

Current status and conditions for agritourism development in the Lombardy region

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Abstract

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The aim of the article was to present the development of agritourism in the Lombardy region. Primary and secondary data were used to achieve the goal. Empirical studies were conducted using the diagnostic survey method and its technique - a questionnaire survey. They were conducted in two languages (Italian and English) in November and December 2017 with 40 residents of Milan. In addition, research was conducted with selected randomly 70 service providers (from 1551 all owners) conducting their agritourism activity in the region of Lombardy. For this purpose, the CATI method was used. In addition, the information for the article was obtained from the literature on the subject and from online sources. Research made for the article proves that people are generally satisfied with presence of tourists. Residents consider them as the chance to improve local economy, create new jobs, make the region more famous. They see some threats, such as more pollution or noise, but chances of development are much bigger. One of the most important aspects of tourism in Lombardy is growth of agritourism.

Keywords: rural tourism; agritourism; rural areas; Italy; Lombardy

Introduction

Tourism is one of the most rapidly growing areas of economic activity both in Europe and in the world (Roman, 2015b). In recent years, there has been a steady increase in the number of foreign trips in the world, rated from 3 to 4% per year. The data shows that the number of 1 billion tourist trips has already been exceeded, and it is estimated that by 2030, the number of international travels in the world will be amounted to over 1.8 billion (Roman, 2015a). According to the European Travel Commission, the demand for international health tourism, including spa tourism, will grow faster than in other types of tourism (Data of European Travel Commission). In addition to the forecasts concerning the increase in the number of travels related to health (as part of medical tourism), an increase in the interest in culinary travel and travel related to improving professional qualifications is also predicted (<http://www.podrozujemy.info>).

It is also possible to notice a large increase in interest in rural tourism, including agritourism. This type of tourism has been growing more and more in rural areas in recent years (Galluzzo, 2016). Large agritourism farms are created with a prepared tourist offer (Galluzzo, 2015). In many of these types of facilities there is a strongly developed accommodation and nutritional base. In addition, medical services are offered to tourists (e.g. rural SPA, rehabilitation stays, care homes), culinary services and others. The study pays special attention to the development of agritourism in the northern part of Italy (Toor, 1953).

Aim, scope and research methods

The aim of the article was to present the development of agritourism in Italy, on the example of the Lombardy region. Primary and secondary data were used to achieve to prepare the research. Empirical studies were conducted using the diagnostic survey method and its technique – a questionnaire

survey. They were conducted in two languages (Italian and English) in November and December 2017 with 40 residents of Milan. In addition, research was carried out with selected randomly 70 service providers (from 1551 all owners) conducting their agritourism activity in the region of Lombardy. For this purpose, the CATI method was used. In addition, the information for the article was obtained from the literature on the subject and from online sources.

The importance of agritourism in the development of rural areas in Italy

Tourism is one of the most essential sectors for economy of many countries and Italy is one of them (Galluzzo, 2017). Every year tourists decide to visit this country, but nowadays, compared to past times, more and more of them choose particular form, which can be rural tourism or agritourism (sometimes called farm tourism) (<http://www.varese2008.org>).

Tourism is very expanded multi-sector industry and a multidisciplinary area of research (Brussaard and Grossman, 1992). To discover and explore its general and additional dimension, much has been written on this area. Researches from 1960s were mostly concerned about economic issues connected with tourism. Now they are more interdisciplinary, they also combine other aspects, for example cultural, social one. Tourism is now considered as a science about man (tourist) which is away from his usual place of live. This concept extends the previous framework and considers all connected factors, such as: commercials, know how, experience etc. In order to prepare complete research about a part of tourism, it is necessary to prepare a big database including information about the area and society, which may be interested in visiting it (Jafari, 2000).

Tourism nowadays very often transforms to rural tourism, which is a specific kind of it that uses rural resources as main ones. Inhabitants of big cities very often look for space and peace, which they can use for recreation and to spend time with nature. It includes visits to state and national parks. It is connected with actions that let people to know rural areas and landscape (Jafari, 2000). The most attractive and recognized rural areas for tourists are marginal for agriculture, often located in barely populated, separated and less-favoured mountain areas. Tourist investments is very useful tool to protect historical buildings and keep the traditional festival and events going on (Jafari, 2000).

Tourism is a provider of big and continuing profits to rural tourism locations. The most important factor is that people responsible for the development, promotion and organization of rural tourism areas want a balanced, healthy-based attitude (MacNulty, 2004).

