

# European Journal of Service Management

Vol. 23, 3/2017

(Formerly known as Scientific Journal of University of Szczecin. Service Management)

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European Journal of Service Management is indexed in BazEkon database, Index Copernicus and Bazhum

Articles are available at [http://kangur.uek.krakow.pl/bazy\\_ae/bazekon/nowy/index.php](http://kangur.uek.krakow.pl/bazy_ae/bazekon/nowy/index.php)

**ISSN 2450-8535** (1640-6818, 1898-0511)

#### **SZCZECIN UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Edition I. Publishing sheet size 5.5. Printing sheet size 4.9. Format B5. Printed in 64 copies.

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# EQUESTRIAN TOURISM AS AN OFFER OF RURAL TOURISM – STUDY ON THE SELECTED EXAMPLES FROM PODKARPACIE PROVINCE (POLAND) AND PREŠOV PROVINCE (SLOVAKIA)

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RECEIVED	28 April 2017
ACCEPTED	29 June 2017
JEL CLASSIFICATION	Q26, Q10, R11
KEYWORDS	equestrian tourism, rural areas, Poland, Slovakia
ABSTRACT	<p>The aim of the study was to analyze the offer of equestrian tourism as one of leisure activities in rural areas in Poland and Slovakia.</p> <p>The applied methodology included office and field methods. Office methods related to the analysis of source material – literature, maps, yearbooks and Internet resources. The field study consisted in carrying out observations and interviewing selected owners of the centers offering services in horse tourism.</p> <p>The conducted analyses showed that both Podkarpackie Province and the Prešov Province have great potential for the development of equestrian tourism which advantages have not been fully exploited, particularly in Slovakia. These limitations are due to confusing legislature, the lack of cooperation between the various entities and poor promotion of this activity.</p>

## Introduction

Today tourism represents one of the most important leisure activities. It is a way to rejuvenate, relax, rest, encounter new people, culture and nature.

Owing to their diversity, rural areas are particularly predisposed to the development of active forms of leisure. Agritourism centers and farms operating on those areas offer a variety of activities – walks in the countryside, cycling, canoeing and horse-riding trips.

According to Iliev (2014) equestrian tourism is becoming increasingly popular in rural and semi-urban areas. On reason for this is that agritourism farms can jointly run horse tourism and agritourism. What is more, equestrian tourism in rural areas represents a rapidly growing trend of recreational and leisure activities for children, youth and adults.

The aim of the study was to analyze the functioning of equestrian tourism as one of the leisure activities offers in selected rural areas in Poland and Slovakia. The paper involved an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- what does affect the spatial differentiation of equestrian tourism centres?
- what is offered within equestrian tourism?
- what weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats are connected with the development of equestrian tourism?

## Study area

The study area consists of two regions: Podkarpackie Province (Poland) and Prešov Province (Slovakia), which are characterized by similar social and natural environment. More than 52% of the population live in rural areas whereas the agricultural land have the largest share in the total area of the regions (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the analyzed regions

Feature	Podkarpackie Province	Prešov Province
Surface area/km <sup>2</sup>	17,845	8,973
Population [p/p]	2,129,187	820,697
The share of the population in rural areas [%]	58.0	52.9
The share of agricultural land [%]	52.5	42.0
The rural or rural-urban communes [%]	90.0	96.5
Marketability of agricultural production [%]	44.0	45.0

Source: own work based on Mitura, Buczek-Kowalik (2016); *Program hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja...*

The rural character of the study area is also determined by the prevalence of rural or rural-urban communes, low marketability of agricultural production and large agrarian fragmentation (85% of farms do not exceed the area of 5ha). Due to the location in the foothills and mountain areas the conditions for agricultural development are difficult. The dominant crop is potatoes, while in livestock prevails cattle farming.

Both Podkarpackie Province and Prešov Province are characterized by varied terrain. According to the physical geographic regionalization by J. Kondracki (2014) Podkarpackie Province is situated within the three regions: Western Carpathians with the Podkarpackie region, Eastern Carpathians and the Polish highlands. Each of these regions is distinguished by a different geological structure, topography and diversity of wildlife.

The biggest advantage of the region is diverse flora and fauna which is unique in the country and thus protected. All terrain forms occupy a total area of 861,840.40 ha, representing 44% of the entire region.

According to Mazur and Lukniš's geomorphological regionalization (1986) Prešov Province belongs to the East and the West Carpathians, and only a small southern part to the Pannonian Basin.

Taking into account the criterion of development potential Michaeli, Ivanová (2005) divided Prešov Province into three regions: the lowland with great development potential; the basin region with great development potential and the mountain region with small potential. An important element of Prešov Province is rich and rather unspoiled nature. Protected areas constitute 17.8% of the province.

## Equestrian tourism in rural areas of Poland and Slovakia

Since the 70s. of the twentieth century there can be observed a rapid growth in the world's interest in recreation activities in rural areas where tourists' needs to come in contact with nature, culture and practise forms of active recreation can be fully realized (Mika, 2007). According to Sikora (2012) the main reason for participating in tourism in rural areas is the juxtaposition of natural, anthropogenic attractions and tourism conditions of rural and forest areas with urban environment. From the point of view of the participants in tourist traffic this type of tourism includes various types of recreational and tourism activities, facilitating close encounters with nature and rural environment through hiking, cycling, horse riding, cross-country skiing, picking herbs, mushroom picking, sightseeing and educational trips (Sikora, 1999).

Equestrian (horse-riding) tourism, being a form of professional tourism, requires proper fitness and emotional training as well as suitable equipment and theoretical and practical instruction on how to act. It includes recreational horse riding in equestrian centers and in the field, short walks (lasting 1–4 hours, with the distance of 7–30 km), many hour trips (the distance of 30–70 km) and different horse riding rallies. What is more, horses can be used in hippotherapy, i.e. rehabilitation of disabled people with physical or mental injuries (Hollý, 2003; Kurek, Mika, Pitrus, 2007; Krzemień, 2002). Equestrian tourism opens possibilities of close encounters with nature, it meets the tourist's desire to test oneself, improves stamina and gives a lot of pleasure. It also makes tourists forget about the stress of everyday life, educates and develops personality (Merski, Warecka, 2009; Iliev, 2014; Matlovicova, Klamár, Mika, 2015). Rural tourism and equestrian tourism represent the most expansive sort of advanced leisure recreation (Iliev, 2014).

The surge in the interest in this form of activity has been witnessed in Poland and Slovakia since the beginning of the 90s of the twentieth century. This period showed the increase in the number of riding schools and horse stables offering their clients various ways of spending time in the saddle. It is a relatively new, rapidly growing form of recreation, suitable for a wide group of clients (Lijewski, Mikułowski, Wyrzykowski, 2008; Špičáková 2009). Currently, in both Poland and Slovakia, many small private centers and agritourism farms are largely or mainly engaged in activities related in different ways to equestrian tourism. This concerns particularly the centers located near large cities (Kozak, 2013) or those in areas attractive for tourists (the Bieszczady or Beskid Mountains). Their offer also keeps developing, including, among others, horse riding lessons, horse riding in the field, rallies, show jumping, horse-drawn carriage rides, sleigh rides and skijoring behind a horse. Adults, children and adolescent can equally avail in this offer (Józefczyk, 2014; Špičáková, 2009). An important element in propagating this type of activity are horse picnics, festivals, equestrian events and Trec events (Korfel, Mastej, 2015). The increase in the interest in horse-riding market development offers great opportunities for the economy, e.g. through the development of the service and industry sector (blacksmithing, saddlery, production of fodder, horse-riding equipment or harnesses).

Practising of equestrian tourism requires proper infrastructure, which means appropriately marked trails, signposts, information boards, stations (shelters) for riders and horses serving as resting places, sheds, benches, or camp grounds (Špičáková, 2009).

## Material and methods

The paper used both cameral and field methods. At the cameral research stage, secondary materials (folders, brochures, guides, websites, event programs, scholarly and popular science publications) were used, and the obtained primary materials were analysed. During field works, pilot studies were performed, which involved free-form interviews based on a standardised list of required information with the owners of selected resorts providing equestrian tourism services. The 20 centers located in rural areas (10 in each Podkarpackie Province and Prešov Province) were selected based on their significance and position in the region, the availability and range of services offered. During the interview the centers operators were asked about their offer, the functioning of the centers, the main clients, additional sources of funding, opportunities and threats for the development of equestrian tourism in the regions concerned.

## Study results

Based on the analyses, it was found that in 2016 there were 79 and 36 centers of horse tourism in Podkarpackie Province and Prešov Province respectively (Figure 1).

These centers were distributed unevenly. Most equestrian centers in Poland are located around Rzeszow (in Rzeszow District) and in the Bieszczady Mountains (over 59% of all centers), and the least of them are in the northern and north – eastern part of the province (Sandomierz Basin, Roztocze Upland). In the Prešov Province about 40% centers are located near Prešov – the capital of the region and the district towns of Poprad, Kezmarok, Bardejov and Vranov upon Toplou. Despite the favourable natural environment, in the eastern and south – east part, especially near the Polish border, there are no centers offering horse-riding (Figure 1). This is due, among others, to the lack of infrastructure facilitating development of tourism (accommodation, catering, entertainment).

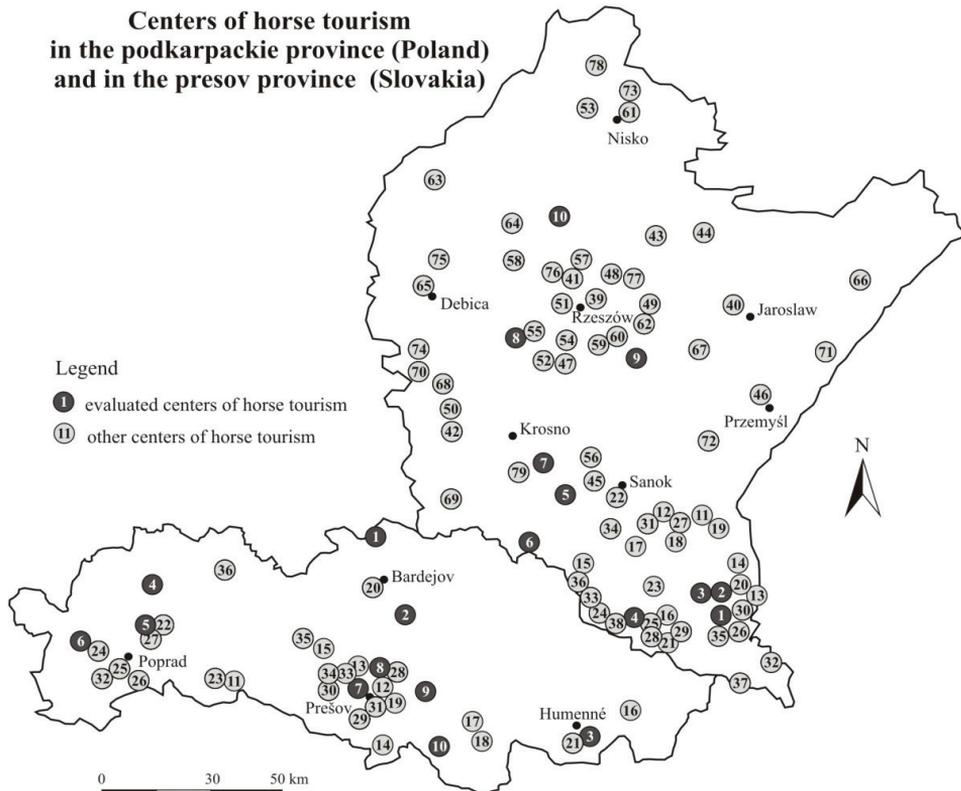
Over 45% of all centers in Prešov Province and 65% centers in Podkarpackie Province are located in the areas of small towns with population up to 1,000 inhabitants.

Both on the Polish and Slovak sides there are centers with dozens of horses and small centers with only a few animal units in the herd.

Both on the Polish and Slovak sides the owners of horse riding schools are mainly individuals who have been pursuing their activities year-round for over 10 years. According to the owners, the greatest interest in horse riding can be observed in the summer months from July to September, and the lowest in the winter months from January to March.

The offer in equestrian tourism is also diversified. Most often the centers on the Polish and Slovak sides offer guided tours for children, horse riding lessons and excursions. Additionally, Podkarpackie centers offer multi-day horse-riding rallies and even horse-riding expedition across the Polish border. Organized groups can take advantage of britzka rides, trapper carts or sleigh rides in the winter. For fans of extreme sports, some centers in the Bieszczady Mountains and near Prešov offer skijoring, i.e. skiing behind a horse and Trec classes. During the summer there are organized camps or day camps with horse-riding lessons, training in the rules of horse behaviour, etc. Another important activity is the use of horses in hippotherapy (mostly found in Podkarpackie Province). Apart

from equestrian centres, “horseback recreational rides” in Podkarpackie Province are offered by equestrian agritourism farms located in places attractive to tourists, like in the Bieszczady and Lower Beskids foothills. Except for horse riding in indoor arenas or in the field, such farms additionally offer other attractions for children and adults, for example playing fields, playgrounds, barbecue areas or campfires.



**Figure 1.** Centers of Equestrian Tourism in Podkarpackie Province and Prešov Province

Source: own elaboration.

More and more centers offer residence studs for horses as well as training and counselling in horse husbandry. This offer is more common among the centers in Podkarpackie Province.

An important element for the development of equestrian tourism is suitable infrastructure adapted for the rider and the horse. Within Podkarpackie Province horse riding trails are distributed unevenly. Most of the regionally and locally important trails are located in the southern part of the province in the Bieszczady and Low Beskids Mountain Ranges. In the area of Prešov Province there aren't any officially marked out horse riding trails. Individual operators engaged in organizing equestrian trips use hiking or partly biking trails or lead the group on unmarked trails. According to the owners of equestrian centers in Slovakia, there is a problem with the management of land

areas on which the trails would run. Attempts at marking out horse riding trails are made as part of the cross-border projects.

Those tourists who do not ride horses can find in Podkarpackie Province many attractive “horse-related” events. The most important cyclical events include: e.g. Horse Fairs in Lutowska, the Ascent and Descent of cattle and “Farewell to vacation with Hutsul horse” event in Rudawka Rymanowska (*Jeździectwo...*, 2014). The owners of the equestrian centres in Prešov Province pointed to the insufficient number of events, both occasional and regular, promoting equestrian tourism. The most important include, for example Day of St. Hubert near Vihorlat, Rodeo in Záhradné.

An important element supporting and promoting equestrian tourism on the Polish – Slovak border area are jointly implemented projects receiving funding from various sources. One of the most important projects was the creation of Polish–Slovak Equestrian Tourism Centre launched in years 2013–2014. The undertaken activities resulted in creating a cross-border, 210 km long equestrian and horse wagon trail (*Projekt transgraniczny...*, 2014).

During the interviews the owners of equestrian centers explained the limitations to the development of equestrian tourism (Table 2).

**Table 2.** SWOT analysis of the development of the equestrian tourism in the Podkarpackie Province and the Prešov Region

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– diverse topography,</li> <li>– large share of grassland,</li> <li>– landscape values,</li> <li>– long horse-riding tradition,</li> <li>– diverse offer,</li> <li>– relatively low prices of the offered services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– lack of cooperation between resorts and the local government,</li> <li>– low promotion of equestrian tourism,</li> <li>– vague legal regulations,</li> <li>– low variety within the offer,</li> <li>– high costs of running a business,</li> <li>– bureaucracy,</li> <li>– poorly developed infrastructure,</li> <li>– low number of experts on horse breeding</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– availability of various funding sources,</li> <li>– implementation of joint crossborder and regional projects,</li> <li>– increase in the popularity of active forms of spending free time,</li> <li>– extending and diversifying the equestrian tourism related offer,</li> <li>– possibility to develop extra services related to visitor service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– competition from the neighbouring countries,</li> <li>– the residents' reluctance towards new undertakings</li> </ul>

Source: own work based on interviews.

## Conclusions

Both the Podkarpackie Province and the Prešov Region do have a long horse-riding tradition and a large potential (especially nature-related) in terms of the development of equestrian tourism.

An advantage of both regions are the landscape values, which result from the diverse natural environment.

An exceptionally significant aspect of the functioning of equestrian tourism, especially in the Podkarpackie Province, is the existing tourism infrastructure, which however should be improved and adapted to the specifics of equestrian tourism.

The spatial differentiation of equestrian tourism centres in the Poland-Slovakia border areas does not result from the natural attractiveness as much as it is related to the proximity of big cities and potential consumers of this form of activity. This is particularly visible in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the Prešov Region where, despite the favourable natural environment conditions, there are no horse-riding centres. This is caused by, among other factors, the lack of infrastructure for the development of tourism (accommodation, boarding, entertainment).

In view of the findings obtained, it seems that an integral element of the development of equestrian tourism in the analysed areas is the necessity of collaboration between the centres, as well as with local governments and associations, which could contribute to the formation of a crossborder cluster promoting this form of activity.

Another significant aspect is the enhancement of promotional actions showing the advantages of the analysed regions as areas which are well conditioned for equestrian tourism. These actions should be complex, consistent and long-term, which implies e.g. establishing a development strategy for equestrian tourism or indicating its role in the existing strategic documents. Unfortunately, for neither the Podkarpackie Province nor the Prešov Region have such things been elaborated.

Other important elements include: undertaking innovative actions, extending the offer and adapting it for new groups of consumers (families with children, the elderly).

Easy access to reliable and up-to-date information is essential for the modern tourist, therefore it is necessary to create a uniform information system utilising new technologies (e.g. GPS). Such actions can be implemented within the frames of various crossborder cooperation projects funded by the European Union.

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**Cite this article as:** Buczek-Kowalik, M., Klamár, R., Kozoň, J. (2017). Equestrian tourism as an offer of rural tourism – study on the selected examples from Podkarpackie Province (Poland) and Prešov Province (Slovakia). *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 5–12. DOI: 10.18276/ejism.2017.23-01.

# CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN FOODSERVICE BUSINESS IN POLAND ON SELECTED EXAMPLE

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RECEIVED 7 April 2017  
ACCEPTED 1 September 2017

JEL  
CLASSIFICATION L83, M14, M21, M48

KEYWORDS CSR, gastronomy, business, management, strategy

ABSTRACT Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the company's strategy, based on the assumption that business is responsible for the society within which it operates. The concept evolved strongly since its first presentation in 1953. CSR is becoming an important issue in the gastronomy business. The main objective of the article is its presentation of the concept from international and Polish perspectives, including own research aiming at the evaluation of CSR implementation. McDonald's is a good example for implementation of the CSR strategy and for that reason it was chosen for in-depth analysis in the article.

## Introduction — Historical background of CSR

The CSR concept was proposed in 1950s, and it keeps evolving. CSR was defined in 1953 by Bowen as “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society” (Bowen, 1953).

