

Principles of the experience economy in designing an agritourism product

ANNA SIECZKO, ANNA J. PARZONKO, WIOLETTA BIEŃKOWSKA-GOŁASA*

Department of Tourism, Social Communication and Counselling, Institute of Economics and Finance, Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, Poland

**Corresponding author: wioletta_bienkowska@sggw.pl*

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Abstract: Taking action aimed at creating an attractive agritourism product contributes to the development of rural tourism. The main purpose of this study is to present reflections regarding the assumptions of the experience economy and their possible application in developing an agritourism product. The conducted empirical research involved a diagnostic survey method based on a standardized questionnaire. The study results show that the owners of Polish agritourism farms, when focusing on the material components of their offer, should also recognize the need to design memorable experiences for their clients.

Keywords: agritourism; agritourism farms; dimensions of tourist; tourist

Travelling, discovering and exploring the corners of the world are inscribed in the history of humanity. These journeys have been undertaken for various motives, sometimes with the view to new economic opportunities and sometimes in search of adventure and relaxation. Since it took the form of an organised activity, tourism has always been the ‘experience industry’ – selling emotions, impressions, adventures and memories related to travel (Stasiak 2013). Experiences are subjective, highly personal and intangible phenomena, hence, the difficulty in defining them. At the individual level, they are associated with such functions as memory, perception, learning and previous experiences. A tourism experience is preceded by concrete expectations. Therefore, it can result in satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Li 2000; Quinlan-Cutler and Carmichael 2010; Tung and Ritchie 2011; de Freitas Coelho et al. 2018). The question arises – what can be done to ensure that the tourism experience is turned into a memorable journey? The modern tourist does not only want to see and to learn, but

also to understand and to experience, that is, to come in direct contact with the visited place (Chen and Rahman 2018; Bec et al. 2019; Vada et al. 2019). The enhancement of traditional tourism products by adding elements that will strengthen tourist experiences is undoubtedly a desirable direction (Kandampully et al. 2011; Sugathan and Ranjan 2019). From the economic point of view, the experience-oriented approach boosts tourist traffic and demand, and thus is important for service providers, influencing the composing of a tourism offer and its market success.

According to Zawadka (2017), agritourism, being a form of rural tourism, which fits into the concept of sustainable tourism and uses the resources of functioning farms, can be considered a relatively uncommercialised, natural and authentic form of tourism, which conscious tourists perceive as its great value. Apart from rest and relaxation in rural areas, agritourism also offers broadly understood on-farm education, possibility to learn about the culture and history of the region, lo-

cal customs and traditions as well as the opportunities to involve in physical activities organised on the farm or in the immediate and wider rural area.

This study aims to contribute to the theory of the experience economy and agritourism product. Previous studies conducted in this field (de Freitas Coelho et al. 2018; Sugathanand Ranjan 2019; Zhang et al. 2019) did not take into account the specificity of agritourism. This study aims to contribute to filling this gap and focuses on the role of designing a memorable experience as part of an agritourism offer. This approach requires taking into account the characteristics of tourists and their expectations of an agritourism product.

The analysis of research results with the implications for agritourism service providers is a contribution to further research.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the research study was to present the reflections on the assumptions of the experience economy and their possible application in creating the agritourism product.

The empirical study was a diagnostic survey involving a standardized questionnaire, which supplied data necessary to achieve the research goal. The survey was carried out in May 2017 and 2018 and involved 519 respondents. The selection of the research sample was purposeful, the questionnaire was addressed only to people who had already used the services of agritourism farms. The questionnaire was underpinned by the review of literature on agritourism product and the literature on the experience economy which was a source of the four dimensions of experience used in this study: entertainment experience, aesthetic experience, educational experience and escapist experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 2011).

The data was collected using a survey questionnaire. Then the data was compiled and statistical analyses, i.e. chi square test and Pearson correlation, were conducted. Out of the many surveyed features describing the respondent, only the most important (gender and age) were utilised, as after initial research they showed the strongest relationship with individual dimensions of experiences expressed on a Likert scale 1–4. Before applying Person's correlation analysis, the data were transformed into quantitative features (centres of age ranges) and then checked for compliance with the normal distribution. After confirming the compliance of the assumptions, a correlation analysis was performed on a sample of 519 cases. Such a large sample

size allowed indicating even very small but significant correlations. Since the sample structure did not coincide with the population structure, the generalization of results and conclusions should be limited.