When these particular rules are in force, it is necessary to adapt the rural tourism product to the customer's needs. Rural tourism centres should also implement a clear competitive position on the market and establish prepared marketing actions (MacNulty, 2004). Agritourism is slightly different than rural tourism and includes mainly the opportunities which appear on working farms. They are placed usually in areas that are rural and suitable for spending free time for people that live in bigger cities. But it is not only the matter of scenery, it is also connected with the type of accommodation, which can be for example bed and breakfast or camping. Products may be available under „pick-your-own“ programs or on agricultural markets. Leisure time activities such as hiking, horse riding can be also available. In many different ways, farmers can get additional income from tourism and after some time agritourism can even become the main source of income replacing traditional agriculture. Agritourism can be a very effective way of stimulating local economy and increasing chances on rural areas. Success is however not a certain thing. It depends on many factors, such as access to nature, transportation, cultural values, availability of animals. It was found that owners of farms, that need additional income the most, don't have large access to agritourism services. It depends on many factors, for example lack of management and marketing skills (Jafari, 2000).

Although the hearts of European travelling are still France (82 mln visitors in 2016) and Spain (75 mln) (<http://data.worldbank.org>), the development of travel technology and creation of European Union made it much easier to visit many countries during lifetime and Italy benefits a lot from that facts (Usher, 2001).

Agritourism is also the possibility for customers to buy and consume agricultural products. Sidali, Spiller and Schulze define them as “products of the soil, of stock farming, and of fisheries, and products of first-stage proceeding directly related to these products” (Sidali et al., 2011).

The main feature of Italian agritourism is perfectly organised legislative body specified only to this sector, which is very unique on global scale, because most countries do not separate rural tourism and agritourism (Sidali et al., 2011).

The state of agritourism development in Italy on the example of the Lombardy region

One of Italy's largest regions, Lombardy is placed in the north of the country and shares a border with Switzerland. It is located from Alps to the Po Valley. It is an area of a wide range of landscapes, including the breathtaking mountain chain that boasts the Valchiavenna, Valtellina and the Camonica Valley. Winter sports fans can find a lot of nice facilities in Lombardy, for example famous resorts of Tonale,

Bormio, Livigno and Madesimo (<http://www.italia.it>). Lombardy is divided into 12 provinces. The biggest is Brescia, and the smallest one is Monza (<http://www.secur-line.com>). Most agritourism farms are located in the Brescia province in the eastern part of Lombardy. These are objects in which there is a very extensive tourist offer. Table 1 presents the largest cities in the Lombardy region.

Table 1. The largest cities in the Lombardy region

City/Town	Population
Milano	1,351,562
Brescia	196,670
Monza	122,955
Bergamo	120,287
Como	84,326
Sesto San Giovanni	81,822
Varese	80,694
Busto Arsizio	80,135
Cinisello Balsamo	75,659

Source: <http://www.citypopulation.de/Italy-Lombardia.html>,
<http://www.in-lombardia.com>

Another aspect that defines the region is its presence of rolling hills that surround Franciacorta area, which is famous for its vineyards and production of wine. In Lombardy there are a lot of attractive lakes, such as Garda, Como and Maggiore, which are surrounded by homes, parks and small towns (<http://www.istat.it>).

Lombardy is famous for its tracts of the Po Valley lowlands, which are covered by water and rice paddles. They make a landscape that is typical for Lomellina. Lombardy is the region full of nature, history, art and culture which go together with technology, fashion, entertainment, and a mod-

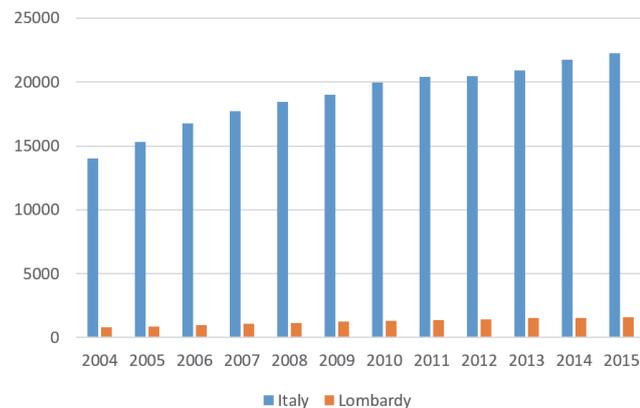


Fig. 1. Number of agritourism farms in Italy and Lombardy in 2004-2015

Source: own elaboration based on data Noi Italia
<http://noi-italia.istat.it>; <https://www.vogliadiagriturismo.com>

ern outlook (<http://www.academiabarilla.com>). Fig. 1 shows the number of agritourism farms in Italy and Lombardy in 2004-2015.

