



Prospects for Farmers' Support: Advisory Services in European AKIS
WP 4 – AKIS ON THE GROUND FOCUSING KNOWLEDGE FLOWS SYSTEM | Topic 1

The effectiveness of advisory services to respond to
the demands of diverse types of small-scale farmers

Agritourism farm in the Carpathian Mountains of Poland

Malgorzata Bogusz, PhD
Krystyna Vinohradnik, PhD
Jozef Kania, Assoc. Prof.



University of Agriculture in Krakow

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List of Acronyms

CDR – Agricultural Advisory Centre

MIR – Malopolska Agricultural Chamber

MODR – Malopolska Advisory Centre

MRiRW – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

ODR – Provincial Advisory Centre

PRO AKIS – Prospects for Farmers' Support: Advisory Services in the European Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems'

1 Executive Summary

A dynamically developing economy requires significant trial and adjustment to the changing economic mechanisms from all participants in the market. In the case of rural areas, multifunctional development is one methods of economic stimulation. In this multifunctional development, significant participation by farmers in rural tourism activities is an alternative of the production function and an additional source of income. An example of such development is in the region of the Polish Carpathian Mountains. This region has significant amounts of (valuable) nature and landscape. It has the greatest number of agritourism farms of all regions of Poland, and simultaneously, the owners of agritourism farms are drawing their attention more and more to the quality of the services provided by introducing innovative projects. Thanks to these main factors, the region has been selected as a case study to be implemented within the PRO AKIS project.

In the research, attention has focused on the assessment of the knowledge and information flows related to innovations in agritourism activities – especially between the advisory institution environment and the farmer running an agritourism activity. In the institutional vicinity, the cooperation of the farmer with regards to the three types of institutions and organisations local to the Polish Carpathian Mountains has been taken into account. These institutions are: the Provincial Advisory Centres in three provinces - Podkarpackie, Malopolska and Silesia; the Agricultural Advisory Centre, division in Krakow; and the Malopolska Agricultural Chamber in Krakow.

The results of the research have highlighted that there is particularly close cooperation between the farmers and the advisors from the Provincial Advisory Centres and institutions of semi-public nature. There is relatively close connections between the Agricultural Chamber and other agritourism-related institutions. In addition, it was highlighted that farm owners conducting agritourism activities were and introducing more and more innovative activities, e.g. services addressed to a particular target group.

The findings of the research have been grouped according to five criteria: the challenges small scale farmers pose to advisory services; the role of small scale farmers in the creation of new

knowledge; differences in the provision of advisory services to small scale farmers and other farmers; the types of advisory methods for addressing small scale farmers; and access of the small scale farmers to ICT as a tool to obtain knowledge and information.

2 Introduction

Polish rural areas still encounter difficulties and barriers related to adjusting to the conditions of the market economy. A developing economy requires farm owners to not only notice, but also adjust to new and dynamically changing economic mechanisms. Multifunctional development is a consequence of the modernization of rural areas [Duczowska-Malysz 1998, p 11]. Thus the examples of developing non-agricultural activities, and thereby creating workplaces related to agriculture or its environment are extremely important for the countryside and its agriculture [Klodzinski 1999].

One way to stimulate the development of rural areas and their multifunctional development is developing agritourism businesses [Sikora 2012, p. 69]. Agritourism as a business activity of agricultural families is the subject of analyses of social policy as well as the Common Agricultural Policy. It has a significant contribution in the multifunctional development of farms and the multi-functionality of rural areas. It is also an example of an alternative source of income for farm owners and one of the elements of the development of rural areas. It makes use of accommodation, catering and recreational facilities on a farm and nature, production and service facilities which exist around a farm – thereby giving the opportunity to improve the quality of life and increase the living standards of the rural inhabitants. An example of such development is the region of the Polish Carpathian Mountains which has become a case study in the PRO AKIS project.

The Carpathian is the largest and the most important mountain tourist region in Poland, and the only region which encompasses a mountain landscape [Lijewski and others. 2008, p. 320-321]. In terms of attractiveness, the area of the Carpathian Mountains is one of the most attractive areas of Poland. It is a region of extraordinary natural and cultural richness. On the other hand, it is an area with small scale farms in terms of their production and large work resources- it is a region dominated by individual farms [Musial 1998, p. 47]. With regards to the economic indicators that characterise the agriculture of the Carpathian Mountain, it should also be highlighted that a vast number of agricultural farms, the fragmented area structure of farms, low ratio of soil bonitation, a large contribution of arable lands covered by the Less Favourable

Areas (LFA) support mechanism, relatively low yields of plants, a high share of permanent grasslands in the area of arable lands and a low level of agricultural income [Musial 1998, p.47]. Therefore, the fact that the popularity of agritourism in this region is increasing and farmers are eager to choose such a form of non-agricultural activity. It is a good choice for farmers because they receive an additional source of income by making empty rooms at home available to tourists, as well as utilising a surplus on-farm workforce, and in addition, agricultural products can be sold in the form of nourishment for vacationers. Hence, agritourism is very compatible with the modern concept of rural development [Sawicki 2007, p. 48].

In recent years agritourism activity has significantly developed in Poland, especially within the Polish Carpathian Mountains where rich nature and landscape values means there is the greatest number of agritourism farms per administrative unit across the nation. Through raising the quality of services offered the owners of these farms are directing their activities towards innovation, e.g. specification of farms to target groups of tourists, or specialising in an agri-business profile.

The main goal of the study has been to evaluate the information flow concerning agritourism innovation between an institutional environment and a farmer running an agritourism activity within the Polish Carpathian Mountains. With regards to the institutional backdrop surrounding three types of institutions and organisations have been taken into account: the Provincial Advisory Centres in three provinces, the Agricultural Advisory Centre in Krakow and the Agricultural Chamber in Krakow.

On the basis of the literature review, as well as on the basis of research conducted to date in the field of agritourism businesses, and also on acquired knowledge, the following **research hypothesis** has been formulated: *Consultancy activities under the scope of innovation in agritourism farms **has had a significant impact on the development** of the farms studied which were located in the Carpathian Mountains.* To formulate these research aims and research hypothesis the following **research questions** were created:

- 1) What is the role of the Provincial Advisory Centre (ODR) in co-operation with small scale farmers?

- 2) How should the methods, approach and tools to support small-scale farmers be chosen?
- 3) What are the impacts of the work of advisory services in household diversification? How are these impacts measured?
- 4) What is the role of the Provincial Advisory Centres (ODR) in co-operation with other institutions in providing advice for small-scale farms?
- 5) What types of innovations have been introduced by owners of small farms as a result of co-operation with the Provincial Advisory Centres (ODR)?
- 6) What is the impact of agritourism activities on the local development and promotion of the region?

The implementation of the research aims has required the use of diverse research methods and techniques. The research has been conducted at two levels: literature studies and an empirical survey. The first level of research, which involved conditioning the subject and identifying its territorial scope, focused on literature analysis of the research subject related to advice provision, communication, entrepreneurship, tourism and agritourism. The second trend concerned the authors' own research conducted in agritourism farms located throughout the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains within three provinces - Silesia, Malopolska and Podkarpackie - that have introduced these innovations to their tourists. The survey was conducted with advisors – agritourism specialists who work for one of the three advisory institutions which operate within the study areas. A special questionnaire was used to guide the interviews.

