

Api-tourism in Europe

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Abstract: Api-tourism, as a form of tourism that deals with culture and traditions of rural communities could be considered as one of the most sustainable way of development and a niche tourism. Api-tourism is a form of tourism connected with beekeeping as a traditional profession and with bee products in ecological, food and medicinal aspects. The activities related to api-tourism include visits in apiaries, open-air museums and bee museums where tourists have the opportunity to observe a beekeeper's work, a method of making honey, its properties and specifics, to find out about other bee products, to watch how bee colony live, to recognize ecological correlation between a man and bees. The purpose of this article is to show good practice in api-tourism observed in Europe. The study is based on field research conducted in apiaries, bee museums and educational farms in the years 2012-2014.

Key words: *api-tourism, apiary, educational farm, ecotourism, sustainable tourism.*

1. Introduction

The 21st century is a period of intense economic development and increasing degradation of natural environment. Decline of biodiversity and dysfunctions of many ecosystems are the problems we face every day. Progressive process of globalization threatens the behavior, traditions, culture and integrity of local societies. From the environmental point of view, it is necessary to counter these negative processes. Implementation of sustainable development principles can deal with the problem. Tourism is the branch of economy where cultural and natural values are required to be preserved (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005). The tendency observed in tourism in recent years is the interest in pro-environmental forms of travelling: eco and agri-tourism, nature and cultural tourism. Tourists look for active forms of spending free time however not only physical activity is crucial but also the cognitive one. Opportunity to gain new experiences, to meet natural and cultural specificity of a region becomes the motive for many tourist trips (Woźniak & Cebulak, 2007). An excellent example of such form of tourism is api-tourism.

Api-tourism (the name comes from Latin name of honeybee - *Apis mellifera*) is a form of tourism connected with beekeeping as a traditional profession and with bee

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products in ecological, food and medicinal aspects. Activities related to api-tourism include visits in apiaries, open-air museums and bee museums where a tourist has an opportunity to observe a beekeeper's work, a method of making honey, its properties and specifics (including tasting different kinds of honey), to find out about other bee products (pollen, wax, bee bread, royal jelly), to watch how bee colony live, to recognize ecological correlation between a man and bees (Woś & Bień, 2013). Api-tourism may be developed on the basis of the already existing beekeeping museums and open-air museums, but, above all, the offer may be formed by the owners of apiaries, bee farms and agro and ecotourism farms with home apiaries. Development of api-tourism is an opportunity to activate rural areas, to create new jobs and to promote a region's culture and tradition. A country that is the leader of the api-tourism market is Slovenia (Sivic, 2014) where api-tourism became one of the branches of tourism that is very attractive both for domestic and foreign tourists. In the last 5 years, the dynamic development of api-tourism was recorded in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Ukraine (Oleynik & Iaromenko, 2012) and Spain (Shiffler, 2014).

2. Materials and Methods

To assess the availability of api-tourism offer properly the research studies were conducted in entities associated with api-tourism: apiaries, museums, open-air museums of beekeeping and agri-tourism farms with api-tourism offer. Between April and August 2013 the studies were conducted in Poland and then, during the next year (April - August 2014), the research area was extended to selected European countries. In total, the survey covered 75 api-tourism entities in Poland and abroad (40 in Poland, 6 in Czech Republic, 7 in Germany, 7 in Slovenia, 4 in Spain, 2 in Lithuania, 2 in Ukraine, 2 in Portugal, 2 in Slovakia, 2 in Hungary and 1 in Greece). The following research methods were used: questionnaire survey among the owners, visits to apiaries and museums and analysis of the availability of api-tourist offer and possibilities of its development. In the second part of the research interviews were conducted with 50 randomly selected tourists in order to determine the interest in the api-tourist offer.

2. Research Results

The aim of this paper was to present api-tourism as an innovative form of spending free time, to show its functions and to characterize the main group of api-tourism product recipients.

On the grounds of conducted research, basic api-tourism functions were distinguished.

Educational function – api-tourism promotes pro-ecological environmental activities (Madras-Majewska, Majewski, 2013) making tourists aware of a huge role bees play in functioning of many ecosystems. 1/3 of products eaten indirectly and directly by a man

depend on insect pollination (Spevak, 2012). For that reason it is very important to retain the largest number of bee colonies and to ecologically educate allowing understanding and appreciating the role of bees in life and economy of a man.