There is an upward trend in the number of agritourism farms in Italy and Lombardy in 2004-2015. Table 2 presents the number of agritourism farms in 12 provinces of the Lombardy region.

Table 2. Number of agritourism farms in individual provinces of Lombardy in 2017

Province	Number of agritourism farms
Brescia	326
Pavia	226
Mantova	221
Bergamo	153
Como	127
Sondrio	116
Milan	112
Lecco	81
Cremona	72
Varese	69
Lodi	33
Monza	15
Total:	1551

Source: own elaboration based on data for 2017, <http://agriturismoitalia.gov.it>, <https://www.researchgate.net>; https://www.agriturismo.it/en/map_view/lombardy; <https://www.dati.lombardia.it>; <https://www.statista.com>; <http://www.in-lombardia.com>

Results and Discussion

Selected test results

The respondents from Milan participated in empirical research. The socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed residents are presented in Table 3.

It is very important to notice, that lot of people that took part in the survey were foreigners. The main purpose of that was to examine also international tourism. Their point of view was very important for the results, because they are a big part of total tourists' population, especially in big cities, such as Milan. The research was conducted to take into consideration opinions both of the residents and international tourists. Questions were prepared to fit both of these groups knowledge.

Over half of the studied population from Milan were female (nearly 58%). The majority of respondents were in the age group up to 40 (85%). A large part of people participating in research had secondary and higher education (85%). Respondents whose monthly income per person was up to 1,200 euros represented 87.5% of the population. Most of

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population (group includes Italian people and foreigners, citizens and tourists)

Specification	Altogether	
	N = 40	%
Sex:		
• female	23	57.5
• male	17	42.5
Age:		
• to 20 years old	6	15.0
• 21-30 years old	21	52.5
• 31-40 years old	7	17.5
• 41-50 years old	3	7.5
• More than 50 years old	3	7.5
Education:		
• basic	24	60.0
• middle school	10	25.0
• higher		
Monthly salary per person less than 400 euro	12	30,0
• 401-800 euro	10	25.0
• 801-1200 euro	13	32.5
• 1201-2000 euro	2	5,0
• More than 2000 euro	3	7.5
Employment status		
• Student	5	12.5
• Wage labor	24	60.0
• Entrepreneur	4	10,0
• Pensioner	4	10,0
• Annuitant	3	7.5

Source: results of own research

the surveyed people performed hired work (60%). Fig. 2 presents the time of residence of respondents in the region of Lombardy.

Most people who participated in the research (62.5%) lived for up to 10 years in this region. This is certainly dependent on the age of respondents. Fig. 3 presents the opinion of the surveyed people on the tourism attractiveness of Lombardy.

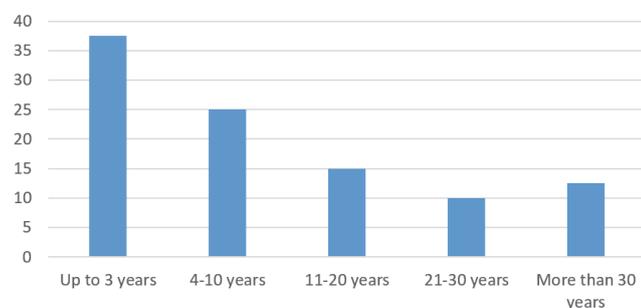


Fig. 2. Time of residence of respondents in the Lombardy region (in %)

Source: Own research results

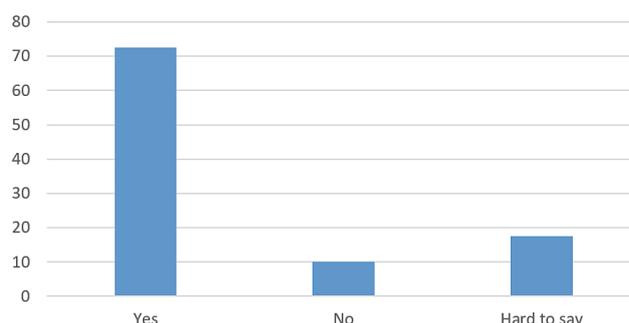


Fig. 3. Tourist attractiveness of the Lombardy region in the opinion of respondents (in %)

Source: Own research results

According to the majority of surveyed respondents, Lombardy can be considered as a region with high tourist values. This is due to the terrain, rich flora and fauna, the presence of numerous monuments, nature monuments and other tourist attractions. Nearly every fifth person surveyed had no opinion on a given topic. Fig. 4 presents the factors determining the tourism attractiveness of the Lombardy region.