This point was stressed by Davis who in 1960 described business social responsibilities as “the businessman’s decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest... which need to be commensurate with the company’s social power” (Davis, 1960).

During 1960–1970, the proliferation of CSR definitions is mainly due to the increasing awareness of stakeholder (e.g. labors and consumers) own rights and government regulations.

The earliest reference addressing specifically social auditing was around early 1960 in a book by Goyder (1961).

However, the development of CSR definitions during 1980 became more specific and extended to various themes, for instance, corporate social responsiveness, corporate social performance and stakeholder theories. One of the most notable experimental studies was conducted by Corchran and Wood (1984). They examined the impacts of social responsibility on corporation financial performance using reputation index as an indicator. Aupperle, Carroll and Hatfield (1985) first applied a theoretical definition of CSR proposed by Carroll (1983) into CSR assessment indicators, which involves four components: economic, legal, ethical and discretionary.

In 2000 globalisation, acting as the worldwide penetration of market-driven corporate enterprise, stimulated the development of CSR, which focuses on responsibility of citizenship without borders (Vogel, 2005; Crane, McWilliams, Matten, Moon, Siegel, 2008).

The European Commission has defined CSR as the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society (European Commission, 2017). The European Commission believes that CSR is important for the sustainability, competitiveness, and innovation of EU enterprises and the EU economy. It brings benefits for risk management, cost savings, access to capital, customer relationships, and human resource management. Companies can become socially responsible by (European Commission, 2017): following the law; integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations.

In addition to the divergence in definitions, companies from different industries also have specific strategies and concerns of CSR implementation (Belu, Manescu, 2013). Despite this, different criteria from the different types of companies still focus on three main concepts, involving environmental, social and economy which is consistent with three bottom lines (Elkington, 1994; Crane et al., 2008; Belu, Manescu, 2013).

CSR in this work is generally understood as being the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives (“Triple-Bottom-Line- Approach”), while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the current performance of CSR in Polish gastronomic business in terms of its contribution to the well-being of the environment, community and economy.

## Method

Reviewing of current CSR implementation in Poland in gastronomy businesses was illustrated by the empirical method, qualitative research method – case study. Case studies show detailed contextual analysis of declarations of the CSR of McDonald’s. McDonald’s was chosen as a subject matter of the study mainly because of its universal appeal and its marked dedication to CSR initiatives. Before McDonald’s was selected for the analysis, other companies were observed in their behaviour on CSR. Positive behavior has been found in international operators such as KFC, Starbucks and the Polish company Sfinks Polska SA. However, the greatest CSR activity was noticed in McDonald’s, so it was decided to put across details of their activities in this area.

## Results

The development of the CSR concept in Poland is still at an early stage. Studies carried out in Poland and other European Union countries prove that large businesses are often engaged in social reporting. Polish enterprises, and in particular MSME, still do not fully appreciate the importance of CSR. They focus mainly on achieving short-term market goals without a long-term strategic vision. Small and medium-sized enterprises are reluctant to engage in the preparation and publication of social reports. According to the CorporateRegister.com site, only 4% of all CSR-reporting businesses are SMEs. Note that SMEs account for about 98% of all businesses.

Based on the conducted analyses, the status of the development of the CSR concept in Poland in 2014 was assessed. The ratings obtained by Poland in the four analysed areas allow a conclusion to be made that in 2014 Poland became closer to the C level – attentive and emerging – in the development of the CSR concept. This rating comprised: (Wolczek, 2015, pp. 211–212)

- The area of legal and political environment: there is a new (established in July 2014) named government department leading on CSR issues but there is no CSR national strategy.
- The area of civil society context: there are universities and research institutes offering specific programmes and courses in CSR and related fields. There is still no widespread civil society involvement in the structured and publicly disclosed dialogue with companies openly aiming at developing a corporate strategy.
- The area of reporting: only 12 out of the 100 largest Polish companies have published a CSR report in 2010. The number of regularly produced, structured CSR reports is increasing from year to year but is still low and independent assurance is at a preliminary stage. There is no widespread adoption of formal public disclosure of CSR issues and data by small and medium-sized enterprises.
- In the area of standards: in 2012 there were more than two thousand companies in Poland, which were independently certified to ISO 14001.

Companies providing gastronomy services did not appear in the top 10 of the Responsible Business Ranking 2016 (Responsible Business Forum in Poland, 2016). However, regardless of the current absence in the rankings, the companies operating in the Polish gastronomy industry increasingly rely on the implementation of the principles of social responsibility, seeing in it an effective business strategy and a source of competitive advantage. The interest in CSR in gastronomy businesses increases alongside the growing standard of living, increasing the role of eating out habits and the increasing awareness of Poles as both consumers and citizens.

As the general public and government have better awareness of the significance of healthier diet and food safety, the requirements for food industry are not merely the quality of food and service, but also the hygiene conditions of their personnel and facilities (Drosinos, Gialitaki, Paramithiotis, Metaxopoulos, 2005). Experimental researches indicate that a large portion of consumers prefer to have accessible information on menus or pre-packed food, such as nutrition composition and ingredients (Hoefkens, Veetil, Van Huylenbroeck, Van Camp, Verbeke, 2012; Fifka, Loza Adai, 2015).

We can observe a global trend to implement CSR in the gastronomy business, especially in multinational fast-food chain restaurants, such as McDonald's, KFC, Burger King and Starbucks.

The majority of companies operating in the Polish gastronomy industry are micro companies that employ up to 9 employees (96%). Only 3.7% are small companies and 0.13% are medium companies. Large companies in the gastronomy industry make up only 0.02% (GUS, 2016). 2/3 companies whose representatives declare awareness of the term "corporate social responsibility" conduct activities related to it. In the group of companies from the whole

of Poland, these are much less often micro enterprises (56% mentions) compared to other companies (approx. 80% mentions) (PARP, 2011).

## Case study — McDonald

The CSR concept can have varying levels of importance for different organisations. In order to understand the extent to which modern organisations have adapted CSR into their everyday business objectives, a case study of the popular fast food chain McDonald's was attempted. McDonald's was chosen as a subject matter of the study mainly because of its universal appeal and its marked dedication to CSR initiatives. McDonalds' CSR strategy is lucid and well etched out. Thus, it would be easy to apply the understanding from the study to companies across functions and industries.

McDonald is the world's leading global food service chain with more than 35,000 locations serving approximately 70 million customers in more than 100 countries each day. More than 80% of McDonald's restaurants worldwide are owned and operated by independent local businessman. McDonald's in Poland has 384 restaurants in more than 150 cities, over 19,000 workers, close to half a million guests every day.

Companies often choose to align their brand image and objectives with their CSR objectives. This is adequately illustrated in the case of McDonalds.

At the cornerstone of their CSR initiatives is the set of 'values' outlined by the company. McDonald's CSR report (2016) contains an explicit commitment and mission to make progress, including the operation of an ethical and sustainable manner as well as concerns about their influences on environment and society.

McDonald's mission is to consistently provide every customer with the best possible restaurant experience. To fulfill this mission, they are committed to being a socially responsible company, as an active member of the community. It is their duty to listen to the opinions of stakeholders including their customers and those of local communities and to take appropriate actions in good faith in response. Therefore, they engage in corporate social responsibility activities (Table 1).

Quality control is the top priority to ensure product safety for customers. To achieve this, they work with all their suppliers in close partnerships, setting strict standards for the sourcing of raw materials and quality control in every step across their value chain from farms to processing plants, distribution channels, and to their restaurants. McDonald's has been making huge changes to its menu over the past years. Therefore the company uses only products and raw materials that must meet the strictest safety and quality criteria and not least they must be tested and approved by all relevant institutions. McDonald's has developed its SQMS, a quality management system for food suppliers. The McDonald's standard focuses largely on the requirements that vendors should meet and addresses such issues as product design principles, management responsibility requirements, crisis management requirements, and verification requirements, and continuous system improvement (Gazeta Praca, 2015). An important role in ensuring food security is provided by systems, which relate to the quality of production. Among them are universal quality systems, which include, among others ISO, TQM, and food quality systems. This type of system is divided into systems addressed to processing and marketing (HACCP, GMP, GHP, BRC, IFS). One of the systems that regulate the production of safe food is the HACCP system. In Poland in 2014, only 39% of gastronomy companies had implemented HACCP and 94% were prepared to implement the system (Stępiak, 2015). The control conducted by Office of Competition and Consumer Protection indicates various types of misconduct were found in 79.5% of inspected gastronomy enterprises, were mainly (UOKiK, 2011): offering foods or drinks of

the wrong quality (21.4%), offering overdue goods (18.4%), failure to observe storage conditions (14.4%), lack of medical certificates for sanitary and epidemiological purposes of employees which have contact with food (8.0%).

**Table 1.** CSR in McDonald's

Stakeholder group	Activities	Key areas	How do they address the issues
Customers/Consumers	Surveys Research	Carbon footprint Human rights compliance Fiber sourcing Impact of products on people and nature	Life Cycle Assessments CO <sub>2</sub> target Sourcing target Business Practice Reviews Eco actions Product safety Chemicals
Employees	Training Feedback	Talent management Performance management Workforce planning Compensation and benefits Corruption Health and Safety	Code of Conduct training OHSAS 18001 certification All employees survey Diversity survey Global Performance Management System
Investors	SRI questionnaires One-on-one meetings Telebriefings Analyst interviews Roadshows Field visit	ESG integration into business strategy Energy efficiency Risk management	Inclusion in sustainability funds and indexes CO <sub>2</sub> target ESAVE Code of Conduct audits and Business Practice Reviews Risk analysis
Suppliers	Supplier audit Supplier questionnaires	Raw material sourcing	Sourcing target Supplier guidelines and standards Supply chain assurance
Society	Participation in industry initiatives and standardization bodies Ongoing dialog Community involvement	SCA's dialog with society Community involvement	Public affairs Stakeholder dialog Membership in organizations Community relations initiatives

Source: own study based on CSR McDonald's information (<http://mcdonalds.pl/omcdonalds/odpowiedzialnosc>; [http://corporate.mcdonalds.com/mcd/sustainability/sustainability\\_CR\\_reports.htm](http://corporate.mcdonalds.com/mcd/sustainability/sustainability_CR_reports.htm)).

McDonald's company requires that its suppliers use mainly natural and no genetically modified ingredients. McDonalds is operating in a society with a high focus on health and obesity, the company has, thus, over the past years, incorporated healthier options into its menus alongside nutritional information and education to reflect the public concerns for obesity and other health issues such as heart diseases and diabetes, which are inevitably connected to its products. Like many fast food chains, McDonald's are starting to offer healthy choices on their menus to attract more health conscious consumers. The chain added to its' menu salads, yogurts, vegetables, fruits, mineral water and juices. The Company is committed to helping customers make informed nutrition choices. From printed brochures and nutrition labeling right on select food packaging, to innovative mobile apps, QR codes and online nutrition calculators, as well as calories on menu boards, multifaceted approaches give McDonald's customers the information they seek in many markets around the world.

The company puts great emphasis on employees – of the possibility of personal growth and development. The company is also based on several values and principles such as respect, open communication and equally substantial and professional development support. An important factor is the fact that McDonald's is able to provide

work for such groups of workers who face many difficulties finding a job, such as young people without work experience, women with children or handicapped persons.

In companies operating in Poland, only 14% have written procedures on how to counteract discrimination in the workplace and during the recruitment process (PARP, 2011). In general, companies do not provide facilitations to disadvantaged groups for finding a friendly workplace. Another area of CSR is "labour practices". How employees are treated – instrumentally (they are the company's capital, used only for maximizing profits) or as actors (employees as partners in action) – this aspect differentiates companies with respect to responsible businesses. One of the indicators of responsible business in relation to employees is the opinion on the employee turnover rate. Struggling retail and catering industries have the greatest employee turnover rate. Gastronomy has also been at the forefront of the sectors with the highest employment in the informal sector. The number of workers "on the black" grows sharply in summer. A survey conducted by Sedlak & Sedlak among restaurant employees in one of Poland's provincial cities shows that almost 35% employees in the catering industry work illegally. Most of them are seasonal workers (T.B., 2011). The employee turnover rate in accommodation and catering in 2015 was higher than 30% (GUS, 2016). As many as 66% of entrepreneurs from Poland indicated that the timely payment of wages it is actually over-standard action, aimed at increasing employee satisfaction. According to Labor Law, this should be standard procedure, not a special distinction (PARP, 2011). But in the catering industry this situation happens very often.

With regard to environmental responsibilities and with a viewpoint of continuous optimisation, McDonald's Poland is implementing a nationwide programme to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in all restaurants. The project partners are the key suppliers of McDonald's. In comparison to the base year (2012) the achieved emission reduction was 27%. McDonald's in 2015 was using certified renewable energy (green energy) in restaurants throughout the country. McDonald's introduced mixed transport (rail) in the logistics of their products and implemented a programme to reduce water consumption at McDonald's. More than a decade ago, McDonald's Poland was the first company in Poland to receive the Environmental Management System Certificate in accordance with ISO 14001: 2004. Subsequent periodic audits confirmed that environmental protection is a company priority. Recycling plays an increasingly important role in the management of waste. McDonald's Poland leads in their restaurants throughout the country with segregation of waste from the kitchen and dining room. The company also runs a national project for full development and re-use of frying oil. It is entirely received and processed at the refinery for biodiesel. All packaging in McDonald's are produced on the basis of paper and cardboard.

As few as one in ten companies from the Polish sample inform the local community about the pollution generated by the company. Out of the companies that inform the local community about the pollution generated as a result of its activity, less than half also consult the community about how to limit this impact (PARP, 2011).

The CSR of McDonald's in relation to the community was also analysed. McDonald's is involved in charitable activities and supports the needy, especially children. Ronald McDonald's foundation is a charity of which the core activity is creating Houses for parents of children struggling with serious diseases who watch over their kids. The charity has already established 345 houses around the world. On 14th October 2015, the charity opened its first House in Poland at University Children's Hospital of Kraków Prokocim, thanks to support and partnership of Jagiellonian University Medical College. More information about the foundation's activities can be found at [www.frm.org.pl](http://www.frm.org.pl).

Philanthropy or charity, this area is undervalued and not perceived by entrepreneurs as a type of activity that brings benefits to the community as well as the company by projecting a positive image of the company in

the community, having a competitive edge or contributing to solving specific community problems. Every fourth company from Poland undertakes some action to the benefit of the local community (PARP, 2011).

The company is reporting continued progress around the world in its social responsibility efforts. In an update that details global advances, highlights include environmental and sustainability initiatives, non-governmental organisation partnerships, animal welfare audits, support of children's causes and healthy lifestyle activities.

## Results supply

The main supply for the article was McDonald's case study and secondary resources. To deepen the analysis, professional and theoretical data were included.

## Results demand

The demand for results is related to a poor adoption of CSR in small companies, especially in the gastronomy business. There is a possibility to improve performance with the example of McDonald's as the role model.

## Limitations

The main limitation for implementation of the results and interpretation is related to the case study method itself. It gives no guarantee that the implemented strategies will result in spectacular results, especially due to the activities undertaken in parallel to CSR, i.e. branding. Still, this can be a starting point for the CSR strategy implementation in gastronomy business in other companies.

## Conclusions

CSR is a compelling strategy for sustainable business, which was primarily implemented in developed countries. The definition of the concept evolved from 1953 and was enriched by various aspects and contexts. The development of the CSR concept in Poland is still at an early stage. Some of the areas are developing slightly more dynamically than others and some are characterised by stagnation. Polish enterprises, and in particular MSME, still do not fully appreciate the importance of CSR.

There is a huge potential of CSR implementation in the gastronomy business, for which McDonald's is a good point of referral. The example can be transferred not only to similar fast food restaurants, but generally speaking to most of the companies.

As we can see there are many benefits that CSR can offer to organisations. But the problem still remains - detection, quantification and assessment of these benefits.

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**Cite this article as:** Gheribi, E. (2017). Corporate social responsibility in gastronomy business in Poland on selected example. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 13–20. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2017.23-02.

# RURAL METROPOLITAN AREAS AS SITES FOR RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY OF THEIR INHABITANTS AN EXAMPLE OF POZNAŃ METROPOLIS

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RECEIVED  
ACCEPTED

7 July 2017  
1 September 2017

JEL  
CLASSIFICATION

O18, Q19, I12, Z20, Z32, R1

KEYWORDS

recreational activity, inhabitants of rural areas, sports and recreational infrastructure, Poznań Metropolis

ABSTRACT

This paper presents motives, types and forms of recreational activity of inhabitants of rural areas, especially location, time and average frequency of undertaking certain types and forms of recreational activity, using particular types of sports and recreational facilities and infrastructure, inhabitants opinions on factors influencing their selection of particular sports and recreation facilities, on recreational offer available in their home location, and satisfaction from the recreational offer in their home location. Research material was collected using diagnostic survey method. The survey included 1,584 of inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis Association area, including 377 inhabitants of rural areas. Obtained results enabled characterisation of recreational function and actions that could improve development of the recreation and business sector and quality of life in rural areas.

## Introduction

Trends in development of holiday and leisure recreation and tourism of townspeople in areas adjacent to a city or a town, including recreational and leisure functions of those areas, are changing as urban expansion progresses. Globally, urbanization is a strong force with significant effects for human health (Akpınar, 2016, p. 76). While urbanization has increased, human recreational needs have also increased (Karaküçük, Gürbüz, 2007,

p. 17). In cities, part of the demand for the recreational needs of growing populations has been met by providing natural spaces (Kong, Nakagoshi, 2006, pp. 147–164; Byomkesh, Nakagoshi, Dewan, 2012, pp. 45–58). Along with urbanization, decreased quality of life and poorer health for city inhabitants have been reported (The World Bank, 2011; Maller, Townsend, St Leger, Henderson-Wilson, Pryor, Prosser, Moore, 2009, pp. 51–83; Byomkesh et al., 2012, pp. 45–58). In reference to this, many urban residents move to rural areas in search of a better quality of life. On the second hand in recent years, the disseminating of the urban lifestyle among the rural population has also been observed, also in terms of spending free time, physical and recreational activity.

Development of recreational function of rural metropolitan areas is, among others, connected to popularisation of active lifestyle and behavioural patterns during free time, decrease of disproportions in the quality of life, social and economic growth in rural areas, and significance of physical activity for human health. Those issues are a subject matter of scientific research concerning, for instance, sports and recreational infrastructure in relation to lifestyles of townspeople and villagers (Florkiewicz, Zwierko, Krzepota, Łubkowska, Trosczyński, 2011, pp. 341–351; Olszewski, Kulikowska, Olszewska, Filonowicz, 2014, pp. 133–138), physical activity of young people (Dumuid et al., 2017, pp. 178–183; Guthold, Cowan, Autenrieth, Kann, Riley, 2010, pp. 43–49; Bartoszewicz, Wieczorek, Gandziarki, 2014, pp. 51–59), promotion of health and physical activity in rural areas (Delbani, Hanusz, 2014; Poczta, Malchrowicz-Moško, 2016, pp. 373–385; Kahn et al., 2002, pp. 73–107; Marcus et al. 2006, pp. 2739–2752; Reis et al., 2010, pp. 137–145), physical activity in rural and urban areas (Tripathy et al., 2016, pp. 1–10; WHO..., 2004) and analytical papers, including analyses of the Central Statistical Office of Poland concerning Poles participation in sports and physical recreation (GUS, 2017) and quality of life in urban and rural areas (Łysoń, 2015), elaborations of the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Poland concerning Poles' level of physical activity (MSiT, 2016), and works of the Institute for Structural Research and the Ministry of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Poland concerning social benefits of investments in sports (Baran, Lis, Magda, 2016).