AGRITOURISM PRODUCT – THEORETICAL APPROACH

Nowadays, the development of agritourism is perceived as a concept of rural development, not a collection of businesses run by individual entrepreneurs. For this reason agritourism product is seen in an increasingly broader perspective as a product developed not by a single individual, but a local community, municipality or region also involving various institutions and organizations. It results both from the progress of civilization, as well as from basic laws describing the effectiveness of human behaviour. There is no doubt that we are a society that is more and more demanding and seeking offers that satisfy the widest possible range of needs (Parzonko and Siczko 2017). Agritourism offers the opportunity to enter the tourism market for farms, often located in attractive areas i.e. enjoying the necessary tourism and anthropogenic assets and offering rest and relaxation on a farm.

The market success of a product is conditioned by its ability to meet specific needs. The purchase of a product should provide buyers with certain benefits. For this reason, the product is sometimes defined in marketing as a set of benefits for the buyer. Various ambitions, tastes and preferences result in different perception of the object of exchange by different participants of the transaction. For the seller, the product is always something that should be simply profitably sold. However, the buyer's motives can be very different. At the time of purchase, the basic decision criteria are usually product features and price. During and after the service delivery, other elements such as experience appear and contribute to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the client. Therefore, experience related to the purchase of a given service, as well as experience of product consumption, become important criteria influencing the overall assessment of the product (Sánchez et al. 2006; Hedlund 2011; Pulido-Fernández and López-Sánchez 2016). That is why, nowadays enterprises do not offer a 'naked' product but 'dress' it in a set of benefits composed of marketing information, brand, promotion.

In the case of an agritourism product, the essential ingredients shaping the individual experience of a tourist include the assets of the farm location, both natural and anthropological (monuments, exhibitions, crafts,

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architecture, rituals, customs, museums). The natural or recreational values are mainly sought after by tourists who live in large urban agglomerations. Research shows a growing interest in the countryside as a recreational space, which creates many opportunities for outdoor recreation, contact with nature and culture, the possibility of socialization in an environment other than urban. Rural areas are valued mainly for the lack of stress, typical of urban areas (pollution, congestion, noise, fast pace of life) sense of returning to the roots and ‘authenticity’ (Ribeiro and Marques 2002; Walmsley 2003; Figueiredo and Raschi 2011; Kastenholz et al. 2012; Poczta-Wajda and Poczta 2016). The tourism value of a given place largely determines the location of the remaining elements of tourist offer. In order to utilize the natural and anthropological assets of the location it is necessary to develop tourism infrastructure providing accommodation, food, transportation and supplementary facilities. The individuality of the agritourism product is created by e.g.: home-made meals based on regional cuisine recipes, unlimited access to the assets of the farm (e.g. walks through the orchard, garden), contact with farm animals, learning folk crafts (e.g. weaving wicker baskets, crocheting, preparation of Easter palms), the possibility to make preserves from fruits and vegetables from the farm, walks in nearby forests and picking and processing fruit of forest undergrowth, helping farmers in field work e.g. (haymaking, fruit harvesting) and the possibility of observing everyday life of the hosts, as well as various species of plants and animals (especially if it is an area of outstanding natural beauty).

DETERMINANTS OF CHOICE OF AGRITOURISM OFFERS – RESEARCH RESULTS

The agritourism product has specific features resulting from the place of origin, available tourist attractions and people providing agritourism services. First of all, the agritourism product is characterized by values related to the unique qualities of the rural environment (folklore, culture) and is intended for a specific group of people who cherish certain set of values (such as preserving the identity of rural areas or environmental protection) and who see the benefits of rest and relaxation on a farm.