3 Selecting and delimiting the case-study

The family farms located in the Polish Carpathian Mountains are characterised by low profits, which forces the farmers to look for additional sources of income outside of agriculture [Ciodyk 2000, p 26]. In the opinion of M. Drzewiecki [2002, p. 90], agritourism is viewed as the means of development for regions in which it is not possible to intensively develop agriculture and industry. In such regions, poor soils and a lack of natural resources create effective protection against urbanisation and create conditions for the development of rural tourism. Additionally, this is an area of favourable natural and landscape conditions- another cause of agritourism development.

The starting point of research has been the analysis of strategic documents connected with tourist activities in the Polish Carpathian Mountains. The results of analysis became the base for selection the particular areas to carry out more in depth research in the chosen farms. The basis for the selection farms for the research are farms with an innovative agritourism business profile as well as actively operating within the institutional environment in the region.

The basic data source used in the case study was information collected through a survey and standardised interview. The selection of areas and farms for research was purposeful. The farms have been selected on the basis of the following criteria: topographic – situated in the Polish Carpathian; naturalistic – the value of the landscape; length time of running the agritourism activity – minimum of 3 years; personal entrepreneurship skills of the farmers – introducing their innovative ideas to a specific groups of tourist as a minimum. All farms that fulfilled the above criteria were selected for empirical research and further analysis. These selected farms are situated in the geographic area of the Polish Carpathian are located in three provinces: Malopolska, Podkarpackie and Silesian (fig. 1).

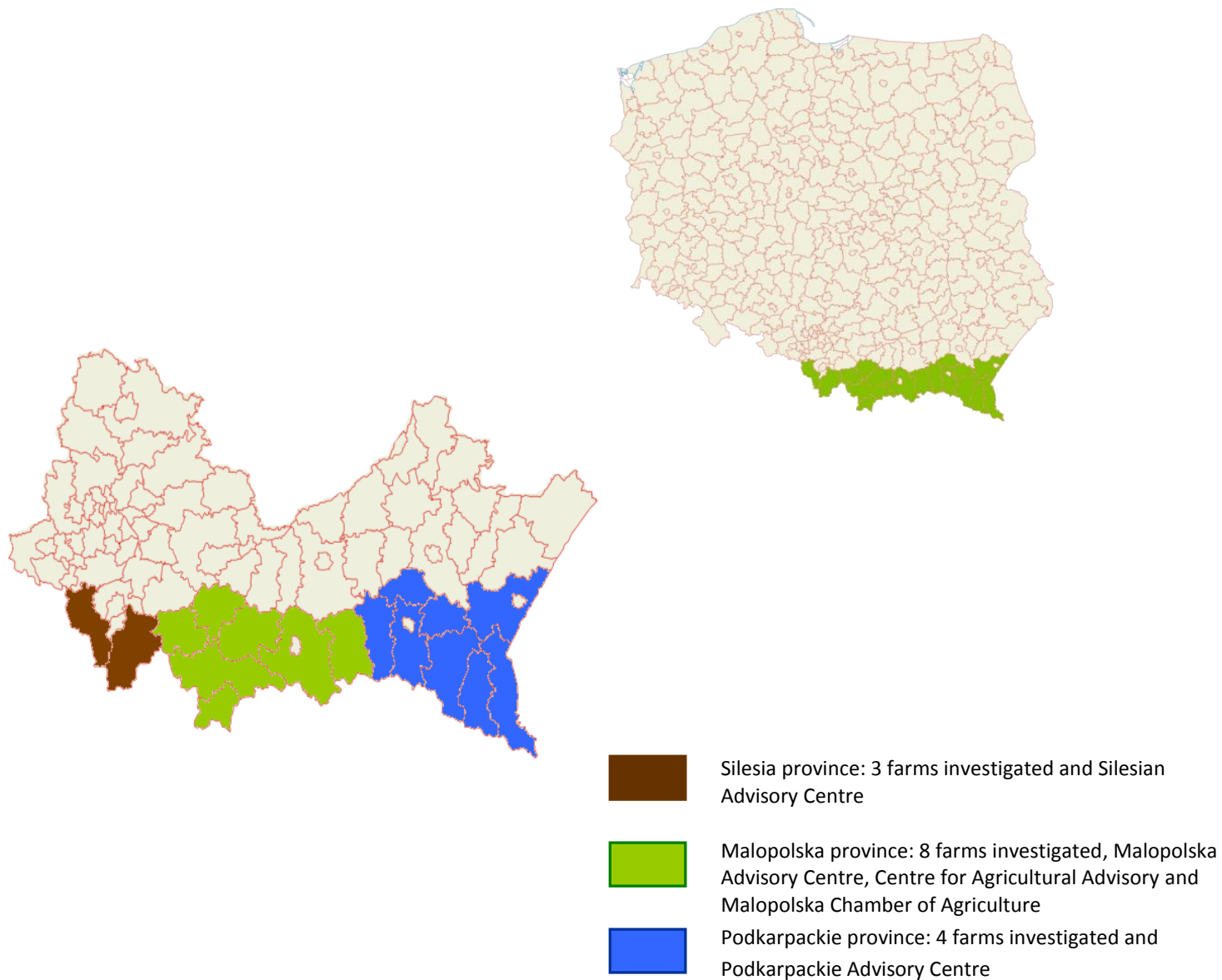


Figure 1. The location of the research area

Source: prepared by the authors

Interviews with representatives of the particular advisory institutions that support the development of agritourism and rural tourism in the Carpathian Mountains were conducted with the help of the interview guide.

4 General description of the case study

Agritourism is not a new phenomenon, but the very notion of agritourism has only appeared in Polish literature fairly recently. Recreational trips in the countryside were already popular in the 19th century. Today the renaissance of this phenomenon can be observed. There are several reasons for this phenomenon, including [Knecht 2009, p. 22]:

- "the fashion for agritourism", which spread widely across western Europe more than thirty years ago and has gradually spread gradually across the whole Europe;
- with changes in the preferences of society in relation to leisure time activities the needs of tourists have changed as they now prefer to rest in a quiet and secluded place, away from crowded cities and in close contact with nature;
- rural populations are looking for alternative forms of income; the phenomenon of unemployment in the country; difficulties in finding work in nearby towns; low incomes from conducting a traditional farm work compel these rural populations to search for additional sources of income.

Agritourism has gained significant popularity to the extent that it has undoubtedly become the most realistic form of non-agricultural activity possible in rural areas [Sikora and others 2006, p. 25-33]. In the EU countries it has emerged as an agriculture domain. The development of agritourism in Poland in recent years has been considerable, creating the urgent need to investigate this field, both from the point of view of practical application and the development of scientific tools for its analysis. The development of agritourism is connected to the modernisation of technical and social infrastructure in the country. This, in turn, reduces the isolation of rural populations making these communities more progressive, modern and – at the same time – open to new challenges [Debniewska, Tkaczuk 1997, p. 7].