The aim of this paper was identification and characterisation of recreational functions of rural metropolitan areas in the aspect of recreational activity of their inhabitants on the example of the Poznań Metropolis. Recognition of recreational behaviour of the inhabitants and ways of using the recreational offer by them can serve as the grounds of determination of rural areas' recreational function and actions supporting development of recreation. In wider context, the described issue can be attributed to improving quality of life, development of business initiatives, and promotion of physical and recreational activity in rural metropolitan areas.

## Method

The paper is of empirical character. The material comprised the results of a survey concerning physical and recreational activity of the inhabitants of rural area of the Poznań Metropolis Association and included a sample of 377 persons (rural communes). It was a part of broader research conducted from March to June 2016 among 1,584 inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis in which diagnostic survey method was used (survey was conducted using standard questionnaire). Spacial range of the survey included Poznań Metropolis understood as an area of the metropolitan city of Poznań, 17 communes of the Poznań district, and communes associated in the Poznań Metropolis Association: Oborniki, Śrem, Szamotuły, and Skoki.

Sample size was determined assuming maximal error of 0.05 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Quota-proportional sampling was used to select persons for the sample. The research is representative – representativity of the sample was evaluated considering sex, age, and level of education. Data obtained from the Central Statistical Office of Poland were used to determine sample size and structure using the quota-proportional method. Conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of indicators of the number of indications of a certain questionnaire item per 100 persons. As the obtained material was very extensive, the authors decided to include in this paper only several aspects of recreational activity of the inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis.

## Results

Types of physical recreation the most popular in rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis include: 1) hiking/walking (44.4 per 100 persons), 2) cycling (35.6 per 100 persons), and swimming (23.6 per 100 persons). Among those activities, the smallest difference between villagers and townspeople were noted for cycling. Fitness (18.1 per 100 persons) and other activities (14.4 per 100 persons) are also willingly undertaken by villagers (Figure 1).

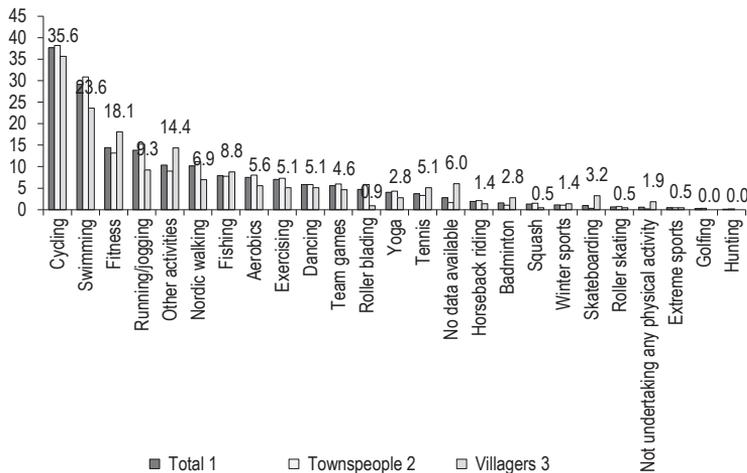
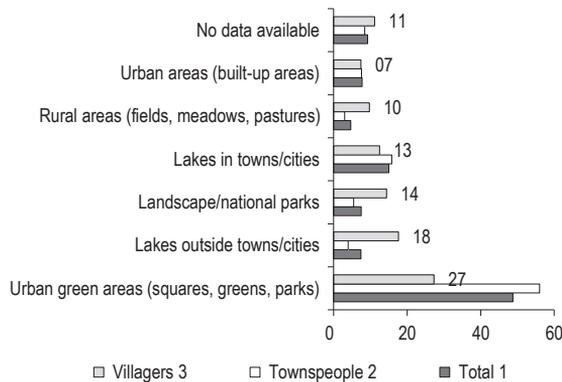


Figure 1. Types of physical activity of Poznań Metropolis's inhabitants

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

Inhabitants of rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis more often than townspeople undertake recreational activity around lakes located outside towns/cities (17.6% of villagers and 3.9% of townspeople), in landscape parks (14.4% of villagers and 5.4% of townspeople), and in rural areas, such as fields, meadows, and pastures (9.7% of villagers and 3.0% of townspeople) (Figure 2). It is worth noticing that despite convenient availability of such sites, 27.3% of villagers recreate in green areas of towns/cities: squares, greens, parks and the share of such sites in the total is the highest.

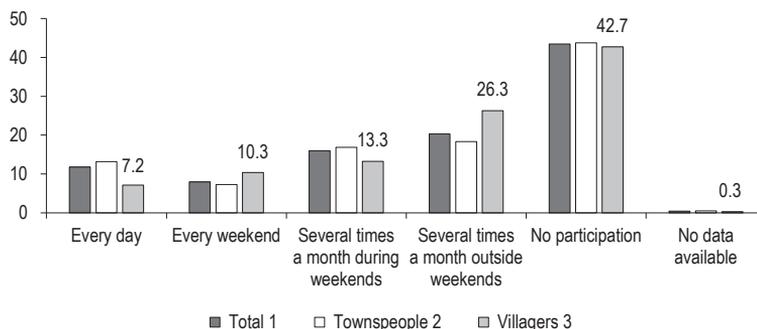


**Figure 2.** Types of sites of undertaking recreational activity in home location (%)

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

According to declarations of the respondents, inhabitants of rural areas undertake physical activity mainly in their home locations. Value of the indicator of undertaking physical activity during weekends ranges from 40.6 to 60 per 100 persons, while during working days, from 36.3 to 67.0 per 100 persons. During working days physical activity is the most often undertaken before noon (67 per 100 persons) and in the afternoon (62 per 100 persons), while during weekends, in the morning (60 per 100 persons), evening (55 per 100 persons), and in the afternoon (55 per 100 persons). The inhabitants of rural areas included in the survey usually do not take advantage of the recreational offer of the city of Poznań and this includes working days and weekends. Also, they do not undertake any physical activity in other communes.

Moreover, 26.3% of villagers engage in physical recreation several times a month outside weekends, 13.3% several times per month during weekends, 10.3% on every weekend, and 7.2% every day. However, 42.7% of villagers does not participate in physical recreation (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Time and frequency of undertaking physical recreation inhabitants of Poznań Metropolis (%)

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

Next interesting issue of the study was motives behind undertaking recreational activity of rural inhabitants of Poznań metropolis (Figure 4). The main motives behind undertaking recreational activity by villagers include: improving physical fitness (62.0 per 100 persons), resting, relaxing (60.6 per 100 persons), improving health (41.2 per 100 persons), achieving attractive silhouette (27,8 per 100 persons), relieving stress (26.9 per 100 persons), and spending time with family, friends (20.4 per 100 persons). Villagers' motives are similar to those declared by townspeople. The two first motives were declared more often by villagers than townspeople, while relieving the stress and spending time with family were indicated less often in comparison to townspeople.

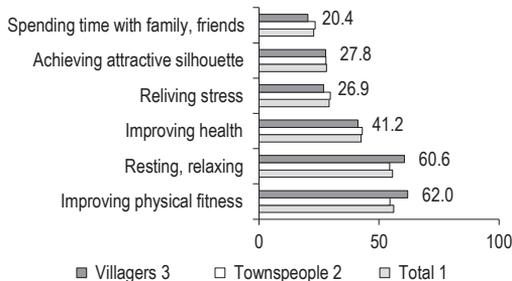


Figure 4. Motives behind undertaking recreational activity by villagers in Poznań Metropolis (per 100 persons)

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

The average time of reaching the site of physical recreation by villagers is usually less than 15 minutes during working days (45.8% of respondents) and during weekends (34.3% of respondents). Every fifth inhabitant indicated up to 30 minutes (23.1%) as the time needed for reaching the site of physical recreation during weekends. The results between surveyed villagers and townspeople are similar (Table 1).

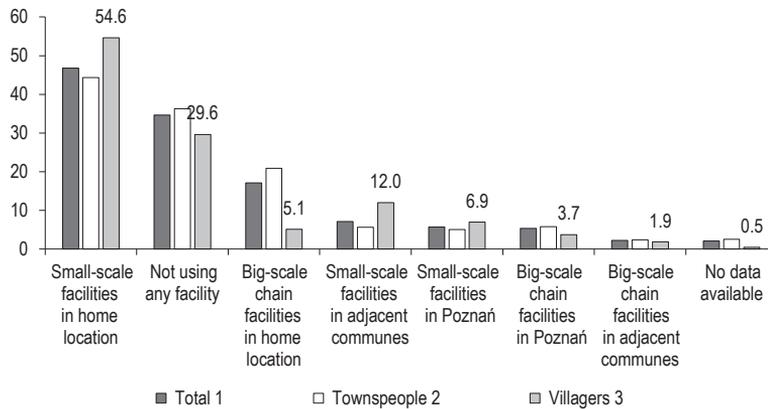
Table 1. The average time of reaching the physical recreation site in opinion of Poznań Metropolis inhabitants (%)

	Total (1)		Townspeople (2)		Villagers (3)	
	working days	weekends	working days	weekends	working days	weekends
Less than 15 min.	48.3	36.1	49.4	37.0	<b>45.8</b>	<b>34.3</b>
About 30 min.	15.3	24.8	15.8	25.2	12.5	23.1
About 45 min.	3.6	6.6	3.3	7.0	4.6	5.6
About 60 min.	0.8	3.0	0.9	3.7	0.5	0.9
Over 60 min.	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.7	0.0	0.0
No data available	32.0	28.9	30.4	26.3	36.6	36.1

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

The opinions of inhabitants of rural and urban areas of Poznań metropolis on the use of sports and recreational facilities in their home location were also examined (Figure 5). Small-scale facilities in their home location are the most often chosen by all of the inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis (46.8 per 100 persons) among whom

inhabitants of rural areas prevail (54.6 per 100 persons). While big-scale chain facilities in their home location are significantly more often chosen by townspeople (20.9 per 100 persons) than villagers.



**Figure 5.** Sports and recreational facilities preferred by villagers in Poznań Metropolis (per 100 persons)

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

On average, inhabitants of rural areas use fitness clubs and gyms in home location 11 times a month, children's playgrounds about 10 times, and skate parks and tennis courts about 7 times a month (Table 2). The results are similar to average frequencies of using sports and recreational infrastructure in home location by all of the inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis. It is noteworthy that villagers less often use grass football fields and outdoor gyms. The respondents living in rural areas did not declare using the following facilities: climbing walls, horseback riding facilities, cycle speedway tracks, ropes courses, golf fields.

**Table 2.** Usage of sports and recreational infrastructure in home location in opinion of Poznań Metropolis inhabitants (per 100 persons)

Type of infrastructure	The total 1	Townspeople 2	Villagers 3
1	2	3	4
Grass football fields	4.30	4.70	2.60
Multifunctional sports fields	3.86	4.06	3.40
Fields for sports requiring small space	2.60	2.00	2.50
Sports and entertainment halls	4.20	4.88	2.22
Gymnasiums	5.40	5.52	4.10
Bowling alleys	1.50	1.62	1.20
Indoor swimming pools	3.90	3.97	3.79
Outdoor swimming pools	2.90	3.00	3.00
Tennis courts	6.20	5.70	7.43
Squash facilities	4.80	4.13	6.67
Climbing walls	1.90	1.90	0.00
Skate parks	6.80	5.75	7.60

	1	2	3	4
Horseback riding facilities		4.00	4.00	0.00
Cycle speedway tracks		0.00	0.00	0.00
Outdoor gyms		4.05	4.14	1.50
Ropes courses		1.60	1.60	0.00
Children's playgrounds		7.91	7.58	9.86
Golf fields		5.50	5.50	0.00
Alpine slides		0.00	0.00	0.00
Ski slopes		2.09	2.33	1.00
Shooting ranges		2.43	2.43	0.00
Watering places		3.04	3.33	2.00
Artificial skating rinks		2.30	2.33	2.00
Riverside hostels		5.40	6.60	2.75
Other		12.52	13.60	8.50

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

Furthermore, one of the interesting issue were Poznań Metropolis villagers' criteria of choosing sports and recreational facilities. For the inhabitants of rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis the most important criteria of choosing a facility are: proximity (78.6 per 100 persons), price (53.8 per 100 persons), convenient communication (42.8 per 100 persons), and quality of services (35.3 per 100 persons). In comparison with the townspeople, for the villagers the proximity and convenient communication are more important.

Analysis of villagers' average monthly expenses connected to physical and recreational activity divided into seasons allows to conclude that in winter (PLN 453.2), spring (PLN 390.8), and autumn (PLN 387.3) they are higher than the expenses of townspeople. Moreover, in spring and autumn the difference between villagers' and townspeople's expenses amounts to PLN 99.0 and in winter to PLN 66.00. While summer expenses of villagers and townspeople are similar and amount to PLN 654.3 and PLN 670.0, respectively.

Opinions of villagers concerning sports and recreational offer in their home location do not differ significantly from the opinions of all the inhabitants of the Poznań Metropolis (Figure 6). Almost a half of villagers (48.3%) thinks that the offer is good and 28% assigned a medium to it.

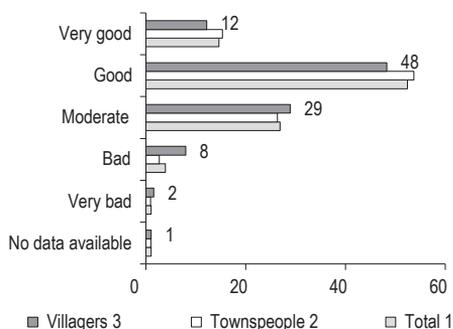


Figure 6. Poznań Metropolis inhabitant's opinion on home location's sports and recreational offer (%)

Source: own survey's study 1: N = 1,584; 2: N = 1,207; 3: N = 377.

## Conclusions

The obtained results enabled recognition of recreational function of rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis and recreational behaviour of their inhabitants as well as determination of the range of actions that would create good conditions for physical activity, improve quality of life in rural areas, and that would facilitate development of business initiatives.

Recreational function of rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis for their inhabitants is very important. Villagers very willingly engage in recreational activity in those areas and are able to reach those sites within 15 minutes.

It can be concluded that physical activity is a part of life of the inhabitants of rural areas of the Poznań Metropolis. Over half of inhabitants (57%) declares undertaking recreational activity. Villagers seem to lead healthy lifestyles and take care of their physical fitness as people aware of the importance of resting and relaxing as well as fitness.

The attractiveness of landscape parks, rural areas, and lakes enables undertaking recreational activities such as hiking and cycling which were indicated more often by villagers than townspeople. However, predilection of villagers for undertaking recreational activity in urban green areas (squares, greens, and parks) and using sports and recreational facilities (fitness clubs, playgrounds, and skate parks) is noteworthy. This can suggest popularisation of urban model of living.

In addition, described recreational behaviour of villagers, the level of expenses on recreation, and proximity declared by most inhabitants as the main criterion of choosing sports and recreational facilities, can serve as pointers on the directions of development of businesses of the physical recreation services sector, e.g. development of infrastructure and active forms of recreation that are willingly used and undertaken by the inhabitants. This can also be the ground for further researches concerning creation of conditions for development of other forms of physical activity.

The benefits of the study can refer to the issues related to the formulation of regional strategies to create conditions for the development of the leisure sector and support local socio-economic initiatives, such as: development of recreational infrastructure, recreation services and sports and leisure activities, which may have an impact on the development of entrepreneurship and job creation.

Development of the sector of recreation in rural areas is a chance for improving the quality of life there, i.e. creating convenient conditions for undertaking recreational activity as well as vocational activation and improving professional competences of the inhabitants. It is also noteworthy that promotion of physical activity and active life style improves health of an individual person but is also beneficial for the entire community.

## Acknowledgement

Project funded as part of specific subsidy for maintaining research capacity from the resources of Ministry of Science and Higher Education 2016 – Metropolitan Region as Space for Recreational Penetration based on Poznań Metropolis in 2015–2016 under supervision of Agata Basińska-Zych, PhD in WSB University in Poznań (decision number 27090/E534/S/2016).

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**Cite this article as:** Holderna-Mielcarek, B., Basińska-Zych, A., Kaiser, A. (2017). Rural metropolitan areas as sites for recreational activity of their inhabitants an example of Poznan agglomeration. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 21–30. DOI: 10.18276/ejasm.2017.23-03.

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYLVAN TOURISM

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RECEIVED 4 May 2017  
ACCEPTED 5 September 2017

JEL CLASSIFICATION L31, Z32

KEYWORDS entrepreneurship, sylvan tourism, tourist attractions, tourist values

ABSTRACT Different forms of leisure activities are being developed in different areas in all regions in Poland. The choice of localities and specific places depends primarily on tourist values and attractions as well as the prices of services. Considering natural and landscape, as well as cultural values, on the other hand, this confirms the belief in the fantastic opportunity and possibilities of having a rest in such areas. Apart from tourist values and attractions, using the offer also depends on the anthropogenic values and attractions. In this case, entrepreneurship, which is the driving force behind the development of tourism and recreation, is very important. On the other hand, it brings a profit to the inhabitants of forest areas buffer zones. Entrepreneurship is where entrepreneurial people (creative, risky, resourceful) live and work. The more there are entrepreneurial people in each area, the more tourists are likely to visit this area, and at the same time their family budget is likely to improve.

## Introduction

In business activity three concepts are usually used: enterprise, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship. The most important economic factor, however, is the entrepreneur (a human factor). The way the business operates depends on it – irrespective whether it is large, medium, small or micro-enterprise. The results of a given entity will also depend on the entrepreneur, that is whether he or she will be entrepreneurial, and to what extent it will find its

fulfillment. In tourism, this is particularly important due to the seasonal character of functioning of most tourist facilities and the development of tourism.

Entrepreneurs should act in an entrepreneurial way, and entrepreneurship in common language is synonymous with such words as resourcefulness, activity and ingenuity. According to A. Gawel the most common business-related key-words are the following: starting, setting up, creating a new company, innovations, new products, new markets, exploring opportunities, risk taking, profit seeking, new resource combinations, management, resource acquisition and value creation (Gawel, 2007). The concept of entrepreneurship today should be understood in a bit broader way, as it should also be associated with such attributes and attitudes as creativity, dynamism, flexibility, the pursuit of growth and tendency to take risk. In Europe, the leading role of business entities as a driving force for economic growth and diversification has been recognized for a long time.