In order to identify the determinants of the selection of agritourism offers an empirical study was carried out on a group of 519 respondents (57.9% female and 42.1% male). The age of the respondents was quite diverse, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age (year)	Sex		Total (number)
	female (number)	male (number)	
< 18	10	8	18
18–25	129	57	186
26–35	48	51	99
36–45	32	29	61
46–55	44	41	85
56–70	28	24	52

Source: Own study

The distribution of employment status of the respondents was as follows: 39.9% – full-time employees, 30.8% – students, 10.4% – pensioners, 10% – entrepreneurs, 5.6% – freelancers and 3.3 % – unemployed. Nearly 70% of respondents had secondary and tertiary education.

Experience and agritourism product are inextricably linked. Tourists want to take part in something unusual, different from their everyday experience and the aim of their trip is a unique summer adventure. That is why when it comes to designing the agritourism offer it is very important to know the tourists’ expectations. Figure 1 presents the expectations of tourists regarding agritourism accommodation.

According to Ritchie and Hudson (2009), the basic criteria for selecting an offer are not rational criteria related to measurable, physical product features (aesthetics, tangible aspects of service quality). As the researchers note, more attention is paid to improving the subjective perception and emotional involvement of travellers. However, in the case of agritourism, for Polish tourists, the selection based on rational criteria was important. As Figure 1 shows, the respondents valued attractions associated with the natural rural surroundings of an agritourism farm and the opportunity to experience the local cuisine and culture, both through participation in various cultural events as well as tasting regional dishes. Emotional impressions were appreciated. Respondents valued friendly atmosphere and high quality of service. Similar research results were obtained by Freitas Coelho et al. (2018). According to their study social interactions are an important component of a tourism product. The data presented in Figure 2 show that tourists primarily value regional and home-made dishes offered on the farm. It is interesting that as the selection criterion tourists also indicated the possibility of participating in regional cooking courses. This seems to expose