In Poland the demand for agritourism services is increasing year by year. There are many determinants fostering the development of agritourism business. One of the most important factors that guarantees the development of agritourism is the valuable nature and landscape of the countryside. Among other factors that contribute to the development of agritourism in

Poland, there is cultural heritage, legal opportunities, tourism service marketing, and increasing the reach of tourism services as well as support from the institutional environment [Krzyzanowska 1997, Knecht 2009, Vinohradnik i Bogusz 2011, Sikora 2012]. Through considering the natural and cultural values of the Polish Carpathian, agritourism farms are recognised to be successful.

Within Poland the most popular institutions involved in supporting agritourism are semi-public agricultural advisory centres. In this case study the most important actors within the agritourism advisory services in the Polish Carpathian Mountains are: the three Provincial Advisory Centres (ODR); a government institution – the Agricultural Advisory Centre (CDR) in Krakow; and a farmers' organisation – the Malopolska Agricultural Chamber (MIR) in Krakow. The support of ODR relies, above all, on [MODR 2014]:

- providing assistance for farmers in preparing the necessary documentation for applications for financial support from the EU funds to develop agritourism businesses;
- advisory services supporting the activities which aim to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the countryside, and for the ecological and functional arrangement of the countryside;
- organising fairs, exhibitions, shows, conferences and other projects to transfer and impart agritourism knowledge.

It should be emphasized that agricultural advisory centres, in principle, were the first institutions to popularise the development of agritourism in Poland [Kutkowska 2003, p. 175].

The advisory institution which also supports agritourism activities is the Agricultural Extension Centre, which is a governmental institution supervised by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Its aim is to train and transfer information to topic specific advisors. Four branches operate within the structure of the Centre. The organisational structure of the Centre and Branches is formed by separated departments, self-contained positions, and multi and or single worksites. The Branch Centre in Krakow performs the tasks specified in the Act on consulting, with particular focus on [www.cdr.gov.pl/krakow/]:

1. Support for rural tourism.

2. Activation of local environments.
3. Preservation of the countryside cultural heritage, and traditional and regional products.
4. Support to non-agricultural forms of economic activities of farmers and their families.

Another institution which supports advisory activities within the scope of agritourism is the Agricultural Chamber. It is the self-authority of farmers, operating to solve agriculture problems and representing interests of its members. Agricultural Chambers act for agriculture, affect shaping agricultural policy and participate in its implementation [MIR 2014].

When selecting the study area, the attention was focused on the number of agritourism farms in the Polish Carpathian Mountains. The total number of registered agritourism objects in the research region was 2334. This data came from 2007 which is the newest data in the official statistical sources [The Institute of Tourism 2007]. Another factor influencing the choice was that in the area of the Polish Carpathian, the owners of the agritourism apartments are aiming to improve the quality of their service and the specifications and specialisation of their activities. This was confirmed by the topic-specific agritourism farm networks, among others, e.g. *Malopolska Village for Children*, (*Malopolska wies dla dzieci*), *Malopolska Village for Seniors* (*Malopolska wies dla seniorow*) or due to the type of services/ activities offered, e.g. *Malopolska Village Fragrant of Herbs* (*Malopolska wies pachnaca ziolami*) or *Educational Farms* (*Gospodarstwa edukacyjne*).

5 Methods and data collection, local stakeholder involvement

The research process, as with any other process of information or knowledge exchange, is a conscious and intended action by the researchers and actors involved. However, this operation, which has to be relevant for the given destination should be controlled methodologically by specific rules and signs that determine human behaviour [Sztumski 1984, p. 46].

To prepare the case study report, two stages of research have been applied:

(1) The theoretical stage, in which the review of literature and analysis of documents of National Statistical Office, Province Agricultural Advisory Centres, National Agricultural Advisory Centre and Agricultural Chamber were carried out; within this stage the main research tool was an analytical method;

(2) In the empirical stage, initially a survey for agritourism farms was developed, in which the main tool of research was a questionnaire; and then the interviews with advisors involved in agritourism services in the study area were undertaken – for this interview the set of open questions were used. The results of the first stage of research forged the base of information for the selection of the study area. Then the specifically chosen information was also used as the basis to establish the criteria for selecting the farms for the next stage of research.

The empirical part is divided into two stages. **In the first stage** the survey was conducted on 15 agritourism farms. The selection of farms for research has been purposive on the basis of the four criteria which were previously specified:

1. The innovative character of the agritourism business,
2. Cooperation with an advisory institution,
3. Location in the area of the Polish Carpathian,
4. Hold a minimum 3 years of running an agritourism activity.

The time criterion has been used on the grounds of owners' experience, thanks to which they could give comprehensive answers on all questions set forth in the questionnaire.

In order to present the diversity of agritourism farms, several farms from each innovative project which operate in the analysed area have been selected, namely:

- Malopolska Village for Children ("Malopolska wies dla dzieci") – 2 farms,
- Malopolska Village Fragrant of Herbs ("Malopolska pachnaca ziolami") – 2 farms,
- Tourist packages – 2 farms,
- Malopolska for Seniors ("Malopolska dla seniorow") - 1 farm,
- Educational farms – 8 farms.

In the Silesian province three farms have been evaluated, in Podkarpackie province – four farms and eight farms in the Malopolska (there were a greater number of these farms due to the high number of innovative agritourism ventures in this province).

In the second stage of the study, interviews (through a questionnaire) were conducted with advisors who have been operating in agritourism in the study area for many years. Five interviews have been conducted:

1. With a representative of the Agricultural Advisory Centre, Branch Office in Krakow,
2. With the topic specialist from the Malopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre,
3. With the topic specialist from the Podkarpackie Agricultural Advisory Centre,
4. With the topic specialist from the Silesia Agricultural Advisory Centre,
5. With the advisor from the Malopolska Agricultural Chamber in Krakow.

The criterion for selecting the appropriate advisor interviewees in the research was connected to their length of experience in agritourism advisory services. Each of the selected advisors had at least 12 years' experience in the advisory services, supporting agritourism activity every day. Each of the chosen advisors were involved in creating new concepts of agritourism activity, such as educational farms. They also cooperate with local agritourism associations and are members of the major institution working in agritourism – the Polish Federation of Rural Tourism.

6 Results

6.1 New small-scale farmer's needs and demands for knowledge

An important issue in any agritourism business is to appropriately prepare the home to be ready to receive the specific group of tourists [Knecht 2009, p. 87]. Therefore, a very important step in the structure of agriculture service management is the process of market segmentation.

We can list several categories of 'agritourism groups' in which agritourism farms may specialise. The main groups of people who use agritourism ventures include [Musial, Kania and others 2005, p. 120-121]:

- parents with small children,
- elderly people,
- nature lovers,
- social groups,
- foreign tourists.

An agritourism farm prepares services which are appropriate for the specific group of tourists. D. Knecht [2009, p. 87-89] lists four types of agritourism farms:

- universal farms (comprehensive),
- farms for families with small children,
- farms for the disabled,
- farms for people of advanced age.