Entrepreneurial behavior depends on the individual characteristics of a person, his or her skills, and mainly the perception of in an objectively complex situation a chance that can bring certain benefits and it also depends on the existing motivation system.

The aim of the study is to present the importance of entrepreneurship in the broadly defined development of sylvan tourism. By observing and discussing with the owners of tourist facilities about the activities of their subjects, the author was convinced that everyone is an entrepreneur, but when it comes to specific achievements, then, in practice, entrepreneurship cannot be seen. The questions concerned mainly entrepreneurship and the decision to develop it, because entrepreneurship is crucial in sylvan tourism, as in other branches of economy. The intensity of tourism, its development, and the preparation of anthropogenic tourist attractions mainly depends on the level of entrepreneurship of entrepreneurs.

To get an idea of the importance of entrepreneurship in business activity, the author carried out a questionnaire survey in May and June 2016. The survey consisted of 22 closed and open questions. Out of fifteen entrepreneurs (in a diagnostic survey), none of them stated that he or she was not very creative and is conducting his or her business activity proportionally at the same level. These were micro-enterprises from Hajnówka country (5 entities), 10 small enterprises from the country of Bielsk Podlaski (6 entities) and 4 entities from Białystok country. They were the entities that specialize in wood processing, forestry, tourism and catering. Only four out of fifteen respondents of selected companies stated that there had been a health determinant as an obstacle to achieving better results. The answer to the question concerning unsatisfactory results of the entity was most often confined itself to place the blame on the state or regional politics or the lack of financial resources. In the research, I also used the analysis of the source literature.

## **Entrepreneurship in the light of the subject literature**

Entrepreneurship is a complex and multifaceted concept. An entrepreneurial attitude has been promoted in society around the world, and thus in Poland, for many years. In the subject literature entrepreneurship is being formulated from different perspectives, mainly as an economic concept, but also as a social and cultural concept. In modern scientific literature, especially in the field of economics, psychology and sociology, many definitions of entrepreneurship can be found. As early as in the thirties of the last century J.A. Schumpeter (1960, p. 104) recognized entrepreneurship as one of the most crucial factors in economic development. The author expresses the view that every entrepreneur is a businessman, but not all businessmen can be entrepreneurs (Bwisa, 2010). The category of entrepreneurship first appeared in the eighteenth century in the works of A. Smith and

J.B. Say (Bratnicki, Strużyna, 2001). According to Say, this is an action perceived from the angle of the role of the entrepreneur, who creates or controls an enterprise, sees opportunities conducive to his or her business and uses them, and is a motive force of economic changes and progress. Entrepreneurship is, in classical terms, primarily connected with innovativeness.

It must be stated that entrepreneurship is a socio-economic category, which is essential in every socio-economic situation, at every stage of economic and civilization development of society. In academic literature, it is emphasized that "entrepreneurship can be characterized as a socially determined process of creating opportunities for creation of wealth and their creative use through using the financial, material and human as well as human and social capital in an innovative way" (Klasik, 2006). According to R.W. Griffin entrepreneurship is a process of planning, organizing and doing business as well as taking the risks associated with it (Griffin, 2014).

Entrepreneurship issues are taken in their research by scientists of various disciplines such as economics, psychology, history of economics, political science and law. It is a common view in the subject literature that the concept of entrepreneurship is not limited to the sphere of business. This is confirmed by P. Drucker, who states that entrepreneurship is not confined only to the economic sphere, although it derives from it, and that there are slight differences between entrepreneurship existing in various spheres (Drucker, 1992).

Entrepreneurship depends on individual characteristics of a person, his or her ability to perceive in a complex objective situation a chance that can produce certain benefits. It also depends on the existing motivation system. T. Kraśnicka claims that cultural factors play a vital role in the development of entrepreneurship such as value and belief systems, entrepreneurial traditions in each area, trust as a cultural asset, family model and family ties, as well as social climate favorable to or not supporting entrepreneurship (Kraśnicka, 2002). Personality traits that facilitate entrepreneurship include:

- ability and readiness to take over the initiative,
- ability to make decisions in the absence of complete information and risk tolerance,
- taking on greater responsibilities and willingness to make even a long-term effort,
- ability to understand the market needs as well as to forecast and anticipate them,
- associating information from different fields,
- ability to manage people, not just in the formal structure, but also to raise enthusiasm and trust.

Entrepreneurship is a specific human attitude towards surrounding world and people, expressing itself in a creative and active pursuit of the improvement of existing states of affairs, in readiness to undertake new activities or to extend existing ones, and the pursuit of achieving complex, usually increased, material gains that lead to perceptible increase in profit (income) and improve living and working conditions (Wiatrak, 2003). The ways of understanding the concept of entrepreneurship affect the field of entrepreneurial activity and show that everyone can perceive entrepreneurship in diverse ways. Entrepreneurship is the opposite of passivity in action as well as expectation and apathy in tricky situations. Nowadays, entrepreneurship is conditioned by the economic growth and development as well as the well-being of societies.

J. Waśkiewicz defines entrepreneurship as a specific mindset, human attitude to themselves and the surrounding world. It is also preferred way of thinking that reflects someone's feelings on a given subject. These are also human competences and capabilities in given circumstances (Waśkiewicz, 2015). In turn, F. Kapusta defines entrepreneurship as a set of human traits, which consists in the tendency to undertake new actions, to improve

the existing elements of the environment and to have an active a creative active attitude to the surrounding reality (Kapusta, 2006).

To conclude, it is possible to accept that the richness of the interpretation of the notion of entrepreneurship manifests itself in the possibility of considering it as:

- characteristics – a set of behaviors that aim to create and implement projects aimed at achieving the intended goal with risk reduction,
- a process to create something new and valuable, with the assumption of financial risk, but also with the assumption of monetary compensation or personal satisfaction,
- the kind of human factor activity – entrepreneurship is a specific kind of human activity, where people act individually or within an organization, using emerging opportunities, by implementing projects (introducing innovations, creating new organizations or renewal of those who exist) that bring economic and non-economic effects to their entities and surroundings.

Entrepreneurship is particularly desirable in the development of sylvan tourism due to the natural values of forest areas and their attractiveness.

### **The realization of entrepreneurship in the development of sylvan tourism**

Entrepreneurship is the foundation of economic development. It is the pursuit of continuous change and improvement of production, services, commerce and consumption, creating new, better opportunities to meet the needs and functioning of tourism operators. It can be defined as all activities and ventures related to the pursuit of profit and taking a risk, the essence of which is producing, offering, delivering and selling products and services deemed to be beneficial to meeting the needs and contributing to the functioning of tourism industry. Entrepreneurship is not mainly about maximizing the benefits of the use of what already exists, but the essence of it is rather the creation of something new or innovative.

One very attractive and unique way of practicing tourism, which is distinguished for its destination, is tourism in forest areas. It is called sylvan tourism or sylvan tourism. This is mainly due to the environment it is organized. These are the areas where flora and fauna exists, there are some by-products, apart from wood, and there is friendly microclimate. Despite these conditions there is still some interest in recreation in such areas among various social and occupational groups. Forest areas are a desirable location for cultivating diverse types and forms of tourism (Gaworecki, 2010), but the most salient form is sylvan tourism (Michałowski, Łagowska, 2010, pp. 126–130). Sylvan tourism is also referred to as forest tourism based on forestry-recreational infrastructure, organized in forest areas, mostly by foresters themselves ([www.maskulinskie.bialystok.lasy.gov.pl/.../-/asset...-/pop\\_up?\\_](http://www.maskulinskie.bialystok.lasy.gov.pl/.../-/asset...-/pop_up?_)).

The development of sylvan tourism creates opportunities for economic activation of many economic units as well as areas with particularly high afforestation. It is usually organized in free time, and it is an important form of rest that prevents the development of civilization diseases as well as it has its role in counteracting stressful situations characteristic of modern civilization (Muszyńska, 2000). Sylvan tourism fulfills various functions because of links between tourism and the reality in which it functions and develops. Entrepreneurship skills and creativity are essential to its organization. A critical issue in the development of entrepreneurship in tourism is the identification of the elements that stimulate it, as well as those that inhibit it. To this end, several factors can be identified that affect entrepreneurship, including:

- the intellectual potential of an individual/individuals,
- the possibility of financial support before and during activity,
- the proper selection of management as well as service and administrative staff,
- favorable policies self-government or local authorities in terms of entrepreneurship,
- competence of inhabitants living in forest lands.

Significant factors have been identified, which largely determine the development of entrepreneurship in all types of activity. In addition to these factors, there are also barriers that can make it difficult. However, the most important of these is the access to startup capital. A significant impediment in undertaking new business is also the lack of appropriate knowledge and competence necessary to carry out properly innovative investments. Acquiring knowledge and using it in practice is a big expense for the owners of the entities. This since when taking new initiatives, it is difficult to estimate risk. The effects of a project are usually spread over time, and after spending some cash, it is often observed success or failure of the entrepreneur.

From the viewpoint of the recipient, in tourist activity the most important are tourist values and attractions. It depends on them whether the customer will take advantage of the offer. While natural values and attractions are most commonly known to those seeking to take advantage of an offer, anthropogenic values and attractions can be made upgraded every season or every year. That is why every entrepreneur who waits for the purchase of his or her product or service should progressively upgrade it. In this aspect advice can be very helpful, which should not be avoided. Tourist customers using the product or service, in addition to attractions, most often expect:

- satisfactory living conditions, proportional to the price,
- ecological food products that are skillfully prepared,
- friendly atmosphere and sociable service provider,
- friendly service and varied environment in terms of nature, culture and landscape.

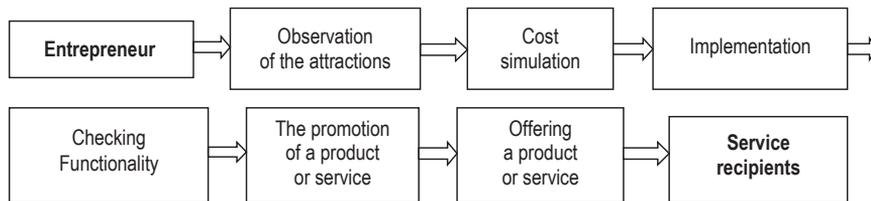
To meet such expectations every customer expects an enterprising service provider who is committed to meeting the needs of his or her customers. This applies to facilities located in or near forest areas such as hotels, motels, guest houses, camp sites, agritourism farms, inns, hostels, travel agencies or transport companies.

Deciding on actions to improve the competitiveness of enterprises requires the adequate knowledge, experience and abilities, which owners of business entities often not absolutely have. That is why they often declare bankruptcy, dismissing employees and not subsidizing local government budgets or creating other business entities, often less competitive and profitable. Therefore, building mechanisms of supporting the development of entrepreneurship in tourism activities in forest areas becomes something that is needed or perhaps absolute necessity.

In Poland, there are many towns and places where anthropogenic attractions could be created, which would enable visitors to spend their leisure time (Jalinik, 2016). The most interesting ones could be:

- rope parks using forest tree stand,
- recreational paths with several stations, located in forest areas, e. g. balance beams, bars and ropes to pull-up, swings, parallel bars, chess fields, tables for table tennis and others,
- bowling alleys,
- gondola gullies in surface waters of forest areas,
- the organization of recreational events such as roller skating, ball games, biking, crossing a river or a basin on a rope in a hilly or mountainous area.

These are exemplary proposals, and after putting them into practice it is highly probable that forest areas will be transformed into attractive sports and recreational areas. To create them it is needed to be an entrepreneurial person and open to changes. How to do it and where to learn it? This is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The process of creating attractions in forest areas

Source: own study.

To create an attraction someone should be a creative person who first analyzes and observes the planned attraction (in its site, in drawing, on a website) and then proceeds to accomplish it by performing all the steps shown in the figure. Well-prepared anthropogenic attraction arouses great interest of service recipients and it should be assumed that the profit of the business will be proportionate.

### Conditions for entrepreneurship in forest areas

Entrepreneurship is a feature of personality and action that can be learned in the process of scientific and social education. The essence of entrepreneurship in a market economy is the gathering and redistribution of manufacturing factors into business environment, under the uncertainty and risk, to make a profit. The ways of understanding an entrepreneur and entrepreneurship define the area of entrepreneurial activity and make everyone perceive entrepreneurship and entrepreneur from another point of view. The economist sees the entrepreneur as an innovator who combines work, capital, resources and knowledge to gain or increase previously held value, the forester notices the internal need to use forest areas for tourism and leisure purposes. The development of entrepreneurship in forest areas should bring social and economic benefits to the local communities. The development and functioning of tourism in forest areas should involve economic functions such as commerce, catering, accommodation and transport. And local authorities should create conditions and encourage for the development of entrepreneurship.

The environment in which entrepreneurship is triggered is the market. Entrepreneurs not only adapt their activities to market conditions, but they actively shape them, creating new links between market participants. The desired ways behavior includes: innovation, responding to challenges, willingness to take a risk, thinking through the prism of recognized competitive conditions, as well as responsibility for the consequences of decisions taken and the dynamics of action.

The manifestation of the development of entrepreneurship is the broadly understood competitiveness between economic entities. Hence, it is necessary to change the attitudes of entrepreneurs and to open to cooperation with other entrepreneurs or to benefit from broadly understood advice. In case of the appearance of barriers the reason may be too low level of initial education, often referred to as one of the reasons for the development of entrepreneurship in tourist entities. Considerable influence on the development of entrepreneurship may have

qualified staff and a specialized training system. Tourist service providers should be interested in entrepreneurship related to the diverse types and forms of tourism and recreation.

Conditions for the development of entrepreneurship are accurately defined by K. Krajewski, who thinks that entrepreneurship is the result of individual traits of people (talents, skills, energy, imagination, common sense, and willingness to take a risk) and socio-economic characteristics generated in their environment (resource availability, local economic traditions, social absorption capacity of business initiatives, socio-economic policies, and local climate around business activities) (Krajewski, 2002).

The experience of people who have gained (or lost) a fortune because of their entrepreneurial activity can be a subject of fascinating stories, but even more comes from the fact that entrepreneurship plays a vital role in our society and tourist economy (Griffin, 2014).

The manifestation of entrepreneurial attitudes is dependent on the existence of certain objective and subjective conditions. According to J. Sikora (2012, p. 58) objective conditions belong to so-called external conditions, which should provide freedom of choice. In such conditions, everyone can influence his or her own situation and development. Such objective conditions include: market economy, stable legal regulations, economic, tax and credit properties, economic equilibrium, economic autonomy of business entities as well as their diversity and organizational culture. In turn, according to the author, subjective conditions include: know-how, qualifications and motifs, as well as personal qualities, including courage, energy, willingness to risk, diligence, intelligence, ability to cooperate with people, solidarity, honesty, ability to learn and adapt to changing conditions, ability to predict, easiness in communication with other people, determination and persistence, optimism, and the need for achievement.

## Conclusions

Forest management is governed by several regularities and rules. It is a mechanism whose function is constantly influenced by several factors. Forest areas are a desirable destination for tourism (sylvan tourism) because of their calmness, the lack of pollution and noise, but its success depends on tourist infrastructure and the creativity of the originator. It is also worth remembering that one of the basic determinants of its development is the state policy. Every time it can be said that politicians are shaping the stage where entrepreneurs operate (bans and orders). Polish economy, as it is known, is based on market mechanisms. Hence, it is extremely important to make changes to determine the optimal direction for the further development of the tourism industry. Entrepreneurship raises competitiveness and where there is a large group of enterprising people, there is, in financial terms, a better place for people to live.

In addition, entrepreneurship produces uneconomical effects in the form of changing the consciousness of the inhabitants of adjacent villages. Based on the discussion with the owners of the surveyed entities every one of them considers himself or herself as an entrepreneur, but when it comes to concrete achievements, then entrepreneurship is practically imperceptible. Therefore, the development of entrepreneurship requires broad interdisciplinary knowledge and considerable skills that are still low among the rural population.

This is especially important in tourism activity in forest areas due to the seasonal nature of its many products and its place (unpolluted environment). If a customer has not been satisfied with the purchase of a product in each year, then he or she will not certainly use the same product and the place of its purchase for some years.

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**Cite this article as:** Jalinik, M. (2017). Entrepreneurship in the development of sylvan tourism. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 31–38. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2017.23-04.

# SPECIALIZATION IN AGRITOURISM

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RECEIVED

5 May 2017

ACCEPTED

29 June 2017

JEL

CLASSIFICATION

Z32, L26

KEYWORDS

specialization, agritourism, agritourist farms, theme villages

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to analyze the types of specialization of agritourism farms in Poland in the selected Polish literature and examples, which can lead to increased competitiveness. Agritourism itself signifies some kind of specialization. The choice of specialization made by the owners of agritourist farms depends on a variety of factors. The chosen specialty brings them specific benefits. It is also possible to observe specialization of villages, which is the basis of creating tourism products. At present, not only individual sites, but also whole villages are turning towards specialization. The specialization of whole villages, where apart from the offers of individual agritourist farms, tourists will receive something more – events of specific character, referring to the specialization theme.

The article has the character of a theoretical review and may encourage further research and scientific deliberations. It presents an analysis of agritourist farms specialization in Poland. The authors identify specializations of these farms, which may become development stimulation factors. The method used in the work was literature and content analysis.

## Introduction

Agritourism is not a new activity in rural areas, has been recognized around the world since the beginning of the 20th century (Gil Arroyo et al., 2013). It is a form of tourism which is rapidly developing in these areas. In Poland, this kind of activity is run by over 8,000 farms, offering 84,500 beds (*Rolnictwo i obszary wiejskie*, 2015). Currently, agritourism has become a broad concept, because apart from ordinary recreation, it comprises a range of other

accompanying services, differentiating it from other forms of tourism. Agritourist farms are beginning to specialize, which allows the farmers to achieve satisfactory quality and enables them to use the potential of their farms and family members (Karbowski, 2014).

The aim of the article is to analyze the types of specialization of agritourism farms in Poland in the selected Polish literature and examples. This process in agritourism is just beginning, but undertaking these actions shows that there is a change in the approach to the competitiveness of this form of tourism.

## Literature review

In most definitions it is defined that agritourism must be held on the farm (Barbieri, Mshenga, 2008; Majewski, Lane, 2003; Sikora, 1999). Zelenka and Pásková (2012), Zelenka et al. (2014), Šimková et al. (2015) specify that activity allow effectively manage tourism development in order it is in line with natural resource limits their recovery time, while it is still beneficial to tourists, local community and the environment. Specialization is defined as the emergence of certain domains, a more precise division of work and functions, or as developing a skill, expertise in an individual field, or pursuing a particular line of work (Grądział, 2014).