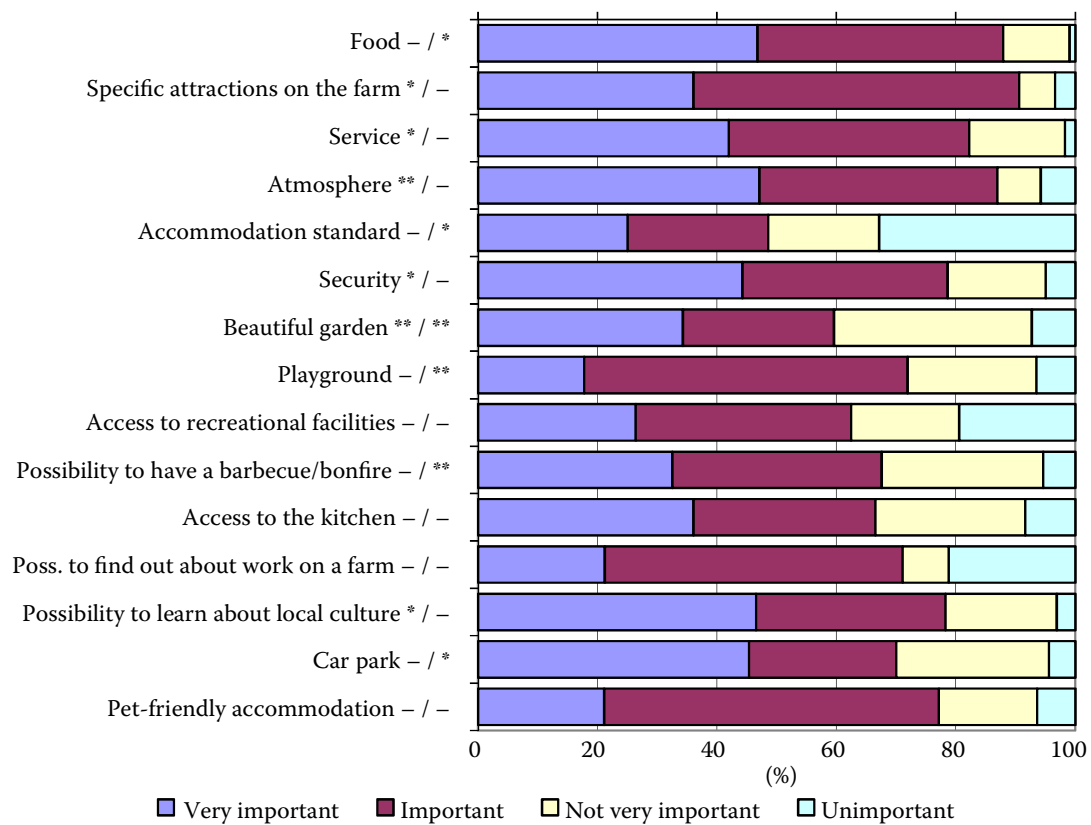


Figure 1. Respondents' individual expectations regarding agritourism accommodation (the respondent could select more than one answer)

Asterisks before the slash indicate the relationship between the examined characteristic and gender; asterisks after the slash indicate the relationship between the characteristics and the age group; *significant relationship at < 0.05 ; **significant relationship at < 0.01 ; – no relationship was found

Source: Own study results

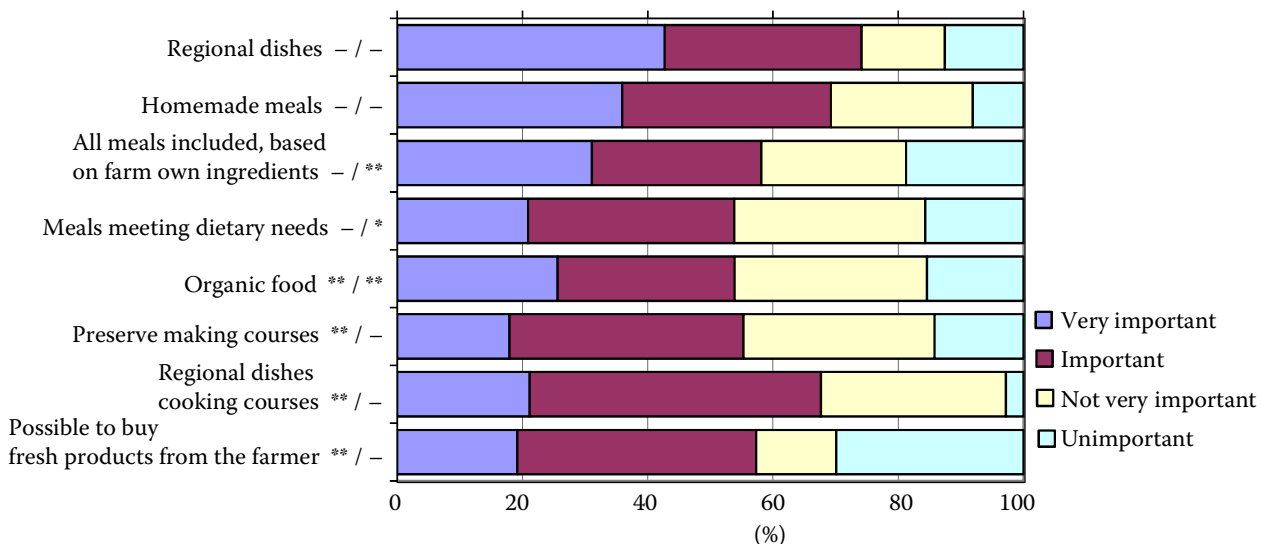


Figure 2. Respondents' expectations regarding food on a farm stay (the respondent could select more than one answer)

Asterisks before the slash indicate the relationship between the examined characteristic and gender; asterisks after the slash indicate the relationship between the characteristics and the age group; *significant relationship at < 0.05 ; ** significant relationship at < 0.01 ; – no relationship was found

Source: Own study results

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the need to experience the authenticity of the offered product. In a sense, it is an expression of boredom with mass tourism based on leisure resorts created solely to meet mass needs. MacCannell (2013) also observed a similar relationships.