Touring function draws attention to the specific nature and tradition of a region and especially of beekeeper's work and the history of beekeeping (Schluter, 2011; Sims, 2009, Brscic, Poljuha & Siklic, 2013).

Pro-health function - promotion of natural treatment methods and bee products which, when properly used, can replace complex pharmaceuticals. It is essential to attract attention to not well-known and rarely used bee products such as propolis, bee bread, royal jelly, pollen and wax. Showing numerous applications of bee products in cooking, medicine and cosmetics it is also a promotion of pro-healthy lifestyle and the return to nature, which can successfully serve a man.

Social function - an api-tourism offer allows activating a local community by creating new jobs at tourist traffic services, to develop agri-tourism farms and to benefit from the potential of knowledge and experience of apiarists (Woś & Bień, 2013).

Such diversity of functions makes api-tourism an increasingly popular and highly valued form of tourism especially when carried out in apiaries and bee farms, which provide workshops and presentations in natural conditions. The research found that the main group of api-tourism offer recipients (54%) is made of children and adolescents. (Figure 1).

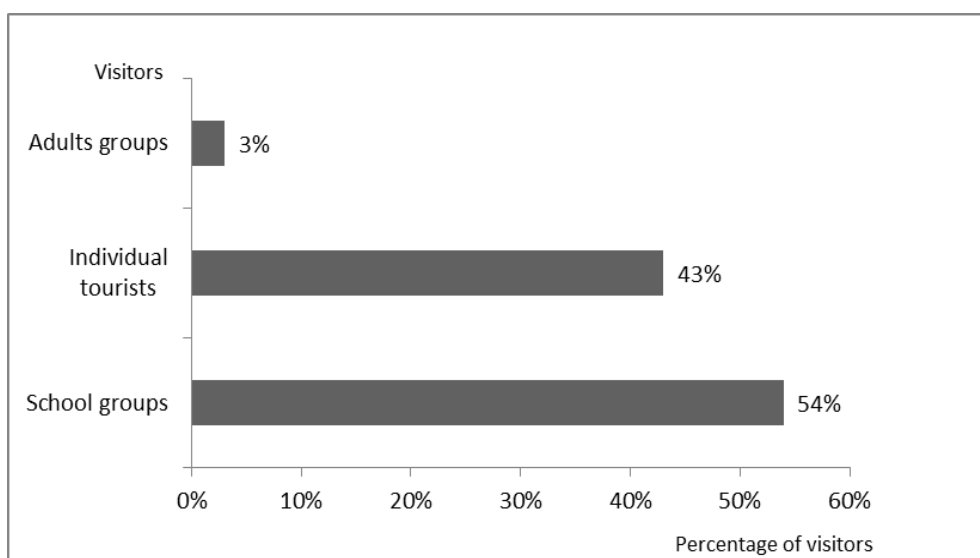


Figure 1. Main group of tourists interested in api-tourism.

Source: According to the author's calculations.

This is due to the educational function of api-tourism and the fact that many farms and apiaries dealing with api-tourism provide classes of biology, ecology and history of beekeeping dedicated to children and adolescents. An interesting form of these classes which combine theory with practice and offer many other attractions (trips to apiaries, wearing beekeeping protective clothing, games and plays related to beekeeping, tasting honey straight from a honeycomb) are a very interesting offer for schools and kindergartens. The second significant group of agri-tourism recipients is made of individual tourists (43%). As the conducted analysis indicates the group consists mainly of tourists who arrive to an apiary to purchase honey and later they choose additional activity, being encouraged to visit the apiary or to participate in workshops. Interviews with beekeepers involved in api-tourism show that the interest with an offer of classes in the apiary is increasing and visitors more and more often ask about the possibility to visit an apiary or expect to find such information on farm websites. The smallest group of agri-tourism offer recipients is made by adults (3%), usually apiarists interested in improvement workshops in apiaries and bee farms but this situation has also changed together with increasing popularity of api-tourism. In Slovenia, a country with firmly established position of api-tourism, groups of beekeepers arriving for workshops and trainings are an important group of recipients.

An api-tourism offer available on the market was analyzed during visits in apiaries, agri-tourism farms, museums and beekeeping open-air museums, (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Main attractions offered in apiaries and eco-farms. Source: According to the author's calculations.

