of consumers. Goods and services have already become insufficient product for buyers, what is a result of their market large availability, similarity and indistinguishability. Producers, who want to become more competitive, must enrich the goods and services they sell with original and unique experiences and feelings⁴². Experiences cannot, however, function independently, but can be combined with

⁴² An interesting work about transforming ordinary products into extraordinary experiences is the book of D. LaSalle and T.A. Britton: *Priceless. Turning ordinary products into extraordinary experience*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston 2003.



traditional goods and services, becoming their most important part and the main cause of customers' satisfaction. Such enriched products gain the highest value for the purchasers, making it possible to realize the greatest profits for entrepreneurs [Stasiak 2015].

Diagram 1. Progress of economic value in the perspective of an economy based on experience



Source: B.J. Pine, J.H. Gilmore (1998), *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. *Harvard Business Review*, July, p. 98

As Pine and Gilmore argue, experience is not an amorphous invention - it is as real as a service or good, thus another item of exchange in developing economy, which evolution in this context is presented in the table 1:

Table 1. Evolution of economic value in particular types of economy

Economic Offering	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences
Economy	Agrarian	Industrial	Service	Experience
Economic Function	Extract	Make	Deliver	Stage
Nature of Offering	Fungible	Tangible	Intangible	Memorable
Key Attribute	Natural	Standardized	Customized	Personal
Method of Supply	Stored in bulk	Inventoried after production	Delivered on demand	Revealed over a duration
Seller	Trader	Manufacturer	Provider	Stager
Buyer	Market	User	Client	Guest
Factors of Demand	Characteristics	Features	Benefits	Sensations

Source: B.J. Pine, J.H. Gilmore (1998), *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. *Harvard Business Review*, July, p. 98.

Many companies in today's service-based economy add extra experiences and emotions to their traditional offerings, what should increase dynamics of sales. However, to make this possible product designers must consciously plan and integrate into their goods experiences that will be



captivating to the buyer. Such requirement seems to be vital for all companies that want to remain a part of the economy evolving towards full commodity by raising their offer to the next level of economic value. The authors of this conception compare the contemporary market to theater. Experiences occur when companies consciously use their services as a scene (with goods as props) to intrigue buyers and provide them an unforgettable event. Recipients of experiences and impressions - 'guests' - especially appreciate what the company reveals to them during the 'show'. It is important here to perceive experiences as personal products, as they exist only in the mind of the individual who engages in the emotional, intellectual and even spiritual way. Due to the fact that the impressions are the result of the interaction between the presented event and the state of mind of the individual, they will be personal and distinct from those experienced by other participants [Pine, Gilmore 1999]. The role and significance of experience in the modern economy is emphasized by many researchers. Z. Bauman [2000] stresses that consumer is not driven by the desire to buy and possess, nor he is interested in the accumulation of goods in the tangible, material sense. His priority is to excite new, previously unknown experiences. Consumers are first of all collectors of impressions, they collect things only secondary, as derived from experiences. K. Krzysztofek [2004] adds that competing in the sphere of intense sensations brings the greatest profit. However, in such situation it is important to convince the recipient that collecting those sensations is necessary to achieve a high status and fullness of life.

EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS IN AGRITOURISM

The uniqueness and originality of the experiences and feelings available for tourists during farm holiday is a result of agritourism specificity. Such form of rural tourism, being a part of alternative tourism, offers visitors numerous unique and authentic attractions, unavailable outside the countryside.

Potential experiences, sensations and impressions resulting from staying in a rural farmhouse were analyzed based on the structure of the agritouristic product. It consists of some distinctive elements and derived sensations.

One of the basic parts of a tourist product (including agritourism) is accommodation. In the case of mass tourism, the accommodation services are very similar to each other and primarily their quality is determined by the price, reflecting their standard⁴³. However, when considering an agritourism farm, such question does not look similar. Also in this case the standard of the facility will undoubtedly be very important, but a key role here will play the interior design. Its idea and equipment, according to the tradition and folklore of the visited region, will give inside an unique character and a kind of cultural authenticity. Tourist staying in such room will have the feeling of specificity and distinctiveness of the area he visits, and the accommodation there will undoubtedly be more satisfying and exciting than staying in a non-genuine hotel room. Another, unattainable nowhere else than in rural areas, experience will be the sound of breeding birds and other livestock kept on the farm, as well as other animals living in the countryside. The proverbial motif of the awakening by crowing rooster can for one tourists be an emotional experience, known only from heard stories, while for others would become sentimental memory from childhood.

Second, right after the accommodation, basic element of the tourist product is food. For many tourists the desire to taste sophisticated and original dishes, prepared accordingly to traditional recipes or served only in specific regions, is even the main motive of the trip, which determines the development of culinary tourism. However, it should be noted that in the vast majority of catering and accommodation facilities, dishes proposed for mass tourism, although tasty and often prepared with high quality products, are similar to each other and usually do not represent anything original.