In order to meet the objective of this study it was necessary to investigate which components of the agri-

tourism product contribute to forming memorable experiences related to farm holidays. This knowledge is important because it can inspire reviews and enhancement of agritourism offers. As can be seen from the data presented in Figure 3, tourists rated the highest the opportunity to participate in cultural events, the opportunity to experience local cuisine, the availability of tourist

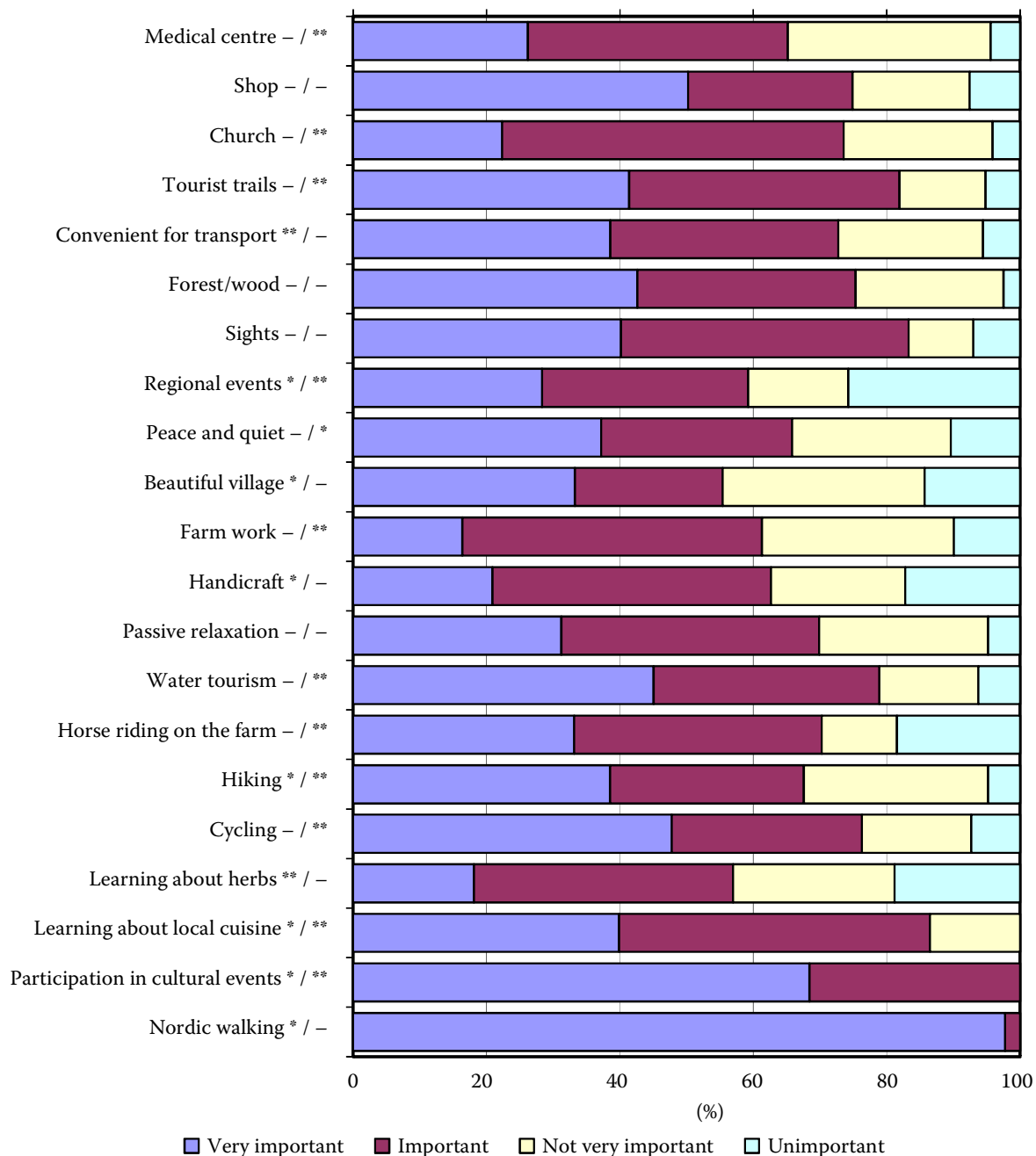


Figure 3. Respondents' impressions related to a tourism product (the respondent could select more than one answer)

Asterisks before the slash indicate the relationship between the examined characteristic and gender; asterisks after the slash indicate the relationship between the characteristics and the age group; *significant relationship at < 0.05 ; **significant relationship at < 0.01 ; – no relationship was found

Source: Own study results

trails and historical sites. It seems justifiable to conclude that such attractions are the basis of agritourism experience. As noted in their research by Kim and Ritchie (2014), the difference between the native tourist culture and the culture of destinations is important because it generates the memorable experience.