As regards the development of specialization on the international scale (trade between countries), traditional economic theories attach great importance to the existence of absolute and comparative advantages, as well as the benefits of synergy, which lead to sector concentration in individual countries (Ochojski, Polko, Churski, Kopczewska, 2016). The explanation of this phenomenon was based on the assumptions of the main theoretical trends in economics, including the classical, neoclassical, Keynesian and development economics, or the endogenous growth theory. With time the problems of specialization started to be considered and interpreted from the micro-economic angle of an individual company and its environment (Kopczewska, Churski, Ochojski, Polko, 2016).

Specialization is a process as a result of which an enterprise, region or country focuses on certain goods and at the same time ceases to produce other commodities; it is also understood as a result of such a process (Bremond, Couet, Salort, 2005). Narrow specialization, as well as the quality of service, stable relations with clients and the innovative character of products or services, increases the chances of winning competition (Skalik, 2005). The growing competition among economic entities functioning on the market has generated the need for specialization of offers.

Specialization is also perceived on the agritourist services market as an effect of the rapid development of this activity in rural areas. Despite the fact that Polish countryside with its landscape, rituals and customs is a product in itself; organizers of recreation in the country look for assets of the natural and cultural environment which will make their offer exceptional, unique and thus – more attractive to tourists (Jęczyńsk, Maćkowiak, Uglis, 2014).

Agritourism development in Poland has become an inherent element of the growth of rural areas. This form of tourism adjusts to the tourists' needs, and satisfying them makes it possible to gain an additional source of income and the upper hand in the competition with those farms which do not offer other services except accommodation and board. Specialization allows farmers to use the potential of their farm and family members, as well as achieve a satisfactory quality level. Facing the large supply of agritourist farms, they must offer something special to win their own clients. These activities will include not only raising the standard of accommodation, but first of all searching for attractions which could be offered to an agritourist by the farm itself or its vicinity (Jęczyńsk, Bogusz, 2017).

Žlábková (2017) deals with the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy. She describes the socio-economic situation in the Czech Republic are evaluated indicators measure of support to tourism.

Due to agritourist activity specialization, owners of agritourist farms are able to (Srebro, Majewski, Mikołajewicz, 2009):

- more effectively match their offer to the expectations of specific categories of clients, thus the tourist is more satisfied with their stay at the farm, which enhances the image of the whole offer,
- reach clients through specialist communication channels more easily,
- run more effective and less costly marketing by creating specially prepared packages for specific target groups,
- make their offer more competitive than the general offer,
- make a more extended offer automatically more expensive.

The main purpose of agritourist farm specialization is to increase the number of clients or/and their expenditure. Therefore, it should begin as early as the stage of creating the product, which involves providing high quality services as regards accommodation, board, tourist attractions, suitable infrastructure and service. The product on offer should guarantee high standard, as well as meet the client's expectations and needs.

Those interested in specialist products expect offers with distinctive, specific features. Specialization improves the competitiveness of the farm on the market, and helps to prolong the tourist season (Kmita-Dziasek, 2011).

## Method

The article has the character of a theoretical review and may encourage further research and scientific deliberations. It presents an analysis of agritourist farms specialization in Poland in the selected Polish literature. The authors identify specializations of these farms, which may become development stimulation factors.

The method used in the work was literature analysis and content analysis. The authors reviewed the available publications concerning specialization and its role in running an agritourism business, as well as analysed online agritourist offers.

## Results

The issue of agritourist farm specialization, which may develop in different directions, has been discussed by various authors.

Agritourism itself signifies some kind of specialization (Majewski, 2001). Its particular features make it different from other types of tourism in rural areas:

- it is limited to agricultural areas,
- it is strictly connected with a farm (animal, fish or horticultural one),
- it uses villagers' residential and farm buildings for accommodation purposes,
- it is characterized by active recreation in the natural environment of the farm.

This form of tourism is immanently connected with the farm and the rural area. Agritourism involves resting in a farmer's house, on an active farm, where it is possible not only to sleep, eat meals prepared from local products, take part in field and farm work, observe animal breeding and plant growing (which is a major attraction), but also do recreational activities on and outside the farm (Jęczmyk, Uglis, 2014).

Jalinik (2007) proposed a typology of agritourist farms, where he presents different types according to their specificity and approach to the client, paying attention to the relationship between the quality of services, price level, the tourist attractiveness and quality of the natural environment and the demand for tourist services. He identifies seven types of agritourist farms, including four general and three specialist ones. The general types include (Jalinik, 2009a):

- type U – universal, i.e. adjusted to the needs of many tourists,
- type C – for families with young children,
- type D – an offer for disabled people, especially those with mobility impairment,
- type E – an offer for the elderly.

The specialized farms include the following (Jalinik, 2009b):

- type I sr – with developed sports and recreational infrastructure,
- type II lh – with good living and housing conditions,
- type III sp – specialist farms, organizing handicraft, horse riding, apitherapy, phytotherapy and other workshops.

Smoleńska and Machnik (2013) analyse agritourist farms specialization with reference to individual and group tourism (Table 1), attracting different types of tourists.

**Table 1.** Tourists staying on agritourist farms

Individual tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– independent youth and students (15–25)</li> <li>– young independent adults, with no family (25–45)</li> <li>– families with children aged 6–15</li> <li>– adults up to 60 years of age</li> <li>– elderly people (60–75 years of age)</li> </ul>
Group tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– educational groups, mainly children and youth</li> <li>– hobby groups with special interests</li> <li>– young people’s organizations and sport associations</li> </ul>

Source: Smoleńska, Machnik (2013), p. 134.

A kind of specialization is categorization in agritourism, which plays a very important role in raising service quality. It is voluntary, implemented by the Polish Federation of Rural Tourism – “Hospitable Farms”. A farm may be given one out of three ranks (1, 2 or 3 “little suns”) in two categories: “Recreation in the country” and “Recreation at a farmer’s place”. However, in order to be specialized in the “Recreation at a farmer’s place” category, the farmstead must meet additional criteria, specific of the agricultural farm. The “Hospitable Farms” website recommends 1,257 categorized facilities (<http://www.agroturystyka.pl>, 4.03.2017).

The same website presents special offers (<http://www.agroturystyka.pl>, 4.03.2017):

- a rural tourism hit: an offer including 33 tourism products which are to be associated with high standard and quality of service, as well as an interesting, extremely varied tourist offer,
- at a farmer’s house: 33 facilities,
- for a mushroom picker: 16 facilities,
- a room in an eco-farmer’s house: 76 facilities,
- for a fisher: 10 facilities,
- horse riding: 8 facilities,
- for families with children: 24 facilities.

The proposed domains of specialization are a symptom of the changing approach to the competitiveness of the rural accommodation infrastructure. It is not only the sale of agritourist services anymore (mostly accommodation services), but the sale of a full specialist tourist product.

An example of using specialization in agritourism are educational farms, which are also a very good example of innovative entrepreneurship in rural areas. The essence of educational farms lies in familiarizing the society with the natural environment of a farm in the countryside, conveying knowledge about the origins of food, the effort put into producing it and the significance of agriculture, in order to create a growing group of conscious clients on the market (Bogusz, Kmita-Dziasek, 2015). The Polish Network of Educational Farms website presents 223 educational farms (<http://www.zagroda-edukacyjna.pl>, 4.03.2017).

We may also observe specialization of whole villages, where apart from the offers of individual agritourist farms, tourists will receive something more – events of specific character, referring to the specialization theme.

A theme village differs from other forms of countryside specialization in that its specialization fits an economy based on knowledge, experience and creativity, as well as is created on the basis of new development factors, usually non-material and emotional (Idziak, 2008). The theme should be based on the local material and non-material resources (e.g. cultural and natural heritage), as well as be complementary to the local specificity (e.g. the inhabitants' passions and skills) (Idziak, Idziak, Kamiński, 2015).

The result of theme specialization is the appearance of theme parks, museums, exhibitions, restaurants, shops, as well as cities or their districts, villages and farms. In Poland, there are 63 theme villages (Kloczko-Gajewska, 2015), most popularly (15) found in the Warmia – Mazury Province. Examples of theme villages in Poland are: Sierakowo Sławieńskie – Hobbits' Village, Krzywogoniec – Mushroom Villages, or Stare Jabłonki – the Village of Apple Tastes.

## Conclusions

The analysis above shows that agritourist farms can specialize based on different factors. They may be special offers for specific tourist groups, or offers of specific infrastructure and recreation facilities, which might satisfy tourists' needs. At present, not only individual sites, but also whole villages are turning towards specialization.

Specialization is not a common feature of Polish agritourism, though there are products which may be described as special. This trend matches tourists' expectations.

Authors in this article represent the approaches to classification of agrotourism farms, which are available in the Polish literature, but this topic need wider literature studies and research among owners of agritourism farms.

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**Cite this article as:** Jęczmyk, A., Hedvičáková, M. (2017). Specialization in agritourism. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 39–44. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2017.23-05.

# ASTRO-TOURISM IN THE AREA OF THE POLISH-SLOVAK BORDERLAND AS AN INNOVATIVE FORM OF RURAL TOURISM

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RECEIVED 5 May 2017  
ACCEPTED 1 September 2017

JEL  
CLASSIFICATION L83, Q26, R11

KEYWORDS astro-tourism, rural areas, dark (starry) sky park

ABSTRACT Astro-tourism is a new, niche trend in tourism, and its destination places are supposed to be free of the so-called artificial light pollution. The article presents examples and compares the activities offered by Dark Sky Parks and individual facilities providing services in the field of astro-tourism located on the Polish-Slovak borderland as an innovative offer of tourism in rural areas.

The analysis covered selected rural areas of Slovak Poloniny and Polish Bieszczady Mountains which, being free from excessive anthropogenic effects, are ideal for conducting astronomical observations, particularly at night.

## Introduction

A negative phenomenon of polluting the sky with artificial light makes that in many places in the world observations of the starry night sky become difficult or even impossible. This applies particularly to urban areas and their immediate surroundings (Collison, Poe, 2013).

The night, star-studded sky which inspired people for ages has now been almost completely forgotten. In the increasingly light polluted environment it is no longer possible to observe the Milky Way, comets or some fainter stars. The Polish-Slovak-Ukrainian borderland is one of those areas in Europe where the night sky is still starry and thus creates an attraction for many people. This is a huge potential of this region, however, starry sky alone is not enough. It requires promotion and the employment of a series of measures to facilitate this encounter with the dark sky. These include such actions as preparation of appropriate infrastructure for the sky observations, tourist personnel training, education in the protection of the dark sky and actions aimed at preserving the natural state of the environment (*Szkolne Schronisko...*).

### **Astro-tourism as an innovative form of tourism**

Astronomy-related tourism can be divided into four main types. The first one is connected with cultural and sightseeing tourism. It involves visiting facilities related to astronomy: planetariums, observatories, museums and others that relate to the development of this field of science, e.g. to the history of space exploration or the life and work of famous astronomers and astronauts. The second type of astro-tourism involves travelling to places where there is opportunity to observe ephemeral astronomical phenomena (like auroras, solar and lunar eclipses, comets and meteor showers). Since some of them, like auroras and eclipses are visible only in certain areas of the globe, tourists interested in this type of attractions have to find offers prepared by professional organizers. The third type of astro-tourism is visiting the areas with clear, dark sky. This is a new trend of tourism, and its genesis is associated with the phenomenon called light pollution. Areas in which it is possible to observe the sky free from light pollution represent the areas of dark sky protection. The fourth type of astro-tourism are cosmic space travels (Iwanicki, n.d.).

Iwanicki (2013) divides those who benefit from astro-tourism offer into three main groups. The first and possibly the largest group are school-age and pre-school children. Organized trips to places related to astronomy (screenings in the planetarium, visiting observatories, meteorites exhibitions) are an attractive complement to the educational process in the field of geography, physics and astronomy. At the same time children and youth visits to such places have also a positive influence on environmental education and on shaping their future interests.

Another group are nature lovers, frequently travelling armed with binoculars and telescopes with which they observe and photograph animals, plants or various landscapes. For this group the opportunity to see the starry sky – which is often different from what they see in their place of residence – can be an attraction on a par with other elements of nature.

The third group are enthusiasts who take interest in astronomy on an every day basis. As a rule, they have their own observation equipment (often very expensive), with which they travel, and what they want while observing is a transparent and free of light pollution sky (Iwanicki, 2013).

There can be also be distinguished a fourth group among the astro-tourists. Namely those who coincidentally, on the occasion of practising other forms of tourism found the offer of astronomical observations and take advantage of it.

### **The dark (starry) sky parks as innovative tourism products**

The key facilities in the development of astro-tourism are the so-called dark sky parks, or starry sky parks. These parks' objective is to protect the starry sky from the pollution by artificial light produced by human civilization

and to inform local communities and tourists about the problem which the excess and improper lighting poses for nature and people. Furthermore, the creation and operation of such areas is aimed at the developing astro-tourism.

The idea of protecting dark skies arose in the 90s of the twentieth century. The first area protecting the dark sky was established in 1993 in Hudson Lake State Recreation Area (State Hudson Lake Recreation Area) in the state of Michigan in the United States, and the first dark-sky park was created in the Canadian Reserve Torrance Barrens in 1999. Within several years a lot of dark-sky parks have been created. They are located mainly in Canada, the United States and Europe (Rapavý, Begeni, 2011). The main postulate for the creation of the parks was the claim that the landscape of a night sky should be regarded as the same asset protected by the law as mountain, marsh, peat bog landscapes, especially at a time when the original dark sky in Western countries is very rare (Iwanicki, 2013).

In Poland, and also in Europe, the first dark-sky park, created from the ground up and with astro-tourism in mind, was established in 2009 in the Jizera Mountains, as part of the Astro Jizera project. The Jizera Dark-Sky Park, with an area of 75 km<sup>2</sup>, is also the world's first cross-border park of this kind. The attractions awaiting tourists in the Jizera DSP include simple astronomical instruments and a hiking trail (4.5 km long) designed to represent the solar system in a scale of 1 : 1,000,000,000 (Iwanicki, 2013).

## Materials and methodology

This article is descriptive. Its purpose is to present the possibilities of developing an innovative tourist offer in the outlying rural areas. This offer can become astronomical tourism, which is becoming increasingly popular. Existing solutions to the use of the dark sky in the development of tourism in rural areas are shown in the examples of two dark sky parks – in the Bieszczady Mountains in Poland and in Polonina in Slovakia. At the same time, the analysis offers the possibility to compare the astro-tourist offer in Poland and Slovakia.

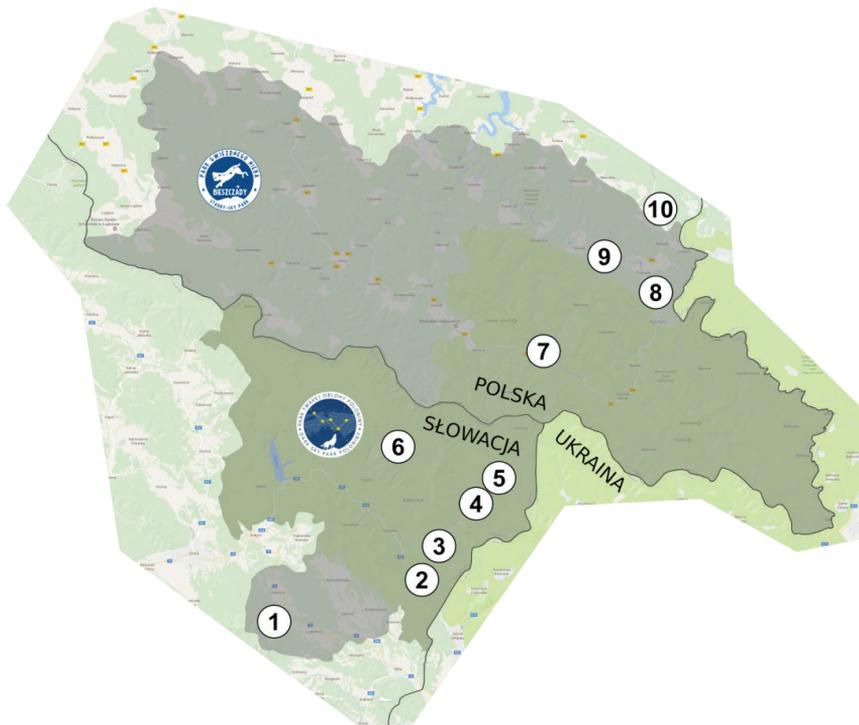
The study was based on an the analysis of available literature, websites (*Gwiezdne Bieszczady*; *Slovenský Zväz Astronómov*; *Park tmavej oblohy Poloniny*), field observations and data from the observatory in Kolonica and the partners of *Bieszczady Starry Sky Park*.

## Results

On the Polish-Slovak borderland there are two dark sky parks – *Bieszczady Starry Sky Park* and *Poloniny Dark Sky Park* (Figure 1). As mentioned earlier, the two parks were established in order to protect the areas from growing artificial light pollution, to educate residents and tourists on good forms of lightning and to develop tourism based on astronomical observations.

Both in Poland and Slovakia, there are no regulations that specify the functioning of the dark sky parks (Bury, 2014), which entails that any such sites can be established only through local agreements between particular, mostly local institutions (Iwanicki, 2013).

*Poloniny Dark Sky Park* (further referred to as *Poloniny DSP*) was created as the Slovakia's first, and Europe's fourth area of this type (Kołomański, n.d.). It covers 48,519 ha and is located mainly within the Poloniny National Park and its buffer zone (Rapavý, Begeni, 2011). The park encompasses 15 villages where the average population density does not exceed 7 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.



Map legend: 1. Observatory in Kolonické sedlo, 2. Ulič, 3. Uličské krivé, 4. Zboj, 5. Nová Sedlica, 6. Runina, 7. Brzegi Górne, 8. Stuposiany, 9. Dwernik, 10. Lutowiska.

**Figure 1.** *Bieszczady* Starry Sky Park and *Poloniny* Dark Sky Park on the Polish-Slovak borderland

Source: own work based on: <https://www.google.pl/maps>; <http://www.gwiezdnebieszczady.pl/granice-parku>; <http://poloniny.svetelneznecistenie.sk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/DSP1.png>.

The main facility within the *Poloniny* DSP is astronomical observatory in Kolonica (and precisely on Kolonické sedlo) opened in 1999. It is also the park's information centre and the only institutional unit in the area that propagates astronomy and astro-tourism and annually organizes several cyclical, thematic events:

1. *Astrostáž Variable* – the event organized in July since 2006, the aim of which is to improve the observation skills, especially among young astronomy lovers from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine.
2. *Perseids* – the event organized since 2005 in the first half of August in the village of Runina with the intention to observe the Perseids shower.
3. *Astrobikers* – the event that combines a passion for astronomy with bike rallies in the area of Vihorlat and Bukovské vrchy. It is organised since 2007 in the month of July.
4. *Kolos* – international scientific conference, organized periodically in December since 2004.
5. *Kolofota* – astro-photography seminar, organized since 2005 in the months of March or April.
6. *Spring Astronomy Day* – held in Ulič in April or May.