The area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains is one of significant natural beauty, and as such nature is precious and agritourism activity is developing rapidly. But it is also the area where a large number of small agricultural farms are looking for additional sources of income. Natural and landscape conditions and a rich cultural heritage are favourable for the formation of agritourism farms. It is estimated that in the Polish Carpathian Mountains there is more of these agritourism farms than within any other Polish regions, several thousand in fact. Many

owners look for new opportunities in which their farms and ventures can be attractive as well as to raise the quality of the services offered.

According to the results from this research, agritourism farm owners see a need for the segmentation of their services and tourists. Therefore, the need for new advisory services related to the introduction of new services in agritourism have emerged (table 1).

Table 1. Segmentation of agritourism services

New agritourism services	Subject	Advisory techniques
Specification of tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ according to age groups (children, older, disabled), ▪ individual preferences (e.g. tourists admire natural farm products), 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ training, ▪ workshops, ▪ study trips, ▪ individual advice, ▪ creating a cooperation network (exchange of experiences)
Specialised services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ educational farms, ▪ caring farms, ▪ therapeutic farms (hippo therapy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ training, ▪ workshops, ▪ individual advice, ▪ study trips, ▪ cooperation between owners with the participation of advisor,
Complex services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourist packages, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ training, ▪ workshops, ▪ study trips, ▪ individual advice, ▪ creating a cooperation network (exchange of experiences)

Source: the author's own interpretation, 2014

By analysing the data contained in table 1, it can be concluded that farm owners currently need specialist knowledge to enable them to introduce a specific new service on their agritourism farms. The owners themselves expressly emphasised that the exchange of experiences with each other and participation in training with a practical dimension (workshops) to allow them to

develop new ideas, and the creation of collaborative solutions are the most important aspects of advisory services for them. A willingness to create cooperation networks has resulted in a changing mentality of farmers- farmers no longer want to operate alone in the agritourism services market as they are beginning to recognise the benefits that result from collaborative group actions. It is worth emphasising that study trips to other agritourism farms to see how other farmers act and introduce good practices are of significant interest.

The owners of agritourism apartments require complex knowledge regarding specific tourist issues (see table 2). The situation of agritourism in Poland is not clearly determined by legal regulations as there is no separate legislative act concerning agritourism. The owners of agritourism farms often get lost in the complex web of illegible regulations. Therefore, they also expect assistance in the indication and interpretation of legal regulations, especially concerning new issues, e.g. direct sales of their products, from advisors. In addition, another problem for farm owners are with issues related to marketing services, especially with the promotion and distribution channels of their services to reach the appropriate recipient group. It should also be emphasize that it is always important to acquire knowledge concerning access to financial support for their operations from EU funds. This is because according to the agritourism business owners, in order to raise the quality of tourism services, one has to continuously invest money which leads to high costs.

Table 2. List of advisory needs in agritourism

Subject matter	Description of needs
1. Legal regulations	knowledge related to new activities introduced in agritourism, including tourist nutrition, direct sales, specialist tourist services,
2. Marketing	knowledge related to promotion, selling your services and reaching the appropriate group of tourists,
3. EU support	knowledge related to the acquisition of funding from the EU,
4. Management	general issues of rural tourism activity management,

Source: the own studies, 2014

The interviews with advisors and survey statements by agritourism farm owners distinctly indicate the directions of advisory services in the field of agritourism. Close- and long-term

cooperation of advisors with the owners of agritourism farms generates their development, but also along with the development of market needs, the type and scope of advisory service needs is changing. Often, the representatives of the two surveyed groups have emphasized that advisory methods and advisory subject matter are the result of permanent cooperation in the area.

6.2 Processes, actors and methods to obtain and use knowledge

15 farms were selected for the research. The basic criteria of selection have been: cooperation with an advisory institution, long-term agritourism activity (at least 3 years) and an innovative character of activity, the additional criteria has been the motivation to undertake such agritourism operations. The scope of the study covered the characteristics of farms and human capital, the needs within the scope of cooperation with the institutional environment, the scope of the subject matter and preferred methods and techniques of advice provision.

The research results indicate that agritourism activities are mostly conducted by women (13 of the 15 farms), in the age range of 46-60 years. Most have a secondary level of education (8), and others have – a higher professional education (4) and a university level education (3). These persons:

- have stabilised material and family situation, do not bring-up children and have free time to devote to receiving the tourists,
- have housing conditions which are able to accept guests because their children are grown up and the majority have permanently left the family home. Large houses dominate the Polish rural areas and as such many have spare rooms which can be used by tourists,
- look for additional sources of income beyond agricultural operations and the products manufactured in a farm make the offer more attractive, individual and rural in their nature,
- have willingness, ambitions, and want to pursue their own interests and open up their homes for customers.

When analysing the agritourism farms, it is not possible to present the size of farms, which certainly influences the undertaking of additional non-agricultural farming activity. Among the surveyed farms the average size farms according to province are- Podkarpackie and 9.01 ha of arable land, in the Silesian province the largest farm is 7.33 ha, and in Malopolska it is just 3.40 ha.

Referring to the length of time involved in the venture, the participants who are the owners of agritourism farms and also cooperate in this field with an advisor have done so for between 3 to 16 years.

Referring to the criteria of motivation, the respondents have highlighted different motives relating to the start of their agritourism activity. The main motive has been a desire to obtain additional sources of income, as well as the use of their empty accommodation. Their favourable location in terms of landscape values and transport accessibility was also highlighted as an asset which inspired and motivated some of the survey participants to undertake agritourism businesses. There have also been survey responses, especially amongst elderly people, that highlight that their main motivation for undertaking these activities had been a desire to fill free time and the possibility of having contact with people from all around Poland and even from abroad. Agritourism gives such possibility.

An innovative character of the activities has been introduced due to willingness to raise the standard of their services, focusing on a specific target group and creating specialised services (a brand). These innovative activities include tourism packages, educational farms, and farms for children, for seniors and specialising in services related to herb cultivation.

The types of agritourism innovations that have occurred resulted from the cooperation of owners with advisory institutions from the study area, as well as cooperation with other farmers. Both farm owners and representatives of advisory institutions emphasise that these are common actions, where the ideas of one of the owners are the inspiration for others who then introduce a similar type of service on their farms or built on the ideas of others through incorporating something new into their services. We are observing here the so-called snowball effect in term of the spread of knowledge and innovations.

In the process of the provision of advice by the Provincial Advisory Centres for supporting agritourism farm owners, the following actions can be identified:

1. The scope of consulting services is updated for a given calendar year. On the basis of the interviews in the area and experience and knowledge about agritourism businesses, Provincial Advisory Centres prepare plans for a calendar year. The type and scope of

advisory services is of direct result of the needs of the agritourism farm owners, and of the evaluation of the agritourism situation and trends in general tourism.