Conducted studies revealed that vast majority of objects (74 out of analyzed 75) possess stands with honey and bee products. It is a fundamental form of an apitourism offer, which attracts tourists (particularly when it is available to taste various kinds of honey) and brings measurable benefits to the apiary owner. In most of analyzed objects, a stand with honey was the beginning of an api-tourism offer development. Further offer was shaped through the direct contact with customers and the analysis of their interests. Owners of 61 researched objects run educational classes related to beekeeping, ecology and biology of a bee. Most frequently, such classes take place in specially designed rooms or a shed and are supplemented by visits at an apiary. To minimize people's fear of being stung they use special beekeeper protective clothing. Apiary owners who do not have special classrooms run presentations away, in schools and kindergartens. During such classes, beekeepers, using visual aids (a demonstration beehive, honeycombs with sealed honey, beekeeper's equipment) explain the functioning of a bee colony and the process of production and obtaining honey. Forty-four beekeeping farms offer tourists apiary sightseeing and participation in workshops connected with obtaining honey (Figure 3.)



Figure 3. Workshop in apiary. Photo taken by author.

The scope of available activities and the size of a group depend on reception facilities and the number of employees involved in conducting classes of such type. Common tourist attractions found in an apiary and an open-air museum are exhibitions of

historical beehives and beekeeper's equipment. Such collections were recorded in 32 objects. Another interesting offer of api-tourism bee farms is bee wax candle making workshops, which attract a lot of tourists. It is worth mentioning that, unlike obtaining honey workshops or a sightseeing apiary offer, which are available for tourists between April and August, "wax workshops" can be conducted all year round. An interesting initiative which is more and more often present in apiaries and agri-tourism farms (11 visited objects had such an offer) are honey plants gardens where each plant is precisely described with a name, a period of flowering and usefulness for bees (melliferous). The creation of such an offer requires relatively low financial investment and brings considerable effects serving as teaching material, visual attraction and additional benefit for bees. Another element of the api-tourism offer having enormous developmental potential is api-therapy – application of honey and bee products in the treatment of various diseases. Treatments directly interfering in a patient's body can be carried out only under a doctor's control; however, there is a scope of treatments that do not require a physician's participation and may positively affect health and beauty. The most popular form of api-therapy used in apiaries (6 apiaries had it in its offer) were api-inhalation facilities – rooms where visitors rest in special comfortable armchairs and breathe beehive air rich in fungicidal and bactericidal substances positively affecting the respiratory system, supporting immunity, reducing stress and fatigue, improving mood. Api-inhalation sessions are recommended for people with asthma, respiratory system diseases, in neurotic states and in states of considerable exhaustion. In addition to api-inhalation sessions (particularly in Slovenian apiaries) the api-spa offers consisted in relaxation massages with the use of honey and bee wax, cosmetic masks, body scrubs and even baths with honey. Such an offer was considered as very valuable and api-spa apiaries attracted both tourists and people who wanted to benefit from honey properties. It is also worth mentioning that a lot of beekeepers who were beginning to create their api-tourism offers were interested in application of api-therapy in its various forms in their own apiaries. Such extended offer, however, involves a significant investment both in premises and in well-trained staff; therefore it is not usually available for smaller api-tourism farms that begin their activity. Visits in apiaries and beekeeping farms revealed also an offer connected with cooking workshops, which presented various ways of using honey and bee product in cooking. During such classes, you can find out about old and contemporary recipes for dishes with honey, try out your cooking and baking skills as well as decorate honey gingerbread. As in the previous case, organization of this type of workshops for large groups requires relevant premises facilities, which not all apiary owners may afford. However, individual tourists can benefit from such workshops in agri-tourism farms whose owners have small home apiaries and where a local kitchen is a place for workshops. As studies imply most tourists who visited api-tourism farms come back

there, taking advantage of other forms of an offer or make supplies of honey and bee products. This group of recipients becomes a natural advertising medium who, by word of mouth, attracts other clients and tourists.

To check the interest of tourists in the api-tourism offer I conducted a survey among 50 people who have not participated in api-tourism before, asking them for their interest in api-tourism (Figure 4).