In 2016, the observatory in Kolonica was visited by around 7 thousand people, which undoubtedly shows a great interest in astronomy and is the reason for expanding further this service and astro-tourism events.

What is more, astronomical facilities in the area of *Poloniny* DSP include (Figure 1):

1. "Under the Dark Sky" Educational Path (the village of Nová Sedlica) – the route running around 1.2 km displays five main information boards about light pollution and the need to protect the night environment. Additionally, tourists can test their environmental knowledge in a quiz on the boards.
2. "Memorial to the Victims of Light Pollution" (the village of Zboj) – six boards informing about the degree of light pollution and its negative impact on the fauna and flora and humans.
3. Knyahinya Meteorite (the village of Zboj), a European rarity located adjacent to the above-mentioned memorial to the victims of light pollution. It is a replica of a meteor (scale 1: 2), which in 1866 broke up into pieces, partly in the vicinity of the village Zboj. The largest portion fell to the place called "Čorni mlaky" (now Ukraine, but historically the area of the village Zboj) with the crater (Begeni, Rapavý, 2016).
4. The 49<sup>th</sup> parallel north (the village of Uličské krivé) – the information board presenting selected places in the world through which runs the parallel.
5. The Information board "*Asteroid Poloniny*" and a model asteroid (the village of Ulič) – the board contains general information about asteroids and the asteroid "Poloniny".
6. "Doors to Poloniny" (the village of Ulič) – a project which promotes the Poloniny National Park and the Dark Sky Park.
7. Starina water reservoir – an information board presenting the problem of light pollution and its effects on the human body, flora and fauna.

*Bieszczady* Starry Sky Park (further referred to as *Bieszczady* SSP) was created in 2013. Its creation was a response to the Slovak initiative of establishing the *Poloniny* DSP. The park area covers 113,846 ha (the second largest park of this kind in Europe) and includes the *Bieszczady* National Park and two landscape parks: San Valley Landscape Park and Cisna-Wetlina Landscape Park. This is the second dark sky park in Poland.

Astro-tourism lovers in the park can find here the following attractions (Figure 1):

1. Natural starry sky: thousands of stars, zodiacal light, Gegenschein, "airglow" and comets, meteor showers, and sometimes even the aurora borealis; the possibility of observing the spots and other phenomena on the solar disk.
2. Information Centre of the *Bieszczady* SSP in Stuposiany, commune Lutowiska (the building of the School Youth Hostel). The Centre serves to promote the information about the objectives and activities of the *Bieszczady* SSP and is a venue for presentations and astronomical displays. The Centre is equipped with professional telescopes to conduct day and night observations, the room is equipped with multimedia and dozens of tables with photographs related to astronomy. In addition, the Centre's offer includes organization of presentations, displays, observations, lectures and astro camps.
3. Observation terraces – sites prepared for astronomical observations using one's own equipment are located in: Lutowiska (scenic point), Stuposiany (at the School Youth Hostel) and in Brzegi Górne (parking lot at the Przełęcz Wyżna). With the terraces there are information boards about astronomy and sky maps as well as horizontal sundials.
4. Sundials of different design, three painted analemmatic sundials by the observation platforms, one horizontal stone sundial in a parking lot at the church in Lutowiska and one armillary sphere at the School Complex in Lutowiska.

5. "Holidays under the stars". Summer holiday astronomical displays led by an astronomer, with professional equipment available on site to observe the night sky. At the beginning of each demonstration there is a multimedia-based lecture about the leading topic of display. The displays start at 22h every clear night and are held under the open sky in one of the observation points: Przełęcz Wyżna or Dwernik. The choice of location depends on weather conditions.

Astro-tourism in Bieszczady has been enlisted on the European Route of the Starry Sky – EU Skyroute. The south-eastern corner of Poland is promoted as one of the seven most attractive places in Europe with astro-tourism offer (*EU Sky Route...*, n.d.).

Both parks are located in rural areas, located peripherally in relation to the large urban centres. The network of agritourism farms is well developed only in the eastern part of the Polish Beskid Mountains, where around 250 agritourism farms can be located (Mitura, Buczek-Kowalik, 2016). Within the Slovak mountain region of Poloniny agritourism is practically non-existent. Seasonally, accommodation is offered there in several farms in the villages of Kolonica, Runina, Ulič and Nova Sedlica and astronomical observation lovers can sleep mainly in tents, for which the park designated 6 camping places.

Some of the agritourism farms in the commune Lutowska have started to cooperate with the *Bieszczady SSP* and added to their tourism offer astronomical observations. These are:

1. Agritourism farm "U Lestka" in Dwernik – observations of the night sky (the farm is equipped with its own telescope).
2. Dolistowie in Dwernik – observations of the night sky (the farm is equipped with their own telescopes), workshops in landscape and night photography "Bieszczady day and night" (outdoor photography and astronomical workshops).
3. The lodge "Magoda" in Lutowska – the stars observation in offer (displays and workshops).
4. The guest house Rusinowa Polana in Dwernik – workshops and astronomical displays.

## Conclusions

In rural areas, free of light pollution, astro-tourism may constitute an attractive form of leisure activity and exploration. Agritourism farms, especially those located in remote areas can enrich their offer with the observations of the night sky, observations of the Sun or workshops in astro-photography.

Astro-tourism-related observations are an innovative tourism product and this type of product is offered only by individual agritourism farms, all within Polish territory. In Slovakia astro-tourism is developed primarily by way of planetariums and observatories.

The Polish-Slovak borderland, with the existing dark (starry) sky parks, is a suitable area for the creation of cross-border astro-tourism products. The only thing it requires is the development of agri-tourism infrastructure (accommodation and catering) in Slovakia.

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**Cite this article as:** Mitura, T., Bury, R., Begeni, P., Kudzej, I. (2017). Astro-tourism in the area of the Polish-Slovak borderland as an innovative form of rural tourism. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 45–51. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2017.23-06.



# CONDITIONS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN POLISH VOIVODSHIPS

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RECEIVED 15 March 2017  
ACCEPTED 12 June 2017

JEL  
CLASSIFICATION L84, C10

**KEYWORDS** Tourism Competitiveness Index, tourism competitiveness rankings, tourism competitiveness of Poland and of voivodships

**ABSTRACT** The research project concerned mainly aims at presenting the methodology of selecting and gathering indicators describing tourism development at the national and regional levels and at discussing selected indicators gathered for individual voivodships in Poland.  
It presents the structure of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index developed and computed for the World Economic Forum as well as the index results and components for Poland. The 2015 TTCI for Poland was 4.08, ranking Poland 47<sup>th</sup> among the 141 countries covered.  
The second part presents the assumptions of studies of the competitiveness of the sixteen Polish voivodships based on a set of indicators designed at the Institute of Tourism in Warsaw in 2004. The values of specific indicators for particular voivodships have been presented in the reports entitled *Turystyka Polska. Układ regionalny* since 2004. The article also contains examples of tables from the 2015 report.  
Finally, the article presents the ranking of voivodships according to the value of the overall Tourism Competitiveness Index developed on the basis of eight sub-indices.

## Introduction

The research project concerned mainly aims at presenting the methodology of selecting and gathering indicators describing the regional development of broader tourism and at discussing selected indicators gathered for individual voivodships in Poland.

It must be emphasised that the fundamental objective of creating a system of indices and their standardisation at the international level is to produce various rankings. In our index analysis, we focus on selecting measurable indicators necessary to design and, subsequently, evaluate the implementation of multiannual and annual tourism development programmes in specific voivodships in Poland.

The system of creating standardised indices is a widely recognised tool for producing various rankings mostly aimed to assess movements in the positions of the entities concerned (countries/regions/cities). Opponents to standardised indices usually point to excessive diversity of particular entities. They also stress enormous subjectivity in the selection of specific non-measurable indices as well as a frequent lack of objectivity in the arbitrary specification of values of indicators hard to measure. It is indicated that it is difficult to justify combining significantly biased indices (e.g. a subjective assessment of the legal system in a country) with those characterised by accuracy (the surface area of a country). Therefore, especially for territorial units with indices hard to measure, most specialists tend to create time series for particular and relatively easily measured indices without aggregation, assuming that qualitative analysis will lead to correct and well-grounded conclusions, useful in economic and business practice.

Additionally, in the selection of indices considered for analyses it is frequently more important to be able to gather numerical data or to choose indices for which there are well-formulated methods of estimating their numerical values.

### **Composite indices of the competitiveness performance of countries according to the WEF**

When assessing conditions of tourism development in a region and the impact of tourism on the regional economy, it is worth drawing on a most comprehensive list of indicators used by the authors of annual reports prepared for the World Economic Forum in Geneva for the purpose of presenting rankings of the competitiveness performance of individual countries.

Competitiveness is defined as the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of an economy, which in turn sets the level of prosperity that the country can earn.

The Global Competitiveness Index combines 114 indicators that capture concepts that matter for productivity. These indicators are grouped into 12 pillars: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labor market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication, and innovation (Schwab, 2015).

Let us now describe the place of Polish economy in WEF ranking.

According to *The Global Competitiveness Index 2015–2016* ranking published by the World Economic Forum in *The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016* (Schwab, 2015), Poland's economy ranks 41<sup>st</sup> among the 140 countries covered, with the overall score of 4.49 (for the top and poorest performers, Switzerland and Guinea, the respective indices were 5.76 and 2.84).

The overall index was calculated on the basis of three sub-indices – Basic requirements, Efficiency enhancers and Innovation and sophistication factors – each of which was composed of several pillars (a total of 14). Put rather simply, it may be assumed that the values taken by the fourteen pillars constitute an assessment of conditions indicating the position of the Polish economy in the modern world.

With regard to our investigation of tourism development conditions, in selected areas it may be methodologically important to take account of another composite index, also prepared by the World Economic Forum and published

in *The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 (The Travel & Tourism..., 2015)*, i.e. the *Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2015*. The index in question is composed of the following: 4 sub-indices, 14 pillars and 90 individual indicators.

Sub-index: *Enabling Environment*:

1. Business Environment (12 indicators).
2. Safety and Security (5 indicators).
3. Health and Hygiene (6 indicators).
4. Human Resources and Labour Market (9 indicators).
5. ICT Readiness (8 indicators).

Sub-index: *T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions*:

6. Prioritisation of Travel and Tourism (6 indicators).
7. International Openness (3 indicators).
8. Price Competitiveness (4 indicators).
9. Environmental Sustainability (10 indicators).

Sub-index: *Infrastructure*:

10. Air Transport Infrastructure (6 indicators).
11. Ground and Port Infrastructure (7 indicators).
12. Tourist Service Infrastructure (4 indicators).

Sub-index: *Natural and Cultural Resources*:

13. Natural Resources (5 indicators).
14. Cultural Resources and Business Travel (5 indicators).

The Survey data is derived from responses to the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey and range in value from 1 to 7. Hard data were collected from various sources. Hard data indicators used in the TTCI are normalized to a 1-to-7 scale in order to align them with the Executive Opinion Survey's results.<sup>1</sup>

The standard formula for converting each hard data indicator to the 1-to-7 scale

$$6 \times \frac{\text{country score} - \text{sample minimum}}{\text{sample maximum} - \text{sample minimum}} + 1 .$$

The sample minimum and sample maximum are the lowest and highest scores of the overall sample, respectively. For those hard data indicators for which a higher value indicates a worse outcome (e.g. fuel price levels), we rely on a normalization formula that, in addition to converting the series to a 1-to-7 scale, reverses it, so that 1 and 7 still correspond to the worst and best, respectively:

$$-6 \times \frac{\text{country score} - \text{sample minimum}}{\text{sample maximum} - \text{sample minimum}} + 7 .$$

Each of the pillars has been calculated as an un-weighted average of the individual component variables.

The subindexes are then calculated as un-weighted averages of the included pillars. In the case of the Human Resources and Labour Market pillar, which is, itself, composed of two subpillars (Qualification of the labour force and Labour market), the overall pillar is the un-weighted average of the two subpillars (Schwab, 2015).

Calculated on the basis of the 90 indicators, the overall 2015 Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index for Poland was 4.08, making Poland 47<sup>th</sup> among the 141 countries covered (it ranged from 5.31 obtained by Spain, the top performer, to 2.43 for the lowest ranking Chad).

In 2015, the authors of the above-mentioned report mainly focused on analysing the responses of the Travel and Tourism (T&T) sector to health, security and economic shocks experienced over recent decades by the world economy. It was assumed that a strong and resilient T&T sector was crucial for job creation and economic growth in both advanced economies and developing countries.

The report emphasises that the indicators particularly advantageous for Poland are those in which Poland obtained top or high ranks. Those are as follows:

- index of terrorism incidence (1),
- access to improved drinking water (% pop.) (1),
- HIV prevalence (% pop.),
- no. of regional trade agreements in force (1),
- hotel price index (us\$) (4),
- no. of environmental treaty ratifications (0–27 best) (4),
- railroad density (km/surface area) (10),
- comprehensiveness of T&T data (0–120 best) (10),
- hospital beds per 10,000 pop. (11),
- construction permits cost (%) (11),
- total protected areas (% total territorial area) (11),
- no. of World Heritage cultural sites (15).

In general, the pillars (groups of indicators) with the highest ranks include: Health and Hygiene (25<sup>th</sup> place), International Openness (26<sup>th</sup> place), Environmental Sustainability (28<sup>th</sup> place) as well as Safety and Security (35<sup>th</sup> place).

The indicators having a considerable downward effect on Poland's position were those where Poland ranked low. Those are as follows:

- extension of business trips recommended (135),
- government prioritisation of T&T industry (132),
- particulate matter (2.5) concentration ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) (130),
- efficiency of legal framework in settling disputes (117),
- no. of days to start a business (112),
- sustainability of T&T development (110),
- labour and contributions tax rate (% profit) (110),
- hiring and firing practices (109),
- airport density per million urban pop. (109).

The lowest ranking pillars (groups of indicators) include: Prioritisation of Travel & Tourism (99), Business Environment (77), Air Transport Infrastructure (73) and Tourist Service Infrastructure (66).

Obviously, in their assessment of competitiveness the authors of the report also took account of a number of absolute values (*Travel & Tourism Key Indicators and Economic Impact*) such as: Poland's surface area and

population, GDP and GDP *per capita*, international tourist arrivals in Poland and international tourism receipts as well as the share of the travel and tourism industry in the national economy and in employment.

### The system of indicators of tourism development in voivodships according to the Institute of Tourism

In 2003, for the needs of the central government and regional (voivodship) authorities, the Institute of Tourism designed a set of and gathering methodology for indicators describing the development of broader tourism in individual voivodships (Borne-Januła, Byszewska-Dawidek, Kulesza, Legienis, Radkowska, 2003).

The main objective of the selection of indicators was to provide information necessary in the preparation of tourism development strategies for voivodships and in ongoing assessments of the current situation in the tourism industry and related sectors. It was also important to ensure full comparability of information in particular voivodships.

In addition, a significant assumption was to make the maximum use of information collected in various databases by the Central Statistical Office (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny* – GUS) and of the results of surveys carried out by the Institute of Tourism and commissioned by the department of tourism.

Since 2003, the set of indicators for three consecutive years prepared on an annual basis for marshal offices was supplemented with brief descriptions of tourism in all the voivodships and with a comparative analysis of the level and structure of tourism-related expenditure from the budgets of marshal offices. The first report covering 2001–2003 data, *Turystyka polska w 2003 roku. Układ regionalny*, was published in 2004 and the structure of subsequent editions remained virtually unchanged until 2015.

The set of indicators with descriptions adopted in 2004 and applicable until 2015 included the following groups:

1. Characteristics of accommodation facilities: the number and regional distribution of collective tourist accommodation establishments, hotels and similar establishments (hotels, motels, boarding houses), hotels by category, other collective tourist accommodation establishments (other than hotels, motels or boarding houses), camp-sites and holiday centres, individual tourist accommodation establishments – accommodation at rural tourism holdings.
2. Other aspects of services supplied to tourists:
  - a) All travel agencies and travel agencies broken down into tour operators and intermediaries;
  - b) The length of tourist trails.
3. Air transport, cultural and environmental protection establishments:
  - a) Airports and passenger service at airports;
  - b) Museums and visitors to museums and museum exhibitions;
  - c) National parks – the area and number of visitors.
4. Tourists at collective accommodation establishments (the number of guests and overnight stays, also of foreign tourists, and foreign tourists staying at accommodation establishments by group of countries).
5. Domestic tourist traffic and foreign tourist arrivals:
  - a) The total number of domestic tourist arrivals in destinations located in the voivodships and broken down into long-stay (5 or more days) and short-stay (2 to 4 days) tourists;
  - b) The number of foreign tourist arrivals and the composition of arrivals by group of countries;
  - c) Expenditure of foreign tourists (average expenditure per person and per day of stay per person in USD).
6. Level and structure of tourism-related government expenditure from budgets of marshal offices.

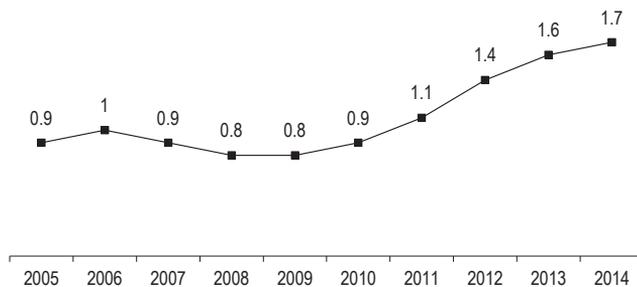
For each indicator, rankings of voivodships in particular years were prepared, in order to illustrate the dynamics of change and to allow voivodship administrations to carry out comparisons between voivodships.

The method of presenting individual indicators is shown in two tables containing the following information:

- the number of travel agencies registered in particular voivodships, with a ranking of voivodships,
- the number of accommodation establishments in particular voivodships, with a ranking of voivodships.

Similar tables were prepared for a total of 27 indicators. Furthermore, the level and structure of tourism-related expenditure in budgets of marshal offices (a total of 4 indicators) were presented.

As already mentioned, the values of specific indicators for selected voivodships can be presented as time series for the whole period covered. Such a graphical presentation of the number of visitors to the Pomorskie voivodship is exemplified in Figure 1. It is worth pointing out that the values of this indicator in specific years were estimated on the basis of surveys of foreign tourists visiting Poland carried out on an annual basis at border crossings.



**Figure 1.** The number of foreign tourists in the Pomorskie voivodship (million)

Source: estimates by the Institute of Tourism based on surveys.