2. Both the farmers and advisors emphasise that consulting currently operates on the principles of cooperation and the creation of some systems of knowledge and information transmission. The form of cooperation in the scope of agritourism and innovative methods is often defined with the actors during trainings, workshops, conferences and seminars.
3. Another issue is the commissioning of knowledge and information. In the various forms of knowledge and information transmission, rural leaders and opinion leaders including the owners of agritourism farms are the main participants. Their activity at the local level means that the obtained knowledge is transmitted to the rural community thereafter. This research has proved that the owners of agritourism apartments are not only the recipients of advisory services, but often become their granters, especially to those people who just intend to handle agritourism operations, or want to introduce an innovative service in their farm.
4. Another method within the process of the transmission of agritourism knowledge is the exchange of experiences. Each of the examined owners emphasised that the exchange of experiences among farm owners, especially through good practices (study visits) is very important for them. During the process of the direct exchange of experiences the farm owners have the possibility not only to discuss, but also to see how this enterprise evolved in a particular case and how the entrepreneurs have succeeded. Furthermore this method of observation of good practice can act as an inspiration for followers or as a basis of choice when concerning the more innovative actions.

Within the structure of the advisory services which support agritourism farm owners in the Polish Carpathian Mountains, we distinguish not only the topic specialists of semi-public institutions – Provincial Advisory Centres, but also the specialists and advisors from the Agricultural Chambers, the Agricultural Advisory Centre, the Local Activity Groups and scientists and researchers from universities and trade research institutes.

On the base of the results it can be concluded that the transfer of knowledge takes place in the area of all the entities of the system and is based on close cooperation between the institutions, organizations and farmers. The scope of advisory methods and tools that are used for knowledge transfer results from the needs of farmers themselves, namely through a bottom-up initiative. Often, on the basis of conversations and a conducted survey, the advisors adapt their tools to relate to the current needs. More and more often workshops, group work, study trips, analysis of good practices and case studies are being used. Furthermore, often advice departs from the typical agritourism training– in other words, instead of a lecture the practical methods are introduced. Within the scope of innovation in agritourism, a method being used more and more frequently is inviting owners of agritourism apartments along to conferences and meetings to give talks about their activities in agritourism- e.g. their successes, failures, and highlighting critical points in the organisation and implementation of their project.

6.3 The supply of knowledge to the new small-scale farmers

Innovative agritourism farms operating in the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains are continuously making use of the advisory services. During the study the owners of agritourism farms with innovative character were asked to indicate the sources of knowledge that they require, the institutions and organisations with which they cooperate and their expectations with regard to the manner of transmission of knowledge, methods and assistance subjects. The results of survey with the farm owners and the results of interviews with the representatives of advisory institutions are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Types of advisory services for agritourism farms in the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains

Types of advisory services	Subject matter	Advisory tools and methods	Recipient of advisory services
Training/ workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ legal regulations, ▪ marketing/promotion, ▪ innovations in agritourism, ▪ management of agritourism, ▪ knowledge of financial measures from the EU, ▪ networking of farms, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lectures, ▪ talks, ▪ seminars, ▪ group work, ▪ discussions, ▪ creative problem solving in groups (brainstorms, target group techniques) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ owners of innovative agritourism farms, ▪ owners of farms who want to introduce new elements to their services ▪ farmers who want to start agritourism activities,
Individual advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ acquisition of EU funds, ▪ innovation, ▪ management of agritourism services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ discussion, ▪ talk, 	
Study visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ good practices from specialised services, educational farms, ▪ networking of farms, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ discussion, ▪ talk, 	
Conferences, symposiums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ legal regulations, ▪ marketing/promotion, ▪ innovations in agritourism, ▪ management of agritourism, ▪ knowledge of measures from the EU, ▪ networking of farms, ▪ eco-agritourism, ▪ educational farms, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lectures, ▪ seminars, ▪ group work, ▪ creative problem solving, 	
Fairs, tourism markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ innovations in agritourism, ▪ improving the quality of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ discussion, ▪ talk, 	

Source: the own studies, 2014

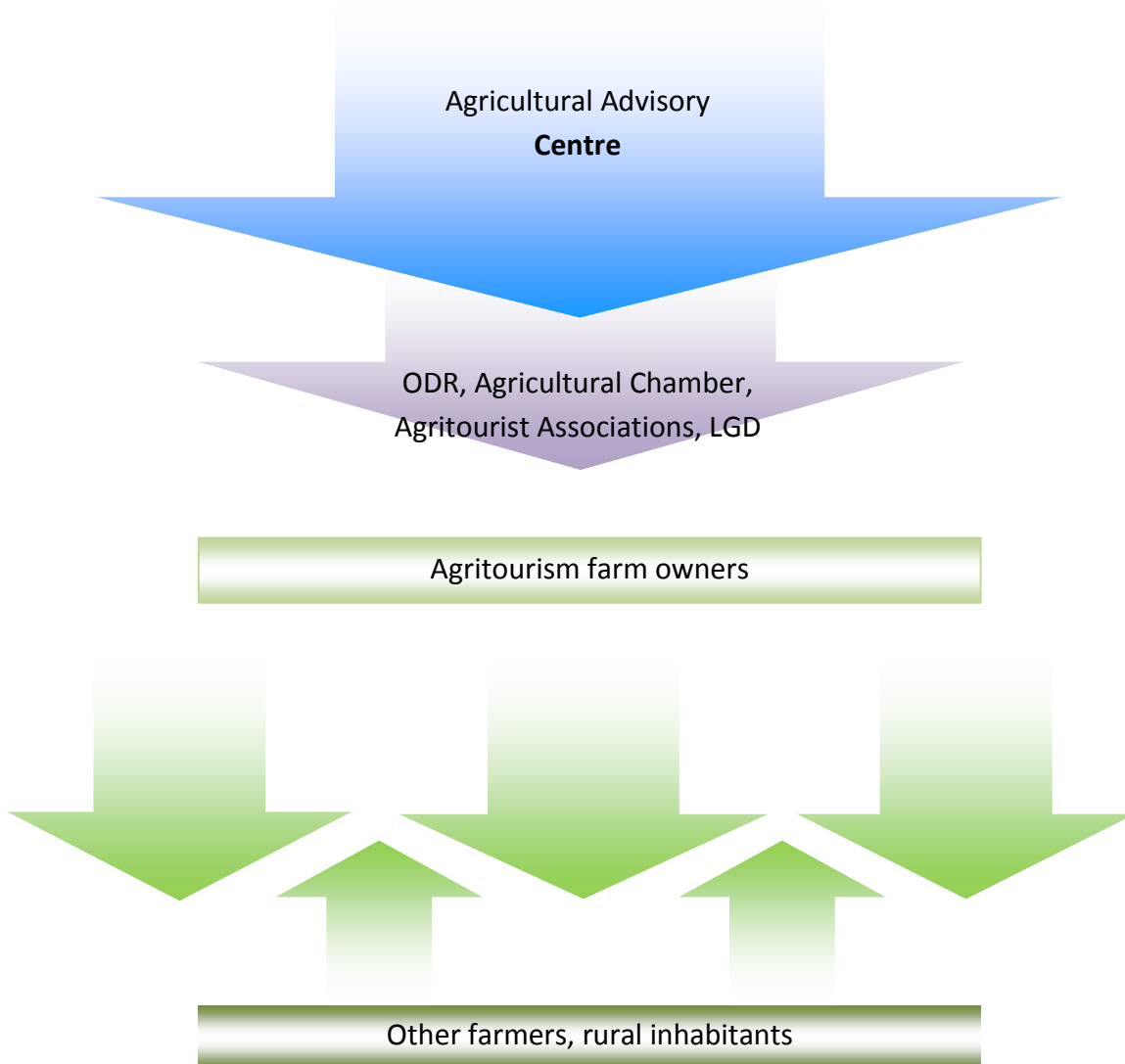
Analysing the data presented in table 3, it may be concluded that the owners of agritourism farms are looking for knowledge and use the diversity of advisory services in this process. As the owners of agritourism farms emphasized in the talks, they need the complex knowledge in each topic that directly relates to managing and developing agritourism. On the other hand, one should emphasize that farmers appreciate workshops and study visits as well as fairs and tourism markets, namely these types of services, whereby means of practical methods, they can exchange information and experiences as well as initiate cooperation among themselves.