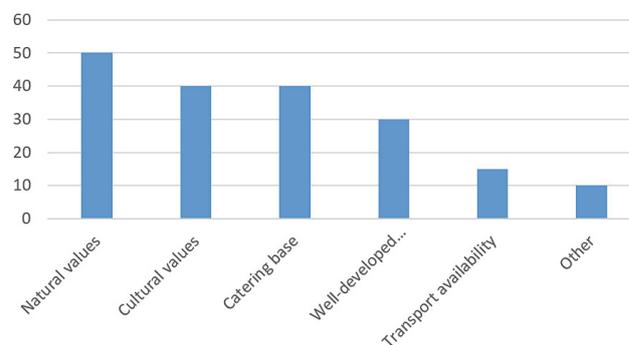


Fig. 4. Factors determining the tourist attractiveness of the Lombardy region (in %)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

In the opinion of the surveyed people, the attractiveness of Lombardy tourism is largely determined by natural and cultural values. It is also worth noting that in this region there is a well-developed catering and accommodation base. In addition, there is a strongly developed network of agritourism farms in this area. Their number in 2017 amounted to 1551 objects. Respondents also assessed factors conducive to the development of tourism in Lombardy. Detailed data are presented in Fig. 5.

The respondents rated the gastronomic and accommodation base very highly. In their opinion, the condition of

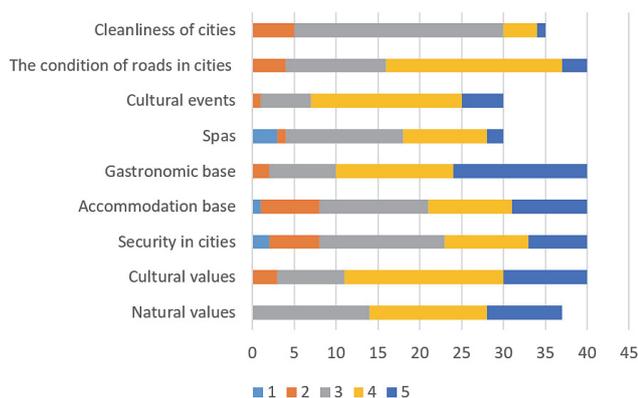


Fig. 5. Assessment of factors conducive to the development of tourism in the Lombardy in the opinion of the respondents (1 – negative, 2 – rather negative, 3 – neutral, 4 – rather positive, 5 - positive)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

roads in cities is at a high level, which is associated with the movement of tourists to destinations. In addition, the respondents rated the natural and cultural values very highly. These factors also strongly determine the rich tourist offer of the region and individual cities and villages. Fig. 6 presents objects and places that, according to respondents, are the greatest attraction of Lombardy.

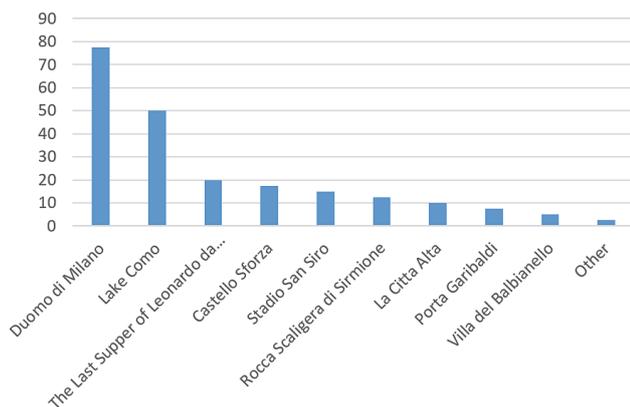


Fig. 6. Objects and places which, according to the respondents, are the biggest attraction of Lombardy (in %)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

Over every third respondent indicated that the greatest attraction of Lombardy is the Duomo di Milano. The next place taken was Lake Como. The other major tourist at-

tractions of the province of Milano include: Chiesa di San Maurizio al Monastero Maggiore, Il Cenacolo, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Duomo Rooftops, Piazza del Duomo, Castello Sforzesco. In the province of Bergamo it is possible to visit: La Citta Alta, Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore. In addition, in other provinces are the following tourist attractions that can be visited by tourists: Villa del Balbianello (Tremezina), Stelvio Pass (Bormio), Il Vittoriale degli Italiani (Gardone Riviera).