As the analysis of the survey shows, the most attractive for tourists would be the possibility of obtaining information about honey and bee product application as a supplementary factor supporting the process of healing. The second one turned out to be the possibility of honey tasting what was indicated by 47.5% of respondents. More than 30% of respondents would eagerly take part in workshops connected with application of honey in cooking. Very popular was also the possibility of visiting an apiary and taking part in extracting honey workshops (27.5%). The workshops of beeswax candles were attractive for more than 15% of respondents. Api-therapy attracted relatively low interest.

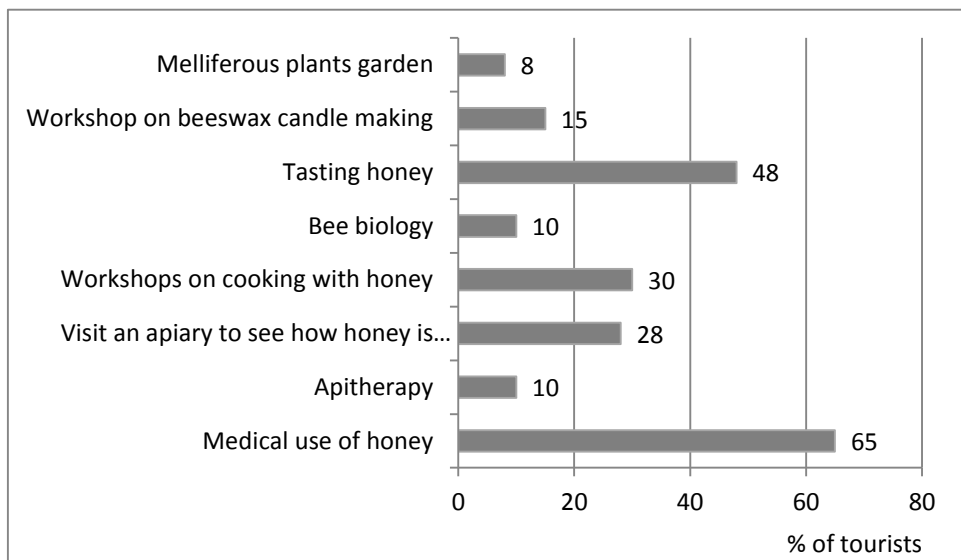


Figure 4. Type of api-tourism offer that the tourists are interested in.

Source: According to the author's calculations.

Only 10% of the respondents expressed their interest in such form of an offer what may be due to the low awareness of the possible use of bee waxes in a therapy and forms of therapy that can be conducted in apiaries. The lowest interests among the attractions that apiaries offered were the demonstrative honey plants gardens, which attracted only 7.5% of respondents. As the conducted research shows, there is a strong demand for an apitourism offer among various groups of recipients that creates a

significant chance for the development of this form of tourism. Interest in the creation of an api-tourism offer can also be seen among the beekeepers community in various countries. Year after year, the scope of tourism services provided by apiaries and beekeeping farms increases as well as their number. An extremely important motivator for the creation of api-tourism offer is the observation of good practices in countries like Slovenia where api-tourism attracts great interest and brings real profit to local community. Opportunity of study trips and of experience exchange between beekeepers from different countries results in dynamic development in most European countries.

Conclusions

Api-tourism is an innovative form of tourism that fits well in the area of niche tourism. Various functions it can follow result in an opportunity for dynamic growth. Such form of tourism can become an excellent support for rural areas creating new jobs in tourism services, supporting the development of local infrastructure and promoting the region. The specificity of api-tourism created on the basis of the existing bee farms, enabling gradual extension of an offer depending on financial, residential and human resources of each farm, allows preparing an offer in every apiary without necessity of big investments at the start. Adjusting an offer to a farm potential and to the needs of recipients allows for the specialization in one of the areas of api-tourism (api-therapy, education) or for the creation of widely available offer. Conducted studies showed a significant interest of schools and kindergartens in api-tourism offer. Education and promotion of healthy lifestyle and pro-ecological attitude based on knowledge and respect for nature seem to be worth promotion. Practical classes carried out in bee farms attract clients' attention to inseparable bounds between man and nature can also become a perfect way of promoting local culture and tradition. From the perspective of the research, it can be stated that optimal development of apitourism requires also the support of local governments and organizations responsible for the development of rural areas.

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