The development of agritourism in the Carpathian Mountains is growing. It drives owners of agritourism farms to analyse the situation in a very detailed manner to maintain their position on the market of tourism services. The surveyed farmers noticed the need of education and cooperation among themselves, to create networks of educational farms that will ensure a readymade package of tourist services for potential customers.

6.4 The knowledge flows for small agri-tourism farms in the Carpathian Mountains of Poland

Legislation with regards to agricultural advisory services in Poland strictly defines the transfer of knowledge and information (figure 2), whereby the Agricultural Advisory Centre – a governmental institution within the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development is the unit responsible for collecting and processing knowledge, and then transferring it to the advisory institutions that directly cooperate with farmers. The Branch of Agricultural Advisory Centre in Krakow is responsible for the topic of rural tourism and agritourism. During the interview with an expert from the Agricultural Advisory Centre, it turned out that information related to agritourism and innovative activities are initially transferred first to the topic specialists from Agricultural Advisory Centres, as well as to the topic specialists and representatives of Agricultural Chambers, agritourism associations, and since 2004 when Poland joined the EU, close cooperation with Local Action Groups has occurred, whose strategies support agritourism.

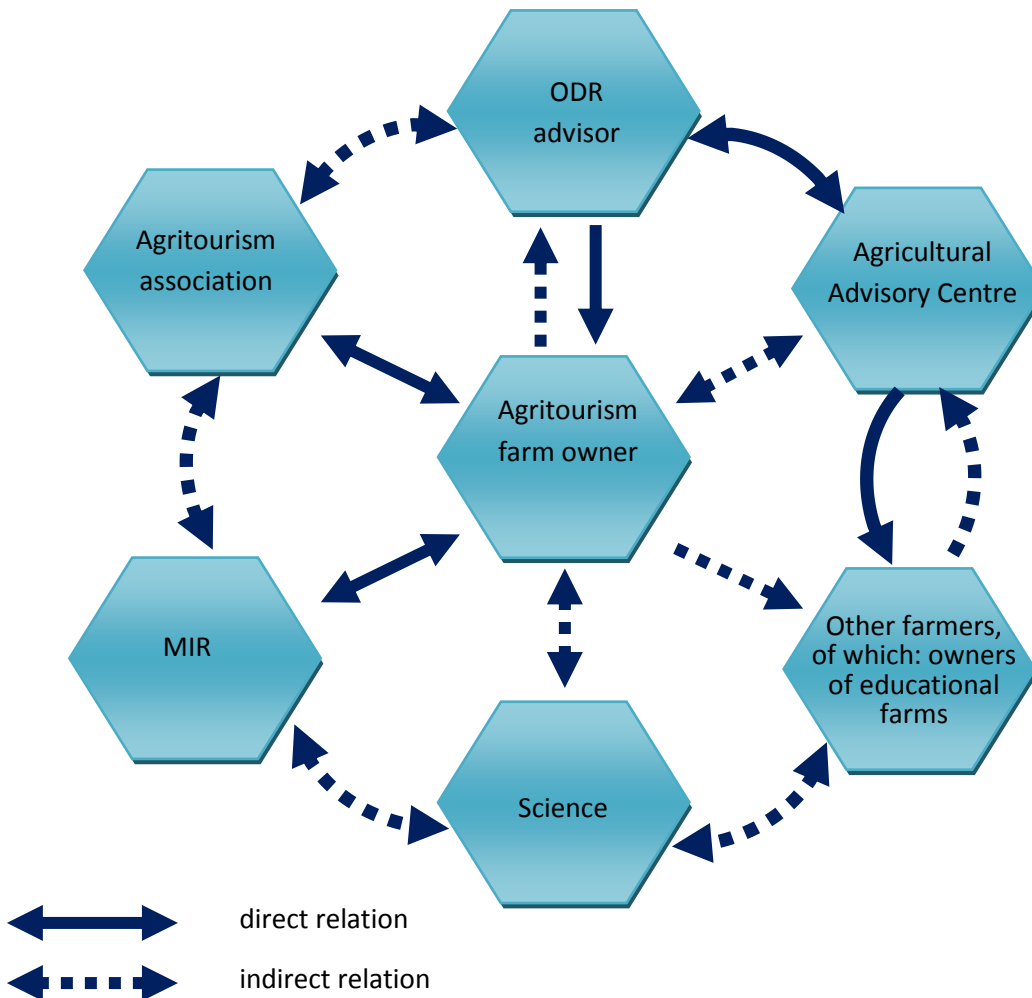
Figure 2. Traditional model of knowledge, information and innovation flow



Source: own study, 2014

However, in reality the Agricultural Advisory Centre also has direct contact with farms and the flow of knowledge occurs not only in the way presented on the figure 2, in the vertical form of knowledge transmission, but also more on the basis of mutual cooperation. This was confirmed by the conducted research which highlighted the flow of knowledge and innovations related to agritourism between actors as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3. The relationship between owners of agritourism farms, institutional environment and other farmers in terms of knowledge flows



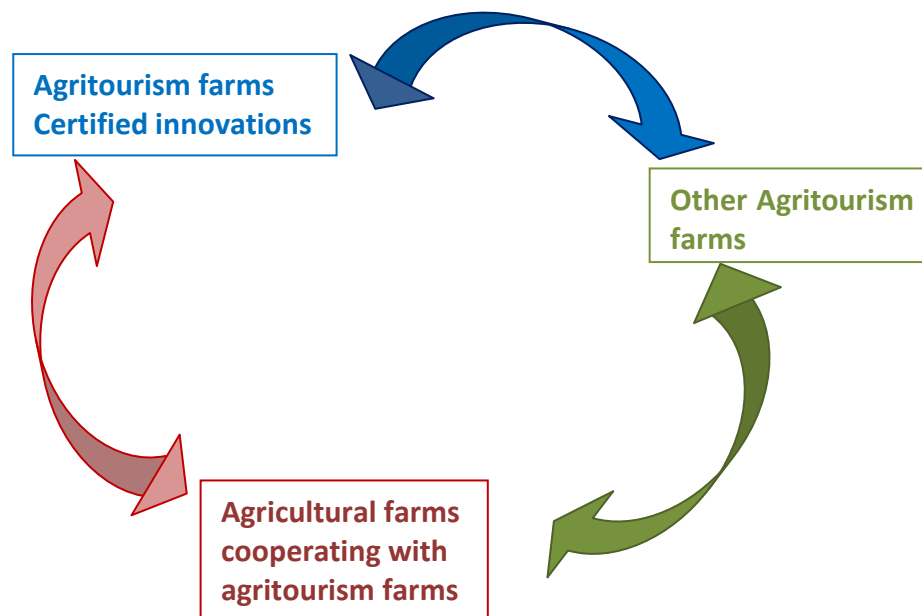
Source: own study, 2014

As is highlighted in figure 3, the flows of knowledge transfer between all entities which deal with agritourism matters in the study area. The research has emphasised that, with regards to acquiring knowledge, the owners of agritourism farms cooperate with advisors as well as directly with the scientists, representatives of other institutions and surrounding organisations and other farmers. A similar situation occurs in the case of agritourism specialists from the Provincial Advisory Centres, who have emphasised in the interviews that when organising training, study trips, seminars or conferences, they invite representatives of other institutions and organisations involved in agritourism to participate in and lead these events. The best example of the flow of knowledge is the agritourism symposium organised every two years by