Fig. 7 presents negative factors affecting the development of tourism in the Lombardy region. The biggest factors hindering the development of tourism in the Lombardy region are: high prices of services, contaminated cities, insufficient promotion of the region.

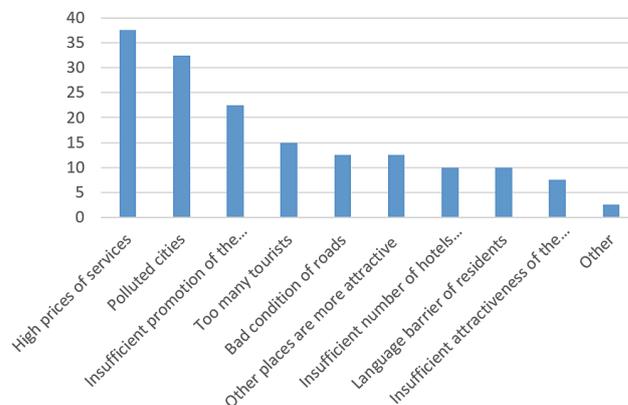


Fig. 7. Restrictions on the development of tourism in the Lombardy region in the opinion (in %)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

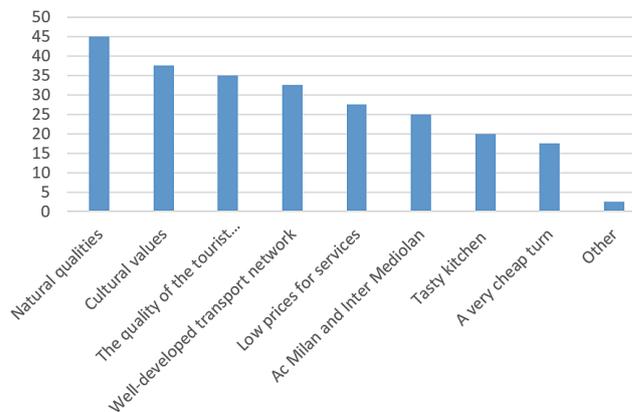


Fig. 8. The greatest advantages affecting the development of tourism in Lombardy in the opinion of respondents (in %)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

Fig. 8 presents the advantages affecting the development of tourism in the region of Lombardy. The factors that favour the development of tourism in the Lombardy region are: natural values, cultural values and the quality of tourist services offered.

Fig. 9 presents the assessment of the activities of the Lombardy region authorities for the development of tourism. In the majority, respondents positively assessed the activities of the Lombardy region authorities towards tourism development (65%). Every fifth person tested had a negative opinion on this subject. Every eighth respondent had insufficient opinion on the activities of the Lombardy authorities on the development of tourism.

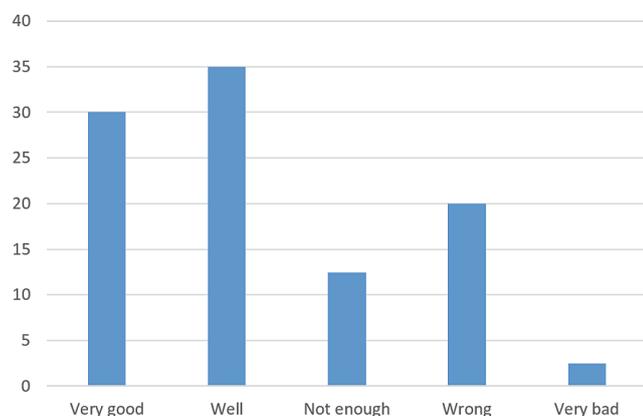


Fig. 9. Evaluation of the activities of the Lombardy region authorities in the field of promotion as a tourist-attractive region in the opinion of respondents (in %)
Source: Own research results

Fig. 10 presents the discussed issue depending on the age of respondents. The opinion of the respondents about the activities of the Lombardy authorities in the development of tourism was divided. Younger people to a large extent noticed positive changes in the promotion and development of the Lombardy region.

