

TRADITIONAL REGIONAL PRODUCTS AS PART OF UNIQUE SALES PROPOSITION IN FARM TOURISM IN POLAND

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Abstract

This paper presents the importance of traditional regional products as unique sales propositions in tourism. Apart from a critical analysis of the literature relating to its subject matter and presentation of information from websites, a research method using a questionnaire survey is also used. The survey was conducted in 2014, among 246 respondents – inhabitants of the province. A casual non-random selection was used. On the basis of the analysis of the literature carried out, and as the author's survey also showed, both manufacturers and potential tourists are interested in the use of traditional regional products in rural tourism. The preferences of tourists regarding the desire to consume traditional products when in rural areas strengthen with age and education.

Key words: rural tourism, traditional products, unique selling proposition

INTRODUCTION

The rising expectations of tourists coming into the countryside mean that beyond the scenic attributes of farm tourism another important attraction is getting to know the local culture, cuisine or tradition. An important element making farm tourism attractive is the availability of traditional regional products, whose high nutritional values have been confirmed by the relevant certificates. These products are one of the important factors determining the choice of a specific tourist destination in Western European countries, as well as in Poland. For example, tests carried out in Italy suggest that these products take second place in the order of reasons (after the desire for relaxation) for using the services of farm tourism. Tourists are interested both in eating dishes created on the basis of traditional foods, as well as the possibility of direct purchase [2].

The aim of the chapter is to present the importance of regional tourism products as unique selling propositions, improving the attractiveness of what farm tourism has to

offer.

In the structure of the tourist product in accordance with the concept of Levitt we can distinguish a few complex layers, forming its core (centre), and the actual and extended products [5].

From the point of view of the competitive struggle the most important product level is the extended, which should include the *Unique Selling Proposition* – (the so-called *USP*). This characteristic distinguishes the product from other offers, therefore, it should be displayed in the promotional message. Thanks to this, a tourist service can be seen as unique, definitely outstanding compared to other offers. These can be, for example, visual sensations associated with the rural landscape (e.g. wild places, heathland) and audial (e.g. rustling of leaves, birds singing), rich cultural heritage, rich culinary heritage, or the opportunity to participate in the field work and everyday life of rural families.

Among the distinguishing characteristics increasing importance is played by the opportunity to eat traditional food associated with local culinary heritage. This includes,

inter alia, traditional regional products, based on which culinary trails are becoming more and more popular, and are a big attraction for tourists.

The development of traditional regional products is part of a general trend observed for more than ten years in the sphere of consumption. As shown by Bywalec [1], after a significant deterioration of the nutrition level of the majority of society in the early 1990s, in the second half of the decade there appeared a beneficial process making slow but steady improvements in nutrition. These trends have increased in the 21st century, leading to greater importance of values such as youth, health, physical form and good looks, which are closely related to the type and quality of food consumed.

The developments taking place at the turn of the century are part of a new consumer trend referred to as LOHAS (*Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability*). It is defined by a move away from rapacious consumption, promoting healthy living, organic nutrition, sustainability and respect for the environment [6]. This trend has had a fundamental impact on the solutions used in the food industry, preferring natural, safe methods of processing and preserving food without artificial additives or preservatives. Examples of such products are traditional regional products, which are finding wider and wider use in tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the paper, apart from a critical analysis of the literature relating to its subject matter and presentation of information from websites, a research method using a questionnaire survey is also used. The survey was conducted in 2014, among 246 respondents – inhabitants of the province. A casual non-random selection was used, taking into account the gender (51.6% women and 48.4% men) and age of the interviewees (20-44 years – 51.2%, 45-64 years – 32.1%, 65 years and over – 16.7%). In addition, reference is made to the results of a survey conducted by one of the authors in 2010 among 19 regional manufacturers of traditional products registered in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development,

operating within the province. The results of the research have made it possible to demonstrate the capabilities and scope of the use of traditional regional products in farm tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An important stage in the development of Polish traditional regional products was the entry into force on 17 February 2005 of the Act of 17 December 2004 on registration and protection of the names and designations for agricultural products and foodstuffs and for traditional products. From that point on, Polish manufacturers after passing through a certain procedure also have the right to use symbols certifying the unique nature of the products. The identification of the products protects them against unfair misappropriation of the name or copying.

The National List of Traditional and Regional Products of the Ministry of Agriculture passes on information and promotes products that are formed on the basis of recipes and methods used continually for generations. Traditional products are entered on the list whose quality, unique characteristics and properties result from the use of traditional methods of production. They represent elements of the cultural heritage of the region in which they are produced. The distinguishing feature of traditional regional products is their unique smell and taste, obtained in a natural way, without using “flavour enhancers”, based on rich culinary traditions.

An important objective of entering a name on the list of traditional regional products is also formal-organization preparation of producers of this kind of products for potential registration at the European Commission.

In Poland the list of products enjoys great interest and appreciation among consumers. This is confirmed by a systematic increase in the quantity of registered products. In 2006, 499 products were registered, in 2009 – 700 products, while in 2015 – 1475. Over the past six years the number of registered products has more than doubled. The leading places on the list are taken by three provinces: Podkarpackie (198), Pomorskie (173) and

Lubelskie (153).