The conducted research study also showed that there is an important and statistically significant correlation between two variables – the age of the respondents and their will to take part in cultural events (Pearson's correlation coefficient = 0.14) (Figure 3). The rating assigned to participating in cultural events decreased with the growing age of respondents. 67% of people under 36 years of age rated this feature as very important and important, in the group aged 36–45 it was 78% but among the older respondents the percentage of these

answers was much lower. In the group of people aged 46–70 it was 62% and those aged over 70 only 41%. The cultural (environmental) dimension has also proved to be important in the study of other researchers (de Freitas Coelho et al. 2018), who pointed out three dimensions (personal, relational, and environmental), which appear to be crucial to memorable experiences.

The attractiveness of an agritourism product can be seen through the prism of various dimensions of experience. Consumer experiences can be classified into four categories: entertainment, aesthetic, educational and escapist (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 2011). Referring to this concept, Och et al. (2007) carried out their research supplementing the list with memory, satisfaction and emotions. Other researchers also pointed to other dimensions of experience, such as hospitality,

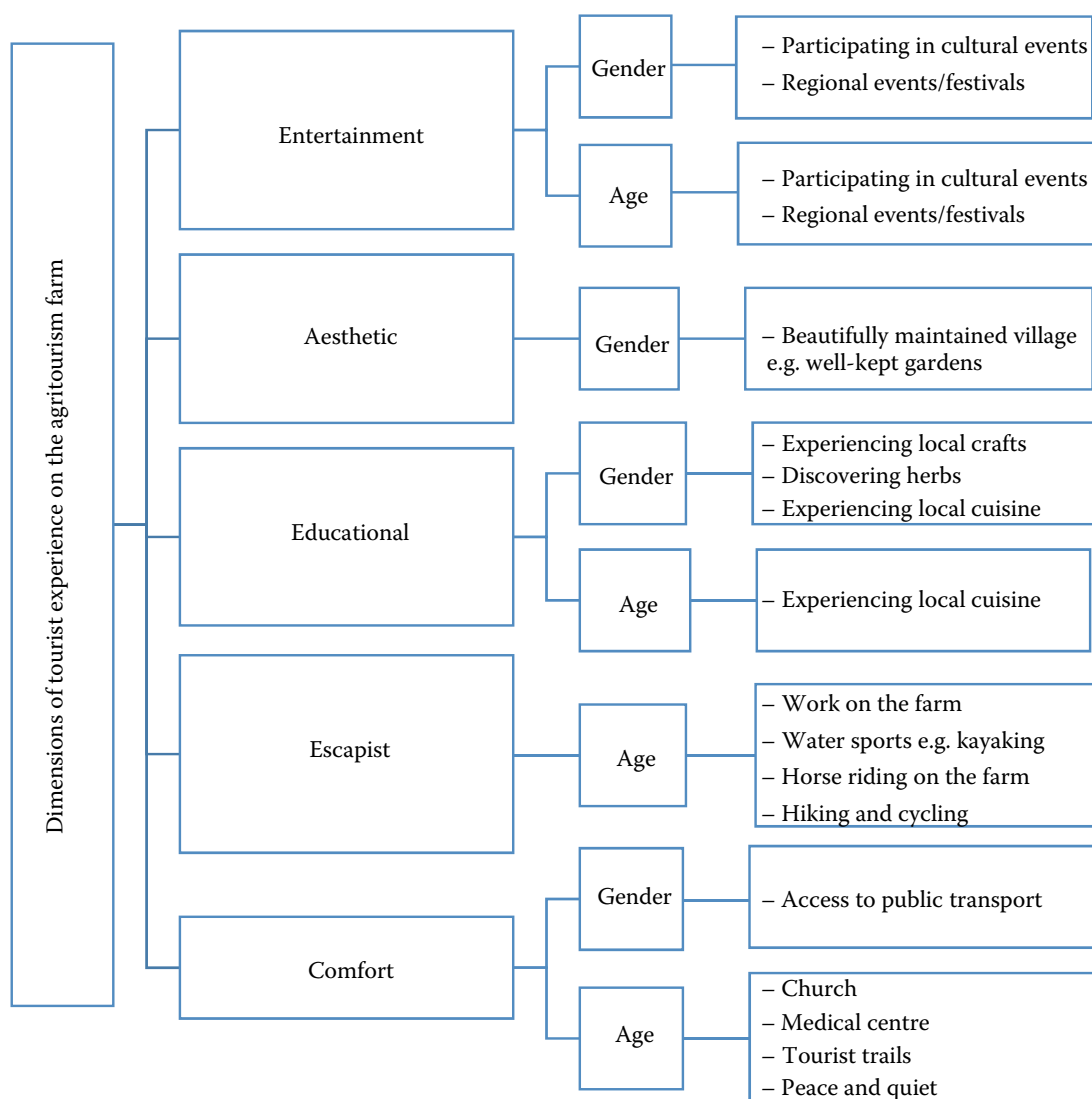


Figure 4. Dimensions of tourist experiences on the agritourism farm by gender and age

Source: Own study results

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security, hedonism, pragmatism, relationships, commitment and novelty (Gentile et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2012; Pezzi and Vianna 2015). In recent years, many authors focused on experience as a new economic value, creating benefits both for the seller and the buyer (Foroudi et al. 2016; Yachin 2018; Gilboa et al. 2019; Heinonen et al. 2019; Prentice et al. 2019).

Based on the carried out research as well as the review of the literature in the field, a proposal of five dimensions of experience was formulated, which take into account a slightly different perception of experiences related to agritourism. This is due to the specificity of agritourism, its connections with the farm, service providers, natural, social and cultural environment (Figure 4).

As other researchers emphasize, one of the main challenges in designing an agritourism offer is to meet the diverse needs of tourists looking for different experiences. Understanding the individual motives, expectations, perceptions and emotions associated with individual subjective experience is the key to providing a high quality agritourism service. The agritourism experience is in fact co-created by agritourism service providers as well as by the local population and the tourists themselves (Knutson and Beck 2004; Urieley 2005; Tung and Ritchie 2011; Kastenholz et al. 2012).