Fig. 11 presents the respondents' opinion on the knowledge of the number of agritourism farms in Lombardy. Over half of the respondents were unable to identify any agritourism farms in the Lombardy region. Other people had knowledge about functioning of such facilities in their region. Over half of respondents (65%) did not know people running agritourism farms in Lombardy. Interestingly, 82.5% of respondents had contact with tourists staying in the Lombardy region. Among this group, 32.5% of respondents benefited from this type of relationship (e.g. selling souvenirs, food products, offering guide and transport services).

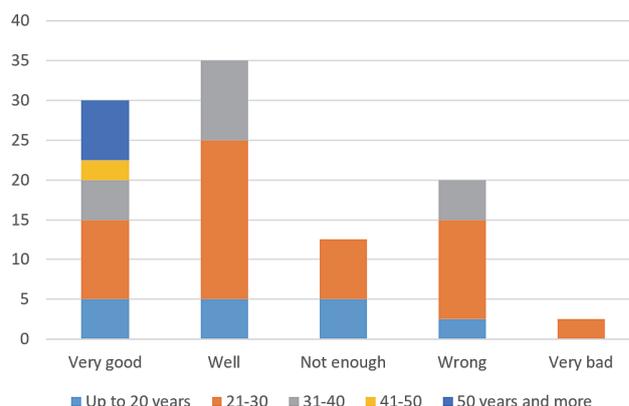


Fig. 10. Evaluation of the activities of the Lombardy region authorities in the field of promotion as a tourist-attractive region depending on the age of respondents (in %)
Source: Own research results

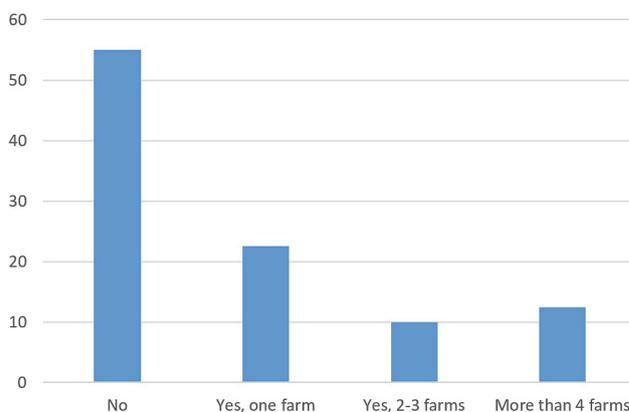


Fig. 11. Opinion of respondents on the knowledge of the number of agritourism farms in Lombardy (in %)
Source: Own research results

Fig. 12 presents the ratio of respondents to tourists visiting Lombardy. Attitude towards incoming tourists were characterized as a positive one. In the opinion of people, visitors are contributing to the economic development of the region. Almost half (45%) of respondents believed that the presence of tourists may also have negative effects. In the opinion of those people, the traffic intensity increases (30%). In addition, there may be noise caused by too many tourists (20%), increased pollution of cities or villages (12.5%) or crowd in cities (7.5%).

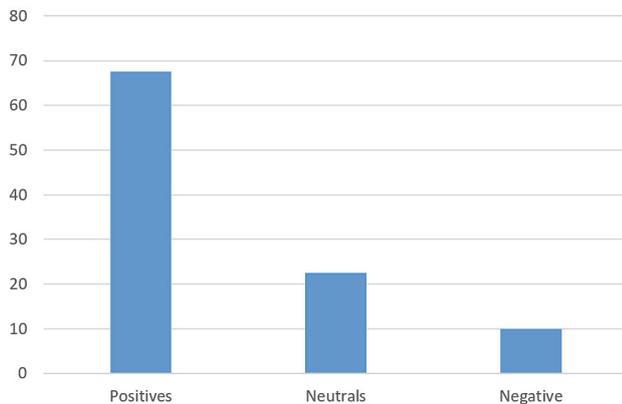


Fig. 12. The ratio of respondents to tourists (in %)

Source: Own research results

Fig. 13 presents the ratio of respondents to tourists depending on the age of respondents. A positive opinion on tourists was shown mainly by young people. In their opinion, the presence of such people in the region contributes positively to the development of the region. It was also very important to get to know the opinions of the respondents on the chances of tourism development in this region. In their minds, the development of tourism can contribute to the development of Lombardy (87.5%). In the opinion of the respondents, financial resources left by tourists in cities and villages have positive effects (45%). These are economic benefits thanks to which there are opportunities for the development of particular towns, new jobs are created. In addition, surveys were conducted with randomly selected 70