the Agricultural Advisory Centre along with Provincial Advisory Centres. Each symposium is organised in a different province. During the 3 days of the symposium all actors in the field of agritourism meet with representatives of scientific centres, advisory institutions, agritourism associations, one of the most important leader institutions – Polish Federation of Rural Tourism, the owners of agritourism farms and, above all, the representatives of the two ministry departments responsible for rural tourism – the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Sport and Tourism.

The other result of advisory activities are, e.g. certified agritourism farms that, as examples of good practice, are used as models for other people conducting, or intending to conduct, this type of activity. Often, the owners of these certified farms undertake cooperation with other farms, including agritourism farms which have not obtained a certificate. Therefore, the previous type of cooperation between the farmer and advisor is getting replaced more and more frequently by interactions between agritourism farms (figure 4). Often both the transmission of knowledge and exchange of information and innovations occurs simultaneously.

Figure 4. The flow of knowledge, information and innovation between the three main actors at the farm level



Source: own study, 2014

The research has proved that most frequently agritourism farms are not only the carriers of knowledge, but also the creators of this knowledge, information and innovations. They are predominantly the members of agritourism associations, they cooperate with different institutions, and they are certified and belong to a selected network of farms of an innovative nature. The owners of these farms are also the so-called 'rural leaders' who lead by example through their operations. Through running agritourism activities they cooperate with other agritourism farms and also with agricultural farms, e.g. within the scope of using crops for educational activities. A good example is the project "From the Seed to the Loaf".

To summarise, in the system of knowledge and agricultural information in the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains, the largest organisation with regards to knowledge transfer is a semi-public advisory organisation (Provincial Advisory Centre). In this case strong cooperation occurs between the state Agricultural Advisory Centre and semi-public Provincial Advisory Centre, especially within agritourism innovations. As is highlighted from the research, cooperation between advisors and farmers is continuous and is characterised by both participation in training, courses, workshops, but also by individual advisory methods which still play an important role.

Mutual exchange of knowledge, experiences among farmers and particular advisory institutions show that the flow of knowledge concerning agritourism is quite dynamic, and the subsequent projects which are created within the scope of innovation in the study area highlight the development of this form of good cooperation.

7 Discuss and assess the performance of the knowledge flows and identify best-fit practices for advisory services

The assessment of the flow of information concerning agritourism innovation between the institutional environment and a farmer who runs an agritourism activity in the area of the Polish Carpathian was the main aim of the research. Three types of institutions and organisations were taken into account, specifically: the Provincial Advisory Centres (ODR), the state Agricultural Advisory Centre (CDR) Division in Krakow and the Agricultural Chamber in Krakow (MIR).

The research hypothesis of *Consulting activity within the scope of innovation in the agritourism farms has a significant impact on the development of the studied farms which are located in the Carpathian Mountains*, has been confirmed. The answers to the six research questions can be summarised as follows:

1. *What is the role of the Provincial Advisory Centre (ODR) in co-operation with small-scale farms?*

The role of the Provincial Advisory Centre (ODR) in co-operation with small scale farmers is significant. This is a semi-public institution that mostly provides advisory services free of charge to all farmers and rural inhabitants. Particular attention is given by the topic specialists to small scale farmers who undertake non-agricultural activity in order to obtain additional income. The role of the topic specialists is mainly to inform farmers on new possibilities for opening such projects, educating farmers on entrepreneurship particularly within agritourism activities, assisting farmers in preparing business plans, as well as informing and assisting in preparing application forms for financial support for projects. Other roles are co-operation with farm owners in order to specialise agritourism farms in specific agritourism products, especially in the recent years through creating cooperation networks, e.g. farm network *Malopolska for children* and *Educational farms*.

2. How should the methods, approach and tools to support small-scale farmers be chosen?

It seems that a slight problem is the selection of methods and tools to support the owners of small farms due to the heterogeneity of the agritourism group. In respect of the size of farms, one can say that this group is homogenous – all have small farms. But otherwise – this group is very mixed. First of all – age – the owners of such farms are usually older people. Secondly, education – a small percentage have agricultural education. Thirdly – motivations to undertake non-agricultural activity on the farm – the activities are usually run by women. Fourthly – a desire to keep a farm and to generate additional income through agritourism. Therefore, an advisor is required to have not only high professional qualifications, but, above all, strong communication skills in many cases. That is why the multiplicity of methods and tools that must be used differ according to individual customers and their needs. The research shows that the owners of agritourism farms mostly appreciate practical methods – workshops, case studies, study visits. Thus the choice of the best methods to fulfil the needs and expectations of small-scale farmers depends on: the advisor's knowledge about the aforementioned characteristics of farmers and their needs; on the communication skills of advisor and his methodical approach to farmer.

3. What are the impacts of the work of advisory services in household diversification? How are these impacts measured?

A growing number of agritourism farms in the Carpathian Mountains have caused advisory services on this topic to take on a more precise and specialised form. Thanks to the cooperation of advisory institutions, first of all, the Agricultural Advisory Centre and the Provincial Advisory Centre in the process of diversification of the farm operations, new agritourism farms have emerged – educational farms that currently operate not only in the Carpathian Mountains but throughout the whole country and their number is constantly growing. An important action in the development of agritourism is also the creation of tourism packages and specialised services in terms of the selected group of recipients, e.g. children or elderly people. The results of these achievements are conducted statistically, e.g. the number of certificated educational farms, the number of tourists, the number of events organised for or by agritourism farms, the number of participants in agritourism events, number, topics and methods of advices provided by advisors,

number of new innovative enterprises, etc. Continuous cooperation between farm owners and advisors results in the fact that all innovative facilities are characterised by the high quality services that they offer.