Activity in the field of development of traditional products is becoming more and more noticeable in the Podkarpackie province. Podkarpackie has a very rich culinary heritage; it is becoming fashionable to rediscover forgotten tastes as well as promote the regional culinary art. Podkarpackie occupies the leading position in terms of the number of registered products. The rich culinary range also stems from the fact that the Polish traditions of the Podkarpackie province mingle with the customs of

neighbours over the eastern and southern borders of the region, which further affects the uniqueness of the products.

Traditional regional products have become a major attraction for the development of tourism, including farm tourism. Products purchased by tourists at the farm, the farmers' market or festival once tasted are considered to be unique delicacies that enhance the farm tourism offer. The interest of potential tourists in regional products produced on the basis of traditional recipes is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The expectations of potential farm tourists in terms of the availability of traditional regional products according to education (percentage).

Description	Total	According to education			According to age		
		Basic	Medium	Higher	20-44 years	45-64 years	65 years or more
Taking into account when choosing tourist offers the possibilities of consuming traditional products	50.8	44.1	49.6	54.5	45.2	51.8	65.9
Willingness to pay higher prices for traditional products in the course of a trip	46.3	29.4	44.2	54.5	43.6	49.4	48.8
Declared loyalty to tourist facilities offering traditional regional cuisine	43.1	26.5	45.1	46.5	34.9	45.6	43.4

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys

Table 2. Tourism as a market outlet for traditional regional products in the opinion of their manufacturers

Description	Total	According to education	
		medium	higher
products are offered to tourists in their own tourist facilities, including farm tourism	16.7	25.0	12.5
products are offered to tourists thanks to close cooperation with farm tourism holdings	25.0	0.0	37.5
products are offered directly to tourists through cooperation with collective tourism	16.7	25.0	12.5
I intend in the future to create markets in this way	33.3	25.0	37.5
I don't see the connection	8.3	25.0	0.0

Source: elaboration based on Kuźniar W. [4]

According to the study, nearly half of the respondents said they take the possibility of consuming traditional products into account when choosing between offers. It is noteworthy that with an increase in education there is more interest in traditional products, which translates into a willingness to pay higher prices for higher quality food. It should be noted that in the group of people with the lowest education (basic/vocational) less than 30% of those polled expressed such a wish. This group also has the lowest declared loyalty to tourist facilities offering traditional regional cuisine (on average every fourth respondent). Declared loyalty increases with the level of education of potential tourists. The data presented shows that the older the respondents, the more they prefer traditional products during tourist trips in the

countryside. Such preferences are expressed by on average two out of three of those surveyed over the age of 65. Some of them, however, remain cautious in terms of their willingness to pay higher prices for traditional products. The greatest willingness in this regard was expressed by subjects in the age group 45-64 years, who at the same time declare the highest loyalty to tourist facilities offering traditional regional cuisine.

The interest of tourists in traditional regional products is seen by their producers, who try to incorporate it into their offer. From the research carried out by the author in 2010 among the manufacturers of traditional regional products, it appears that a large group is beginning to perceive rural tourism as an important outlet for their products (Table 2).

As is evident from the data presented, in 2010

on average every sixth producer of traditional products was associated directly with tourist activity, and registered products are offered to their visitors. Almost half of the surveyed producers at that time cooperated with tourist facilities operating in the local market, and every fourth directly with farm tourism, and another with mass tourism facilities. It should be noted that, on average, one third of those surveyed declared a desire to extend the market for their products in the near future, and only a small percentage did not see a relationship between selling their products and the development of farm tourism services.

Analysing the studied phenomenon in terms of education no significant relationship was observed. In summary it can be concluded that regional manufacturers of traditional products are becoming more and more aware of the importance of tourism, including farm tourism as an important outlet for their products.

According to their declaration in the future cooperation between the tourism operators and manufacturers of traditional regional products will expand, resulting in the creation of enduring relationships between them [4]. Thanks to this producers of products will be provided with fixed outlets and tourist operators, in particular tourist farms, will offer tourists the highest quality food products, which will lead to an increasing group of tourists coming to the countryside.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the attributes of food is its quality and traditional recipes, which have a particularly important role for tourists wishing to relax in the Polish countryside. These are in fact original recipes, based on home cooking and natural ingredients of meals, which is a guarantor of high nutritional value and good, often unique taste. The offer of traditional regional products is an important element of the so-called extended product, whose task is to distinguish a product on the market by offering a unique selling proposition. The development of these products and their use in rural tourism promotes a change in lifestyle of today's consumers, including in particular the greening and servicisation of consumption.

It should be noted that local and regional food products, especially those classified as traditional, are very good promotion for the regions, becoming at the same time an important local tourist attraction, thus linking them to tourism, especially to farm tourism, appears to be fully justified. Offering this type of farm products in farm tourism, regional inns, or during organized events during the tourist season, greatly enriches the tourism and gastronomic offer of the region, increasing the profitability of local agricultural production. Potential tourists are interested in access to traditional regional products during holidays in the countryside. Their preferences regarding the desire to consume traditional products while in rural areas strengthen with age and education.

In the light of the results presented, as well as on the basis of the literature of the subject, it should be expected that the coming years will bring an increase in the availability of traditional regional products during holidays in the countryside. The consequences of this will be both greater satisfaction of visitors, as well as expanding markets for regional products, which may become a "showcase" not only for particular tourist farms, but also for specific towns or municipalities, promoting in this way, all forms of tourism activity carried out in the given area.

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