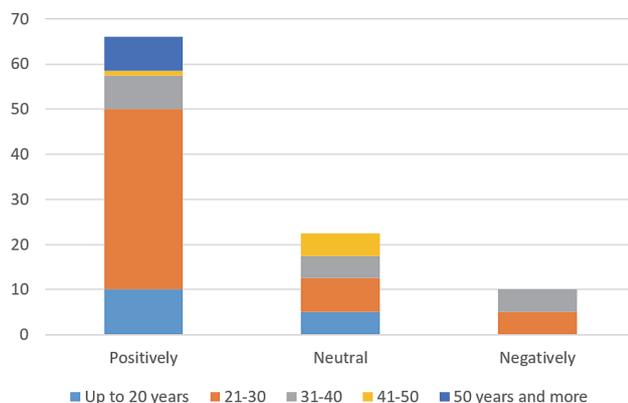


Fig. 13. Ratio of respondents to tourists by age of respondents (in %)

Source: Own research results

service providers¹ carrying out their agritourism activities in Lombardy. The average price per night in the analysed agritourism farms was EUR 63 per day/person.

Fig. 14 presents the tourist offer of selected agritourism farms in Lombardy. Among selected agritourism farms, 77.1% of the facilities were not connected to Wi-Fi. In addition, full-service providers offered services in 54.3% of farms, breakfasts in 35.7% of facilities, and only in 4.3% of farms there was no possibility of using catering services. In other facilities, the owners did not provide full information (5.7%). In agritourism, being adjusted to customer needs is an important factor. In 38.6% of the facilities it was possible to organize special events (e.g. baptisms, New Year's Eve, holidays). In 34.3% of farms there was no such possibility. Other service providers did not provide correct information. The services of agritourism farms are often used by people with disabilities. It is important that this type of facility is adapted to the needs of such a group. Facilities for the disabled were in 51.4% of the facilities. These include: driveways, railings, therapeutic treatments, a specialized offer prepared for this type of segment of receivers.

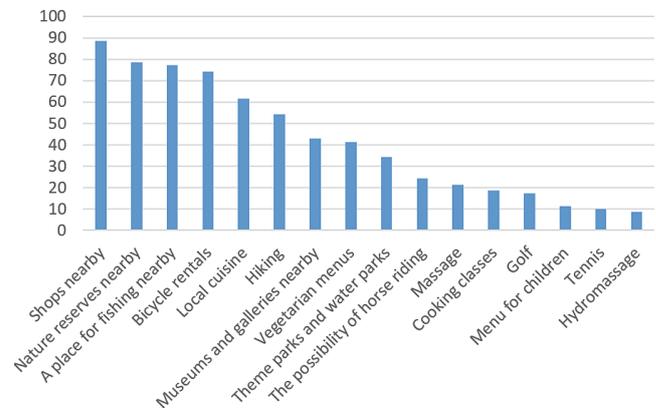


Fig. 14. Tourist offer of selected agritourism farms in the Lombardy region (in %)

* Respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: Own research results

Conclusion

The following formulations and conclusions can be mentioned from own research and own observations of authors:

¹ The owners of agritourism farms were drawn from all 1,551 service providers operating their services in the Lombardy region. The research was carried out using the CATI method.

According to the majority of respondents, Lombardy can be considered as a region with high tourist values. It is influenced by the terrain and natural and cultural values.

- In the Lombardy region there is a very well-developed base of agritourism farms. In 2017, their number amounted to 1551 objects. Most of these farms occur in the provinces of Brescia, Pavia and Mantova.
- Factor that influence tourism in a negative way are the prices.
- Inhabitants have a positive attitude towards tourists. In their opinion, visitors are contributing to the economic development of the region. Almost half of the respondents believed that the presence of tourists may also have negative effects (demoralization of the society, disappearance of culture in the countryside, passing negative patterns to residents, noise and others).
- Agritourism farms are getting more modern, more adapted to needs of its customers.
- Development of transportation has a big impact on tourism growth in Lombardy.
- Lombardy job market is very much supported by the tourism. In big cities, such as Milan, Brescia or Bergamo, number of hotels and restaurants is increasing.
- Big number of young people decide not only to visit Lombardy, but also to live there. Presence of universities has a big impact on that.

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