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the research results, it can be concluded that the experiences and resulting impressions of the surveyed tourists are directly related to the specificity of agritourism offers, which provide experiences like the opportunity to work on the farm, discover the secrets of herbs, take part in workshops on making preserves and regional dishes.

In order to meet the aim of this study it was necessary to investigate which components of the agritourism product have the potential to create memorable experiences related to staying on an agritourism farm. This information is important because it can be an inspiration to improve the agritourism offer. Based on the conducted research involving people who used agritourism services, five dimensions of tourist experience in the context of an agritourism farm were distinguished, taking into account gender and age variables. The distinguished experience categories include: entertainment, educational, aesthetic, escapist and comfort. Admittedly, not all of them depended on gender and age, e.g. aesthetic experience only on gender, and escapist experiences on age. However, these dimensions must be looked at holistically and taken into account when

designing an agritourism product. Since the research was conducted only on a group of Polish agritourists, it is difficult to say whether also in other countries the same dimensions of experience would be equally important, or perhaps completely different ones like safety, hedonism or pragmatism, would prove to be more important.

It is worth emphasizing that the cultural context significantly and positively influenced the memorable tourist experience, which in turn can translate into revisiting the farm as well as recommending the offer to others. It would be advisable for persons providing agritourism services to take into account the role of the local cultural heritage in shaping the agritourism offer, including in particular cultural and culinary events. These types of attractions are crucial for creating agritourism experiences. What is more, the power of experience is proportional to the difference between the native culture of the tourist and the culture of the destination. Therefore, it is important that rural culture is both authentic and significantly different from urban or global culture. The tourist's impressions should be unique and closely related to the rural area.

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