As in the case of countries, eight indicators (sub-indices) served to develop a composite tourism competitiveness index and ranking of individual voivodships. The sub-indices were as follows:

- the number of bed-places in accommodation establishments,
- the number of travel agencies,
- the length of tourist trails,
- the number of visitors to museums,
- the number of tourists staying at accommodation establishments,
- the number of domestic tourists,
- the number of foreign tourists,
- average expenditure of a foreign tourist.

Normalization of the value of chosen indicators shall be done according to the formula below (value of each indicator is between 0 and 1). For eight indicators normalized values were calculated specifying their ranks of the same time

$$\frac{\text{Voivodship score} - \text{sample minimum}}{\text{Sample maximum} - \text{sample minimum}} = \text{Indicator value for voivodship.}$$

**Table 1.** Example values, absolute ranks and normalized sub-indices values: number of bed-places in accommodation and number of travel agencies in 2015

Voivodship	Bed-places in accommodation			Travel agencies		
	number of bed-places	ranking	indicator value	number of agencies	ranking	indicator value
Dolnośląskie – Lower Silesia Province	60,147	4	0.55	329	4	0.35
Kujawsko-pomorskie – Kujawy-Pomerania Province	28,515	9	0.21	108	12	0.06
Lubelskie – Lublin Province	21,848	12	0.13	133	10	0.09
Lubuskie – Lubuskie Province	18,570	13	0.10	59	14	0.00
Łódzkie – Łódź Province	23,128	11	0.15	200	7	0.18
Małopolskie – Małopolska Province	90,304	3	0.88	511	3	0.58
Mazowieckie – Mazovia Province	48,982	5	0.43	838	1	1.00
Opolskie – Opole Province	9,401	16	0.00	73	15	0.02
Podkarpackie – Podkarpacie Province	28,711	10	0.21	137	9	0.10
Podlaskie – Podlasie Province	13,465	15	0.04	87	13	0.04
Pomorskie – Pomerania Province	101,739	2	1.00	291	5	0.30
Śląskie – Silesia Province	45,884	6	0.40	518	2	0.59
Świętokrzyskie – Świętokrzyskie Province	16,101	14	0.07	74	14	0.02
Warmińsko-mazurskie – Warmia-Masuria Province	40,022	8	0.33	120	9	0.08
Wielkopolskie – Wielkopolska Province	42,854	7	0.36	291	6	0.30
Zachodniopomorskie – West Pomerania Province	120,603	1	1.20	164	8	0.13

Source: "Turystyka w Polsce. Układ regionalny" and own calculation.

**Table 2.** Ranking of voivodships by value of the overall Tourism Competitiveness Index developed on the basis of eight sub-indices

No.	Voivodship	Rank	Tourism infrastructure	Tourist traffic
1	Małopolskie – Małopolska Province	1	4	1
2	Mazowieckie – Mazovia Province	2	1	2
3	Pomorskie – Pomerania Province	3	2	3
4	Dolnośląskie – Lower Silesia Province	4	5	4
5	Zachodniopomorskie – West Pomerania Province	5	5	5
6	Śląskie – Silesia Province	6	3	6
7	Wielkopolskie – Wielkopolska Province	6	7	6
8	Podkarpackie – Podkarpacie Province	8	11	8
9	Lubelskie – Lublin Province	9	10	9
10	Kujawsko-pomorskie – Kujawy-Pomerania Province	10	9	10
11	Lubuskie – Lubuskie Province	10	8	10
12	Warmińsko-mazurskie – Warmia-Masuria Province	12	11	12
13	Łódzkie – Łódź Province	13	14	13
14	Podlaskie – Podlasie Province	13	13	13
15	Świętokrzyskie – Świętokrzyskie Province	13	15	13
16	Opolskie – Opole Province	16	16	16

Source: "Turystyka w Polsce. Układ regionalny" and own calculation.

To make joint ranking of voivodships we may use eight ranks of sub-indices. The results obtained are presented in Table 2.

## Conclusions

The system of creating standardised indices is a widely recognised tool for preparing various rankings, mostly for assessing the positions of entities covered and for comparing changes observed in subsequent years.

Gathering information constituting a specific set of indicators included in the overall tourism index allows to carry out a number of comparisons and assessments of positions and of reasons for specific positions on the tourism competitiveness map. In addition, a comprehensive set of indicators also facilitates identifying the causes of an increased or decreased competitiveness of a country or region in the ranking.

The analysis of the ranks obtained in the *Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index* ranking by Poland and its competitors, contained in the document entitled "The Marketing Strategy of Poland in the Tourism Sector for 2012–2020" (*Marketingowa strategia...*, 2011), prepared by the Polish Tourist Organisation, can be used as the basis for selecting indices to be improved as a matter of priority in order to simultaneously enhance Poland's position in the ranking and to move ahead of specific countries.

Improving the place of Poland in the ranking was defined as one of the main indicators of the attainment of the marketing strategy objectives.

A similar – even if somewhat simplified – role in assessing the tourism sector and tourism-oriented activities of the regional administration authorities in voivodships is played by comparisons of values of individual indicators across voivodships. Evidently, regional governments attach greater importance to changes in the index values in specific years and to improving the position of the voivodship concerned in the ranking. The choice of the main indicators to be observed also reflects the priorities adopted in the tourism policy of the voivodship in question.

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**Cite this article as:** Radkowska, B., Łopaciński, K. (2017). Conditions of tourism development in Polish voivodships. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 53–61. DOI: 10.18276/ejasm.2017.23-07.



## PERCEPTION OF MODERN AGRITOURISM. WIELKOPOLSKIE PROVINCE (POLAND) AND THE NORTHEAST REGION (ROMANIA) CASE STUDY

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RECEIVED

8 May 2017

ACCEPTED

14 June 2017

JEL

CLASSIFICATION

Q19, Q56, Q57, R11

KEYWORDS

agritourism, rural tourism, Wielkopolskie Province, Northeast Region

ABSTRACT

Agritourism in countries like Poland or Romania has effectively developed rural space, turning what in the socialist period was regarded as weaknesses, such as small, family farms, or the extensive character of the agricultural production, into strengths. Nowadays, this particular form of tourism is a significant trend in creating brand tourism products in both countries. However, progress depends on many factors, starting from natural, economic and legal conditions, and ending with the perception of agritourism by tourists. The authors of the article attempted to examine how agritourism is approached scientifically in both countries (theory verification in the light of literature analysis), what the supply is in selected regions and how agritourism is perceived by potential clients.

Preliminary studies show numerous differences in agritourism development in both countries. While preparing the article, the authors made use of both, primary (collected during a survey) and secondary materials (analysis of literature, strategic documents, statistical data). The survey questionnaire was prepared with the help of agritourism service providers.

## Introduction

Not only in Poland, but also in many other European cities, rural tourism has been playing an increasing role. However, despite many similarities, especially between adjacent regions, every country is different, at least as regards some features, e.g. the natural environment, religion, traditions, customs and rituals, cuisine, language, or the socio-economic situation – all these differences are reflected in the specificity of rural tourism. In this paper, two European countries – Romania and Poland will be compared. Therefore, the authors know the conditions and the present state of tourism in the rural areas of their countries best; they are also able to draw the most accurate conclusions regarding its future.

## Romania and Poland – similarities and differences

The authors decided to compare tourism developing in the rural areas of two countries – Romania and Poland, because of the similarities and certain differences between them. Firstly, they are both former socialist countries, which belonged to the so called Eastern Block from the 1940s to the early 1990s, which undoubtedly had an influence on peoples' mentality, as well as on the economy, including agriculture. For many years, in both countries, a typical form of property were large, state-owned farms. In the 1990s, most of them were closed down.

At present, very small farms still exist – Romania is the leader as regards fragmentation of farms among all EU, with Poland coming second; the average farm area for Poland in 2010 was 9.6 ha and for the Wielkopolska region – 10.5 ha (<http://stat.gov.pl>), while for Romania – 3.4 ha and in the Northeast Region – 2.5 ha (<http://ec.europa.eu>); in both countries, the values are growing. This is obviously not profit-enhancing, though on the other hand, this particular feature is an advantage as regards the attractiveness of an agritourism farm. In farming and animal breeding, extensive methods are still predominant. The small area of individual farms automatically means that they are very numerous, compared to other European Union states (with Romania in the lead, with 33.5% of all such properties, and Poland coming second, with 13.2%) (<http://ec.europa.eu>).

The question of the religious denomination looks practically identical – ca. 85–90% of the citizens are followers of the predominant, Christian religion: the Eastern Orthodox Church in Romania and Catholicism in Poland. Other similarities concern the size of the countries (they are both medium-sized European states), EU membership, the abundance of intact nature, as well as thriving folklore and traditions, especially in rural areas.

As regards obvious differences, they include the land relief – Poland is a predominantly lowland country (91% of the total area), in contrast to Romania, where mountains cover over 30% of the whole area. We should also mention ethnicity at this point – in Romania, there is a large group of Hungarians, Gypsies and Germans living among autochthonic Romanians (89%). Poland is also inhabited by various ethnic groups, but they make up only 3% of all citizens.

Detailed analysis included two areas: Wielkopolskie Province (the top level administrative unit in Poland) and the Northeast Region (a functional unit, established for the purposes of EU statistics) – both represent the NUTS-2 level. The choice was based on the possibility to compare regions, first of all as regards their size and number of population<sup>1</sup> (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> Romania is divided into 41 districts, which are the top level administrative units. Therefore, it would be difficult to compare Polish provinces to the districts, due to their considerably bigger size and population.

**Table 1.** Selected features of the regions under study (2014)

Feature Unit	Northeast Region	Wielkopolskie
Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	36,880	29,826
Number of population	3,302,217	3,477,755
Population density (persons/km <sup>2</sup> )	90	116.6
Countryside population (%)	56.6	44.9
Farm land (%)	57.61	59.7
Forests (%)	30	25.7
Number of accommodation facilities/beds	709/26,055	711/42,600
Required (collected) number of questionnaires	384 (449)	384 (512)

Source: authors' elaboration based on statistical yearbooks.

### Tourism in rural areas in Poland and Romania

As it has already been mentioned, recreation in the Polish countryside has a long tradition. However, the changing needs of contemporary tourists, as well as the growing competition on the tourism services market, forced specialists to specify the existing forms of recreation in the country. The terms most frequently appearing in European nomenclature are *rural tourism* and *agritourism*. Generally, agritourism is a form of rural tourism, i.e. all forms of travelling to and around non-urbanized areas; the term *agritourism* is much narrower, as it refers only to recreation on a functioning farm. Despite the fact that these two terms have a lot in common with each other, we should stress that they are not synonyms, and they are described in a number of definitions, whose authors usually put emphasis on slightly different aspects. As regards rural tourism, A.P. Wiatrak stresses the economic aspect, saying that "it encompasses whole tourist economy in rural areas". M. Dębniwska and M. Tkaczuk (1997), V. Glăvan (2003, 2006) and P. Nistoreanu, M.R. Dorobanțu and C.E. Țuclea (2011) stress the importance of the rational use of resources in rural tourism. J. Sikora (1999) and V. Glăvan (2003) focus on rural attractions contrasting them with the urban ones. P. Nistoreanu (1999) points out that one of the main benefits of rural tourism is the reconciliation between man and nature. Generally, researchers dealing with these problems may be divided into two groups: some of them focus on the type of terrain where tourist activity takes place, and others – on the attractions connected with "rurality".

As for the concept of agritourism, the following aspects are stressed: tourist's recreational participation in farm work (Nowakowski, 2001; Glăvan, Nicula, 2014), the transitional character of the environment where it is practiced (between highly valuable ecosystems, e.g. protected areas, and those which are intensively exploited in agriculture) (Drzewiecki, 1995); a positive effect on the farmer's budget (an additional source of income) (Długokęcka, 2001); tourists' rational use of the environment resources (Dębniwska, Tkaczuk 1997; Glăvan, 2003, 2006; Nistoreanu, Gheres, 2010). We should also mention an alternative and slightly better developed conception by P. Wolak (1995), who identified agritourism facilities – functioning farms, where tourism services are just an additional element, as well as farm tourism – including those farms whose owners make a living mainly from tourism.

## The condition and character of agritourism infrastructure in Wielkopolska and the Northeast Region

It is very troublesome for a researcher to make a detailed inventory of the agritourism infrastructure in both Poland and Romania. This is due to different approaches to cataloguing this type of facilities by the lowest rank administrative units, changing statistical records and, finally, to the differences in interpreting the concept of an agritourism farm by data collecting institutions. There is the additional problem of verifying facilities at regular intervals and the lack of a uniform inventory form. A consequence of the abovementioned factors are huge discrepancies in the acquired data and spreading inaccurate information, mostly via the Internet. Another problem are the differences in the terminology used to refer to rural accommodation facilities in Poland and Romania.

According to the Central Statistical Office data (based on KT-1 form, <http://form.stat.gov.pl>, according to the tourist facilities catalogue), in 2015, there were 69 agritourism farms in Wielkopolskie Province, offering over 10 beds each (55 were available all year round). On the other hand, according to Wojewódzki Ośrodek Doradztwa Rolniczego (the Provincial Farming Counselling Centre), in 2015, there were 771 farms offering 9,741 beds ([www.wodr.poznan.pl](http://www.wodr.poznan.pl)). When analysing statistical data, one may notice a clustering of farms in just a few administrative units, which results from their natural resources enabling tourists to embark on a variety of activities (Uglis, 2012).

According to the National Institute of Statistics in Romania, in 2015 there were 321 agritourism boarding houses in the Northeast Region, offering 6,026 beds (<http://statistici.insse.ro>). Romanian statistics do not use the term "agritourism farm" and do not differentiate between an "agritourism farm" and a "farm".

Wielkopolska agritourism is becoming progressively specialized, which can be seen in the growing number of educational farms (11 in 2016), as well as in the categories of the competition for the best rural tourism facility, which has already been organized 11 times by the Marshall's Office. The categories are the following: an agritourism farm within a functioning agricultural farm, an accommodation facility in a rural area, and a specialist facility in a rural area, taking advantage of the traditions and assets of the countryside.

As regards Romanian facilities, the study did not show even the early stages of offer specialization.

## Research on the perception of agritourism in the studied regions

The empirical study procedure included 512 respondents from Poland and 449 from Romania. The researchers used a survey questionnaire consisting of eight key questions, both closed and open, enabling the respondents to speak freely. The study was conducted in March and April this year, by means of the questionnaire in the paper form and online, with the participation of partners from both countries.

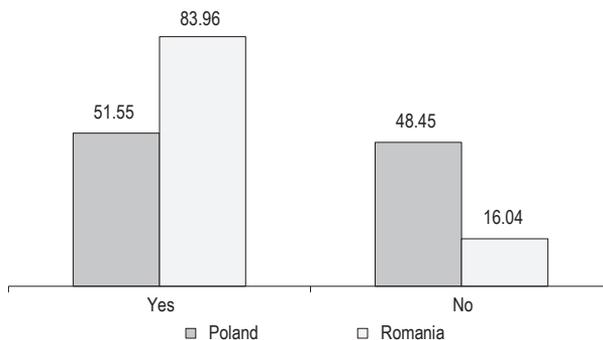
Both samples easily meet the condition of minimum sample size, with the assumed level of confidence  $\alpha = 0.9$  and the maximum error 3%.

The mean age of the respondents ranged from ca. 37 in Poland to slightly below 46 in Romania. Women were much more willing to participate in the survey than men, making up 70% of the respondents in Poland and 61% in Romania. As regards the education level, in both countries, most respondents had completed higher education – about 70% in both countries. Most Polish respondents (51%) declared good financial status, while the Romanians usually described it as average (54.1%). It is not surprising that the majority of the people taking part in the survey came from cities – 76% in Poland and 88% in Romania.

The respondents typically associated the term *agritourism* with the countryside, as well as various natural environment assets, such as *peace, quiet, nature, water, forest, animals*, followed by characteristic farm-related elements.

Most people expressing their opinions about agritourism had taken advantage of this form of recreation before – 83.96% of the Polish and 51.55% of the Romanian respondents. Additionally a high percentage of respondents are going to practice agritourism in the coming year (2017) – this intention was declared by 34.30% of Poles and 68.38% of Romanians.

The expectations of all contemporary tourists are changing, following market trends. We can see this, e.g., in the opinions frequently expressed in social media. What is interesting, despite the fact that they are generally older, the Romanian respondents are definitely more active in this matter than the Polish ones (Figure 1). This distribution of responses is not surprising, considering the fact that it is the Internet that is the main source of information about a potential tourist destination for 73% of all respondents. The next source indicated by them was family and friends (nearly 22%).

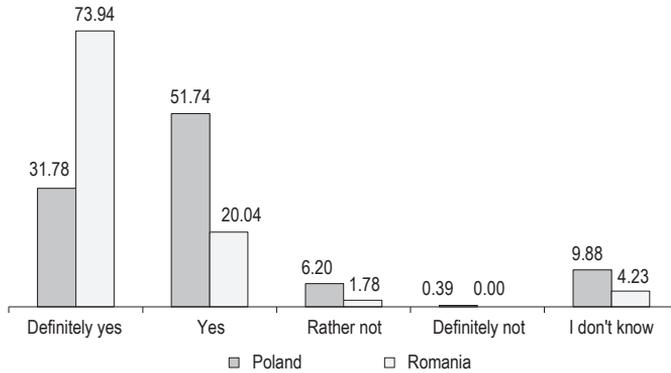


**Figure 1.** Using the agritourism offer by respondents (%)

Source: authors' elaboration.

Respondents from both countries under study had a positive opinion concerning the attractiveness of their home regions for the development of agritourism (Figure 2). The abovementioned distribution of responses proves the respondents' growing awareness of the local tourist potential.

The key question in the questionnaire concerned the features (up to 5) determining the choice of the agritourism. Despite many differences in the development of agritourism in both countries, the features were rated in a very similar way (Table 2). The first two most important features were the same, though in the opposite order. As the third most significant feature, the respondents from the Northeast Region, chose the cosy character of the facility, and those from Wielkopolska pointed to the importance of home-made, good quality meals.



**Figure 2.** Attractiveness of the home country in the aspect of agritourism development in the opinion of respondents (%)

Source: authors' elaboration.

It is worth mentioning that the price turns out much less significant when choosing this type of tourism offer – at least that is what the respondents claimed. This becomes an argument in a discussion whether agritourism must be a cheap form of recreation (many associate it with a low quality of the provided services).

**Table 2.** Respondents' ranking of features determining the choice of an agritourism offer

Feature	Poland		Romania	
	place	% indications	place	% indications
Low price	6	33.91	5	52.12
Short distance from home	14	3.88	10	18.04
<b>Location in an attractive environment</b>	2	59.30	1	80.18
Cosy character of the facility	4	45.93	3	56.12
Comfortable accommodation	5	38.95	5	52.12
Good, reliable information about the facility	9	22.48	7	22.05
<b>Hosts' hospitality, friendliness</b>	1	65.12	2	66.15
A possibility to participate in farm work	12	7.75	9	20.04
A possibility to see farm animals in real life	7	29.07	9	20.04
Home-made, good quality meals	3	55.23	6	28.06
Suggestions for organizing free time	8	23.64	4	54.12
Facility to recreation with children	10	16.67	8	20.49
A possibility to organize a party	13	4.84	13	6.01
Access by public transport	11	8.53	11	8.02
Other	15	3.49	12	7.35

Source: authors' elaboration.