4. *What is the role of Provincial Advisory Centre (ODR) in cooperation with other institutions providing advice for small-scale farms?*

Considering surrounding actors and their cooperation with other institutions and organisations providing consulting services for the owners of small farms, in our opinion, based on observation and results of research, the role of agritourism specialists from the Provincial Advisory Centres is crucial. These advisors are present in the farmer households most often and can practically respond to the farmer's needs directly (or indirectly when a problem requires consultations with other specialists). Consultancy provided by these advisors is usually free of charge and the diversity of forms and methods of advice is considerable. They have the greatest knowledge of the needs and expectations of the farmers, their professional activity, mentality, openness to novelties, willingness to undertake risk, etc. For this reason, other institutions and organisations perceive the agritourism specialists from the Provincial Advisory Centres as the group with the closest contact with a farmer and as the group with the most specific knowledge, experience and skills. Their cooperation with other institutions providing advice (excluding freelancers) is rather close and consists of both the exchange of information and collaboration in arranging common projects addressed specifically to small farm owners, e.g. training in cross-compliance, non-agricultural enterprises, including, the organisation of study visits in Poland and abroad, the organisation of common tourism and agricultural fairs and exchanges, as well as setting and implementing joint projects, among others, financed by EU funds.

5. *What types of innovation have been introduced by the owners of small farms as a result of cooperation with the Provincial Advisory Centre (ODR)?*

Significant examples of innovations introduced by small farmers as a result of cooperation with the agritourism specialists of the Provincial Advisory Centres are: educational farms, specialized farms networks e.g.: *Malopolska village fragrant of herbs, Malopolska for Seniors, Malopolska for Children* or cooperation networks which introduce tourism deals and packages.

6. *What is the impact of agritourism activities on the local development and promotion of the region?*

In our opinion, which was confirmed by the results of the research, it has a significant influence on local development. Firstly – they create jobs which offer additional income – not only for the owners of agritourism farms but also to other farms which provide agritourism services (e.g. educational farms). Secondly – each activity, including agritourism, forces owners to develop their education and knowledge; obtain information, contact with other agritourism farms owners, and contact with customers – tourists who would like to rest. Thirdly – along with the development of agritourism activities, the region becomes well-known – promoted by tourists, local institutions, organisations and associations which publish information about such operations on their websites encouraging their viewers/readers to visit the region, and sometimes to invest in the various activities in this region.

8 Conclusions

Agritourism is one of the forms of non-agricultural farming activity in rural areas of the Polish Carpathian Mountains, which is gaining a growing number of supporters. Therefore, the rapidly increasing demand on the countryside is the drive for to offer new agritourism activities. However, not all persons who hope to and/ or undertake agritourism activities are successful. Some are forced to resign after only a short period of activity. The reasons for failures and success can be identified in many factors, both those relating to farmers and those living in farm surroundings, and an improper plan of implementing agritourism activities. Often, a prerequisite for success is a high quality of services. These services are: accommodation, board, complementary services and a suitable marketing strategy. If an owner of an agritourism farm does not want to be eliminated by the competitors, they have to continuously raise the standard of their farm and its services. If an agritourism farm meets the expectations of guests, its quality will be perceived as good and a positive image of an agritourism farm will emerge. To develop agritourism in the area of the Polish Carpathian Mountains, it is necessary to have a support from the surrounding institutions which assist small farmers who are developing these kinds of activities as an additional source of income [Brelík, Bogusz 2011, p. 19-24]. The aforementioned author confirms this finding.

In summary, the findings of research can be grouped according to five criteria: the challenges small scale farmers pose to advisory services; the role of small scale farmers in the creation of new knowledge; differences in the provision of advisory services to small scale farmers and others; the types of advisory methods addressed to small scale farmers; and access the small scale farmers to ICT as a tool to get knowledge and information. Below are showed the conclusions:

- *What are the challenges posed to advisory services by new small scale?*

In general, the provision of advice for small farmers is a challenge for advisors. It is a specific group of customers, who mainly require advice related to: non-production activities; advice related to other non-agricultural activities conducted on the farm and the farmhouse; advice

related to a wide range of agricultural households; legal advice, e.g. concerning taxes on non-agricultural activities, VAT, social security, etc. They are a group, which eagerly participate in educational programmes but also require non-agricultural education, e.g. related to handcraft, culture, adornment of the farm environment, etc.

The small scale farmers are forced to search for additional income sources which make it possible to maintain a family and a decent quality of life. This search often focuses on their own farm, with an attempt to make organisational changes, introduce new crops and livestock, introduce other agricultural production activities (including marketing) or take non-agricultural activities onto the farm. Examples of such creativity are agritourism and educational farms.

In summary, the new challenges which small scale farmers pose to advisory services are – most of all – advisory services in a very narrow specialisation of production and complex advisory services using novelty tools and techniques including e-learning and active portals, in which they can exchange opinions, offer questions for specialists and exchange information with other farmers. These challenges go beyond a general understanding of agricultural advisory services and consequently require a variety of funding sources, specific knowledge and advisor skills.

- *Are new small scale farmers knowledge creators?*

Everybody – including small farmers – creates new knowledge, new ideas, innovations and many try to implement these ideas on their own farms. Frequently, for this process, they need help from outside; and they expect particular information from advisors amongst others.

The local leaders / opinion leaders, and small scale holders are most frequently involved in the various forms of transmission of knowledge and information. Their knowledge from their activity at the local level is then transmitted to the rural community. This study showed that e.g. the owners of agritourism farms located in the study area are not only recipients of advisory services, but they are often communicators, especially for those who are only concerned with agritourism activities, or want to introduce the innovative nature of the services on their own farms. They are also creators of new knowledge which primarily results from their experience in the business of agricultural and non-agricultural activity, e.g. agritourism and rural tourism, or new methods of promotion.

- *How does the provision of advisory services to new small scale farming differ from the overall provision of agriculture advice?*

Small scale farmers are a special group, often seeking ideas for the development of their farms from specialists or – more and more frequently – activities with a non-agricultural function / production which are developed on their farms. Thus, the specialist small scale advisory services are connected with agricultural production and frequently the topic of advisory services combines agricultural production with non-agricultural activities.

The results of research showed the differences between the general advisory services and advisory services for small scale farmers. First of all, advisory services for small scale farmers require a very specific type of knowledge which often focus on specialised advice within agriculture, or – more frequently – for non-agricultural advisory services and additional services, which can be introduced onto an agricultural farm. Each farm is different because it wants to stand out and thus individual methods of advice provision and workshops are popular in order to consider and discuss a particular case study.

- *What types of novel methods addressing the specialities and needs of small farmers have been developed?*

Among the methods and techniques used in traditional advisory services, small farmers appreciate the practical methods most. In their opinion, the greatest educational methods are workshops, during which they can plan new activities or solve their existing problems. They particularly appreciate study visits, during which they share experiences, successes (and also failures), discuss current problems and solve them, gain new information, establish contacts which sometimes result in more durable contact, e.g. in the form of farm networks and contractor associations which offer specialized services. Other advisory methods which small farmers appreciate include individual advisory services enabling detailed problem discussion and joint problem solution, as well as agricultural fairs and exhibitions, throughout which they can present their offers.

- *How do small-scale farmers resort to ICT as a tool to get knowledge and information? What for?*

The ICT – is a contemporary tool to acquire knowledge and information, but also to share knowledge and information and promote their/ your own activities. Small farmers who conduct agricultural activities use ICT technology to: (a) promote their activities on the website *booking.com* or on agricultural associations websites and advertise their offers; (b) accept orders from tourists who reserve guest rooms; (c) search for information about training and e-learning; (d) search for information about possibilities to obtain financial resources; (e) contact with the advisor, other service providers and tourist-customers via e-mail, etc.

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