⁴³ Exceptions in this case may be *boutique hotels* (sometimes described as *design hotels* or *lifestyle hotels*), characterized by a very high standard, intimate atmosphere, and, above all, the unusual character of interiors.



An example could be standardized European (continental) or English breakfast, served to hotel guests in most of the world. A completely different culinary experience can bring a stay in an agritourist farm, where meals are often prepared from the products of the visited farm and are characterized by the highest quality and freshness. Especially attractive in this respect are eco-agritourism entities, where no chemicals are used for plant protection.

For people interested in exploring new flavors, a valuable experience may be rest at farms referring in their offer to the specific traditions of the region. Cuisine of Podlasie, Podhale, Kurpie, Kujawy, Warmia and Mazury regions abounds in unique traditional and regional dishes, which cannot be tasted anywhere else in Poland. Very important is the knowledge and experience of housewives, whose (often secret) recipes and formulas are passed from generation to generation. Thus, during the preparation of such dishes visitors are satisfied from broadening their culinary skills. There is also a great interest in various types of workshops related to herbalism, apitherapy, making cheese or home-made tinctures, which may become source of positive experiences long after returning home...

Apart from the meal itself, the way of serving it is also very important. Breakfast or lunch in the orchard among blooming apple trees can be a unique experience, both tastefully and aesthetically, unattainable in any other type of tourism. Moreover, it should be noted that in the case of agritourism the time spent at the table has also cognitive, social and integration value. Meals are often eaten in the company of the hosts, what strengthens bond among the banqueters, helps in the exchange of information and the better acquaintance of the unique characteristics of rural life, thanks to the listening the hosts' stories about history and cultural values of the region.

The main function of agriculture is to provide agricultural produce. However, cultivating the role and growing plants, as well as animal breeding can also be very interesting for tourists visiting rural areas. They are mainly inhabitants of cities, therefore their knowledge is mostly inferior. The opportunity to expand this knowledge for many of them may be through extremely exciting participation in the seasonal works at the farm, like harvesting, haymaking or digging. Unforgettable experience can also be (especially for children) in watching, feeding and grooming animals, which enables their better recognition and through developing ecological awareness and respect for living creatures has an educative value. Moreover, it is a good opportunity to get more familiar with the manufacturing process and acquiring many food products. Also some agricultural machines may be interesting for tourists. Learning about their construction, ways of working or self-service is often very unusual experience.

Many tourists are coming to the countryside because it offers the possibility to rest in peaceful and quiet surroundings and contact with nature. Staying in pure, attractive landscape is also a source of many experiences and impressions (mostly aesthetic) that result from the beauty and specificity of non-urbanized areas. Positive emotions can be provided by realizing passions (like painting or photography) or hobbies, such as fishing, gathering (mushrooms, herbs, blueberries, blackberries, wild strawberries) and many others. Those activities, taken up in the rustic atmosphere of the village, provide satisfaction and sense of fulfillment. In the countryside also important is ability to use space for various forms of active recreation. The cycling trip among the flourishing meadows will in this case be a more attractive experience than riding in crowded urban cycling paths, which moreover expose the cyclist to many traffic dangers.

A significant value is also the cultural aspect of rural areas. Vanishing traditions, blurred customs and practices, unique, often unknown and mysterious rituals or colorful ways of celebrating religious festivals bring the whole range of impressions, emotions and feelings related to folklore of the village and become invaluable and exciting experience for the visitors. Examples may include attending religious rituals, May masses and colorful processions alongside countryside crosses or chapels. It is no less exciting to participate in folk handicraft workshops, which aim is to sustain or recreate many of the dying professions, like weaving, wickerwork, smithery, sculpture and many



others. Souvenirs from products of such unique activities may be a source of satisfaction and joy long after returning home. Staying in the countryside is also an opportunity to get acquainted with exciting beliefs, rituals, legends or folk tales, which, with their authenticity, mystery, and sometimes thrill, will enchant and fascinate even experienced travelers.

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the complexity and interdisciplinarity of the agritourism product, still expanding typology of agritourism farms and resulting from that multidirectionality of the specialization of possible actions, the presented content certainly does not cover the vast subject of experiences and impressions of tourists resting in the countryside. Therefore this study is only a contribution to further research and a fuller exploration of the described topic. The need to initiate a wider research on agritourism in the perspective of the experience economy is a result of progressive commodification of the market offer, which deprives agritourism entities the possibility of creating a competitive advantage. Therefore conclusions and insights of the scientific penetration of this area will lead to a more effective search for new ways of distinguishing those entities on the market and stimulate the development of agritourism. Finally, this should result in greater variety and intensity of emotions, sensations and feelings experienced by tourists relaxing in agritourism farms.

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