## Conclusions

The rating of the most important features determining the choice of the agritourism offer, established in the course of the study, points to some guidelines for agritourism development:

- it is advisable to use farms located in an attractive environment, mainly natural, as well as skilfully create and promote attractions through service providers (agritourism must not be treated as a remedy for a difficult economic situation in a given village);
- it is important to build an agritourism brand on the basis of the intuitional, spontaneous hospitality of the hosts open to “live”, authentic contact with tourists;
- a great asset is home-made cooking, based on high-quality products from local suppliers;
- the cosy character of the facility should be maintained (considering the changing needs of tourists who want to get away from large-sized, crowded infrastructure, this feature will be gaining in importance); the growing income gained from agritourism must not be identified with an excessive increase in the number of beds (e.g. in former farm buildings), but with appropriate adjustments of infrastructure to the available space within the farm, as well as with an increase in the range of offered services.

Despite similar evolution of agriculture in both countries in the last several decades, we can observe clear differences as regards agritourism infrastructure. These discrepancies can be noticed not only in the nomenclature, but also in the organizational structure (weak development of regional and local associations in Romania) and the progress of specialization (in Poland, the growing competition in a way forced specialization of facilities, while in Romania this trend has not appeared on the market as yet). In Romania, agritourism is an economic activity on which both theorists and practitioners have mainly focused since 1990. Therefore, there are many theoretical, practical and legal aspects concerning Romanian agritourism still in need to be clarified.

The lack of the “official” tradition of the Romanian concept of agritourism is the reason why Romanians do not usually make a clear-cut distinction between rural tourism and agritourism.

The study described above shows the differences in the tourism developing in the rural areas of two European Union states on the one hand, and on the other – it is an encouragement to undertake further comparative research of this type, encompassing other members of the European Union.

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**Cite this article as:** Spychała, A., Graja-Zwolińska, S., Tacu, G., Păduraru, T. (2017). Perception of modern agritourism. Wielkopolskie Province (Poland) and the Northeast Region (Romania) case study. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 63–70. DOI: 10.18276/ejasm.2017.23-08.

# INCREASING THE LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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RECEIVED 26 April 2017  
ACCEPTED 5 August 2017

JEL CLASSIFICATION I21, I23, I25, O32

KEYWORDS quality, education, higher education, e-learning, ICT

ABSTRACT The aim of the article is a presentation of the model of improving the educational quality service in higher education. Analysis was based on the model that uses: SERVPERF method testing the quality of service, a Likert scale and new framework tool that identifies the main factors determining the quality of a structural, methodical and social area in higher education. The proposed research concept can be used to analyze level of service within the framework of specific subjects, teaching staff and teaching modes, such as blended learning mode. Assuming a proper (the best description of the nature of education and quality) selection of descriptive characteristics and transforming them into real determinants of quality, the proposed concept can be used to improve the quality in other organizations. The main argument of the article assumes that maintaining and expanding a competitive advantage in the market of educational services in higher education, requires monitoring and flexibility in the implementation of both, proven technology and new, innovative educational tools, what leads to increased level of quality, usability and efficiency of distributed knowledge.

## Introduction

The quality of educational services in higher education is increasingly effective tool to build competitive advantage in a rapidly changing economic environment. The development of the information society with the progressive processes of globalization and demographic change, as well as the growing importance of academic education, make it necessary to adapt the Polish universities to the challenges of the twenty-first century. The article

discusses the issues of pro-quality approach to the Polish universities, in the context of ongoing changes in the methodology of training, technological development, the development of functional and organizational models and social changes in relation to higher education. The primary purpose of the article was to identify and analyze the key factors responsible for the level of quality in higher education.

### **Structural, functional and social aspects of higher education**

The starting point for in-depth analysis of the problem was the adoption of a number of methodological assumptions, allowing the use of certain elements of the analytical methods [system-based approach – the structural aspects (Bertalanffy, 1968), (Sadowski, 1978), process – functional aspects (Hammer, 1999) and the theory of stakeholders – social aspects (Pajunen, 2002)] to describe the pro-quality problems at the academic level. The most important of them include:

1. The university (or intentionally separate unit, for example, a department) as an institution of public trust, fulfills a certain social mission and seeks to achieve the desirable level of quality of educational services, through rational configuration of resources and proper processes coordination.
2. The university is an object that can be analyzed in terms of structure (configuration resources) and functionality (coordination processes), and can be divided into five basic areas: organizational, economic, infrastructural, social and methodical.
3. Identification of key elements that determine the quality of educational services on separate five areas allow to improve quality and give an answer to the question about the directions of qualitative changes in higher education.

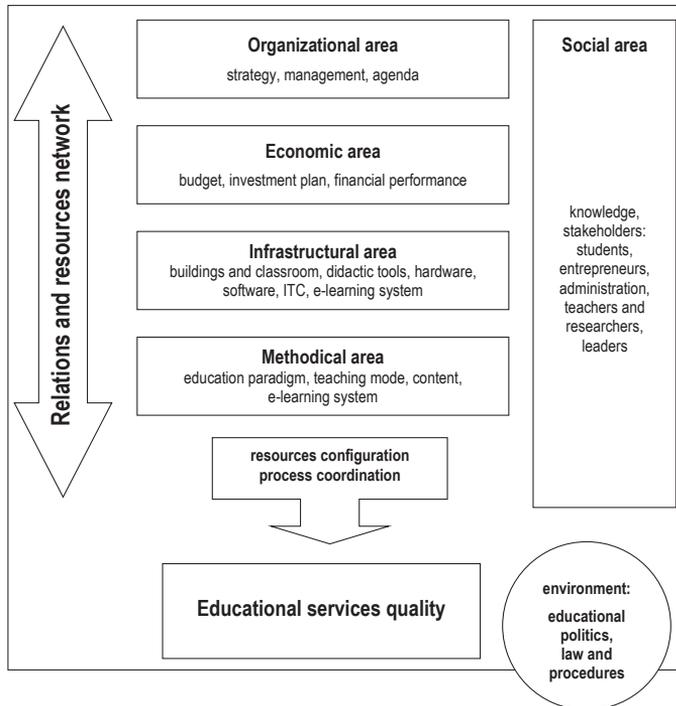
Separation of these five areas (Figure 1) is contractual in nature and is used to better understand the qualitative aspects of ongoing education services.<sup>1</sup> In business practice the selected areas penetrate each other, and their key resources and processes create a network of mutual ties and interaction.

Scientific literature, that describes the method of improving the level of quality services, shows that the most commonly used approach is to adopt the customer's perspective and assessment of the satisfaction with the service received (Bryman, 1998; Payson, 1994). In the case of educational services, the key is therefore to develop such a test method that will enable analysis of the presented determinants of quality, as well as their impact (according to the respondents) or the impact of individual areas on the quality of service within a timeframe for a certain academic organization.

Developing a consistent mechanism to improve the quality of educational services in higher education is a complex and complicated task. This is mainly due to the basic features of educational services (immateriality, impermanence, heterogeneity, inseparability, individuality, etc.), hence the assessment of the level of quality is very subjective.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature one can find different theoretical models of quality services, such as: Service Quality Model (Grönroos, 1984) or Gummesson's partial quality model (Gummesson, 1996), but this approach is based on SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1994).



**Figure 1.** Schematic diagram of the educational services quality in higher education

Source: own study.

In the literature on the study of socio-economic problems, one of the major divisions of methods of analyzing problems is the division into quantitative and qualitative methods. Apart from the details of the academic dispute over the “superiority” of one method over another, it should be stated that the choice of the way of analyzing processes and/or objects should be conditioned by the essence and subject of the phenomenon under investigation. There are no better or worse methods, they are only better or worse adapted to the analysis, interpretation and understanding of specific socio-economic phenomena. “Every good researcher knows that the choice of method should not be imposed in advance. You should rather choose a method that corresponds to what the researcher wants to know” (Silverman, 2009).

### Methods of improving the quality of educational services

When analyzing the literature on the problems of improving the quality of services one will find that some of the most commonly used methods (or their modified versions) are the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1994) and SERVPERF methods.

SERVQUAL method refers to a model of service quality developed by A. Parasuraman, V. Zeithaml and L.L. Berry, also called the model of gaps (GAPS model) (Rudawska, Kiecko, 2000). It refers to the fifth and final gap, which is characterized by differences between the expectations of stakeholders, and the actual perception of the product or service.

In the nineties of the twentieth century, a team of two scientists J.J. Cronin and A. Taylor suggested a significant modification of the SERVQUAL method. The authors of a new concept assumed that the essence of the analysis of the service quality is a subjective assessment of the customers' opinions after service is delivered, however, they ruled out the necessity of examining the quality level of expected service (before it is delivered), assuming that the customer will always expect quality at the highest level. The new method was called SERVPERF (service performance) and may be considered as a counter-proposal to the SERVQUAL method (Cronin, Taylor, 1994).

### The model of improving the educational services quality in higher education

The main problem of testing the level of quality of educational services was to identify the key factors for quality in five separate areas of the analyzed organization. Respondents made the analysis of all proposed determinants, and their comments, suggestions and observations were taken into account in the further stages of research. In this way, the original list of 46 was limited to 32 items. A detailed list of factors determining the level of quality of educational services is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of the determinants of the quality of educational services at selected areas

Economic area: Ek <sub>1</sub> – Cost of study, Ek <sub>2</sub> – Transport, accommodation, Ek <sub>3</sub> – Scholarship programs,, Ek <sub>4</sub> – Foreign trips, Ek <sub>5</sub> – Academic entrepreneurship	Organizational area: Ok <sub>1</sub> – Time implementation activities Ok <sub>2</sub> – Consultations and lectures on-line, Ok <sub>3</sub> – Administrative procedures, Ok <sub>4</sub> – Student activities, Ok <sub>5</sub> – Job fairs, Ok <sub>6</sub> – Foreign language studies
Infrastructural area: Ik <sub>1</sub> – Buildings and classrooms, Ik <sub>2</sub> – Library resources, Ik <sub>3</sub> – Specialized laboratories, Ik <sub>4</sub> – Equipment and tools Ik <sub>5</sub> – Printing system, Ik <sub>6</sub> – Wi-Fi and ICT services, Ik <sub>7</sub> – E-learning tools, Ik <sub>8</sub> – Software	Methodical area: Mk <sub>1</sub> – Content, Mk <sub>2</sub> – Teaching efficiency, Mk <sub>3</sub> – Teaching mode, Mk <sub>4</sub> – Presentation tools, Mk <sub>5</sub> – Communication tools, Mk <sub>6</sub> – Verification tools, Mk <sub>7</sub> – Innovative solutions, Mk <sub>8</sub> – Mobile solutions
Social area: Sk <sub>1</sub> – Knowledge, Sk <sub>2</sub> – Skill transfer, Sk <sub>3</sub> – Ethics and manners, Sk <sub>4</sub> – Practice, Sk <sub>5</sub> – Prestige	

Source: own studies.

The research was conducted on a sample of 321 students of the Faculty of Management and Economics of Services (University of Szczecin, Poland) in the academic year 2014/2015 (winter semester 2014 and spring semester 2015). The sample selection was random. Preliminary analysis of presented characteristics shows that the study was attended by both bachelor and master students (69% and 31%). Most respondents were female (61%, men 39%) and residents of Szczecin (69%, 31% of outsiders). The collected empirical data related to the quality problems, allowed the use of statistical analysis to aggregate information and calculate the average value of the results for the five specified areas (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Average rating of selected areas

Area	Rating	Importance (%)
Economic	5.04	18.3
Organizational	4.08	19.7
Infrastructural	4.69	18.5
Methodical	4.19	22.1
Social	4.91	21.4
Average	4.58	X

Source: own study.

Most valued group of factors is the economic area (5.04), which also has been classified as the least important for quality matters among the remaining areas (18.3%). In the second place were the factors grouped on the social area (average score 4.91), while the weight of the social dimension was 21.4% (second in importance). Infrastructural area has been assessed at the level of 4.69, and its weight (importance) was 18.5%. A little below, the students evaluated the factors determining the quality of a methodical area (4.19), while the weight of this group of factors has been recognized as the highest and stood at 22.1%. The lowest value was assessed at organizational level (4.08), while the weight of this dimension was 19.7%.

Detailed analysis of partial results concerning the specific factors determining the level of quality at selected five areas are beyond the scope of this article. However, studies made it possible to note that the final level of evaluation of the quality of educational services was essentially influenced by three groups of factors:<sup>2</sup>

- the factors determining the satisfactory level of quality,
- the factors determining the acceptable level of quality,
- the factors determining the unsatisfactory level of quality.

Summary of all the elements allowed to create so-called determinants map of quality, which shows the possible ways of specific, required corrective actions. Factors that for objective reasons cannot be adapted to the requirements of service users, should be subject to discussion among the leaders of the department, and specific changes should be included in the strategic and tactical documents concerning development (for example, radical cost reduction, cannot be implemented in the short period of time, but strategy for scholarships can be discussed and included in development strategy of the organization).

There are 11 items among the factors which quality level is defined as unsatisfactory (Table 3), 4 of which relate to the methodical dimension, 3 to infrastructural, 2 to organizational and 1 to both economic and social. Assuming that due to financial, infrastructural and time limitations, the adaptation program cannot be focused on 4 factors (printing system, mobile tools, software and innovation tools) the remaining 8 determinants may be a subject to certain modifications, which may lead to increase the level of quality of educational services in the near future.

<sup>2</sup> The scale uses the following assumptions: a range of values from 1 to 4.5 – the factors determining the unsatisfactory level of quality; 4–5 – acceptable and 5 or more – satisfactory. However, due to several key factors, specific determinants have been “manually” shifted to a different group when their values were close to the borders of scale ranges.

**Table 3.** The factors determining the unsatisfactory level of quality

No.	Determinant	Value	Area
1.	Consultations and lectures on-line	2.48	Organizational
2.	Printing system	2.51	Infrastructural
3.	Foreign language studies	2.65	Organizational
4.	Mobile solutions	2.87	Methodical
5.	Innovative solutions	2.93	Methodical
6.	E-learning tools	3.32	Infrastructural
7.	Software	3.90	Infrastructural
8.	Communications tools	4.12	Methodical
9.	Practice	4.16	Social
10.	Academic entrepreneurship	4.20	Economic
11.	Verification tools	4.32	Methodical

Source: own studies.

The analysis show another group of factors whose quality level was found to be admissible (Table 4), but they still require a specific adjustment.

**Table 4.** The factors determining the acceptable level of quality

No.	Determinant	Value	Area
1.	Presentation tools	4.55	Methodical
2.	Administrative procedures	4.73	Organizational
3.	Teaching efficiency	4.75	Methodical
4.	Job fairs	4.76	Organizational
5.	Time implementation activities	4.83	Organizational
6.	Teaching mode	4.85	Methodical

Source: own studies.

Of course, a change in the paradigm of education, related to the appropriate choice of teaching mode, and increasing the level of effectiveness in knowledge transfer takes time and requires great deal of experience. Sometimes it takes not only a big changes in the perception of the teacher's and student's role in the didactic process, but also the commitment and determination of academics and administration workers in all the organizational and administrative process.

The last and the largest group of items are determinants of a satisfactory level (which does not mean the optimum level of quality, Table 5. Most determinants are grouped at infrastructure area (5 items) and then, economic (4 items), social (4 items) and methodical (1 factor). This result means that these factors, grouped on the least flexible areas (due to financial, organizational, infrastructural limitations) has been assessed positively. This indicates that the largest potential in increasing the level of service quality may take place through changes in the methodical and organizational area.

**Table 5.** The factors determining the satisfactory level of quality

No.	Determinant	Value	Area
1.	Transport and accommodation	4.80	Economic
2.	Equipment	4.80	Infrastructural
3.	Skill transfer	4.90	Social
4.	Prestige	4.95	Social
5.	Content	5.06	Methodical
6.	Student activities	5.10	Organizational
7.	Ethics and manners	5.19	Social
8.	Scholarship programs	5.20	Economic
9.	Knowledge	5.30	Social
10.	Buildings and classroom	5.39	Infrastructural
11.	Foreign trips	5.40	Economic
12.	Study cost	5.60	Economic
13.	Specialized laboratories	5.75	Infrastructural
14.	Wi-Fi and ICT services	5.86	Infrastructural
15.	Library resources	5.90	Infrastructural

Source: own studies.

## Conclusions

The study ends a phase of analyzing the possibilities of improving the quality of educational services in selected organization. This raises the question about the possibility of using the proposed model for other educational entities. The answer to that problem is not simple, because it depends on the individual nature of certain academic units, their specificity, technological capacity and human resources, as well as strategy development. One can, however, be noted that assuming proper (that is, the best possible description of the nature and essence of education and quality) selection of descriptive characteristics and transforming them into real determinants of quality, the proposed concept can be used to improve the quality of other academic organizations. This also applies to universities with different structure and profile than the one analyzed and studied in this paper (Faculty of Economics and Management of Services). Of course, a modified quality model for new academic organizations will take into account these elements, which play a key role in their educational operations; in particular, the new areas and identified determinants may be added or removed to/from the proposed model. In other words, the individual character of each institution, allows the use of the proposed concept to improve the quality of educational services, including adjustments for details corresponding to the structure and operation of the particular organizations. The universal nature of the proposed approach can be used on several levels:

- Level I – Evaluation of selected subjects by the teacher specified period of time.
- Level II – Evaluation and comparison of specific groups (subjects, teachers, students, teaching modes, tools, etc.).
- Level III – evaluation of the quality of educational services within the whole organization (for example, at the university), through periodic studies and comparing the results in the context of separate areas and specific quality factors.

Level IV – comparison of two (or more) higher education institutions, with the following assumptions:

1. The universities or isolated unit (faculty) should have similar profile and structure
2. The list of determinants must be the same for all analyzed organizations and the study must be carried out by external evaluation center (e.g. a specific group of experts).

Summing up the previous considerations, it should be emphasized once again that the problem of studying the quality in higher education, and in particular the proper identification of the determinants of the quality of services, their selection and evaluation, are a challenge for all the academic organizations. Based on studies of literature, analysis of the available models and qualitative methods, the article shows the original concept that allows the assessment of quality issues in education at the university level. Results of this study indicate the need of individual approach to the studied organization so that the proposed five-areas model and proposed determinants are the best way to capture the essence of the quality of education services in higher education.

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**Cite this article as:** Stecyk, A. (2017). Increasing the level of educational services quality in higher education. *European Journal of Service Management*, 3 (23), 71–78. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2017.23-09.