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# FOREST RESOURCES AS A BASIS TO CREATION OF AN INTEGRATED TOURIST PRODUCT OF AN AREA ON THE EXAMPLE OF BIAŁOWIEZA FOREST

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## ZASOBY LEŚNE PODSTAWĄ KREOWANIA ZINTEGROWANEGO PRODUKTU TURYSTYCZNEGO OBSZARU NA PRZYKŁADZIE PUSZCZY BIAŁOWIESKIEJ

STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł podejmuje problematykę szeroko rozumianego produktu turystycznego obszaru. Głównym jego celem jest analiza teoretycznych aspektów dotyczących istoty i struktury produktu turystycznego obszaru, ukazanie znaczenia zasobów leśnych w turystyce na przykładzie Puszczy Białowieskiej i przedstawienie koncepcji zintegrowanego produktu turystycznego tego obszaru w oparciu o unikatowe zasoby leśne. Kreowanie nowych leśnych produktów turystycznych (jako produktów częściowych), które będą powiązane ze sobą wspólną ideą (pod nazwą Leśne Dziedzictwo Europy) pozwoli lepiej wykorzystać dotychczasowy unikatowy potencjał przyrodniczy regionu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: produkt turystyczny obszaru, zasoby leśne, Puszcza Białowieska, dziedzictwo leśne

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## Introduction

One of the important aspects of research in the contemporary scientific literature in the field of tourism is the issue of the development of tourist products of an area (region)<sup>1</sup>. The tourist product of an area is a very complex and multidimensional category. It consists of many various elements, among which an important role is held by the heritage (natural, historic, cultural). It is often a basis for the development of the tourism functions of the region (however it is not the sole and sufficient condition of the development). Tourism is largely based on the resources of the natural capital (including forest resources) and should protect it, to be able to use it in the long perspective. One of the particularly valuable forest areas, both on the scale of Poland and Europe, is the region of the Białowieża Forest, which has great potential, hitherto poorly used, to create attractive, competitive and innovative tourist products. The issue of the development of tourism in the region of Białowieża Forest was described among others A Rutkiewicz<sup>2</sup>, M. Jalinik<sup>3</sup>, K. i E. Janeczko<sup>4</sup>.

The aim of the article is a theoretical analysis of aspects regarding the essence and structure of the tourist product of an area, show the importance of forest resources in tourism on the example of the Białowieża Forest, and to present the concept of the integrated (complex) tourist product of that area, based on unique forest resources. This study concentrates on showing the possibility to create new tourist products of the forest, which will be linked together by a common idea and will create a conceptually coherent whole.

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- <sup>1</sup> J. Borzyszkowski, *Rozwój produktów turystycznych jako sfera działań Destination Management Organizations*, "Zeszyty Naukowe" 2015 no. 19; J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk, *Produkt turystyczny. Pomysł – organizacja – zarządzanie*, wyd. II, Warszawa 2010; A. Panasiuk (ed.), *Markowe produkty turystyczne*, Szczecin 2005; M. Marczak, J. Borzyszkowski, *Region (obszar) jako produkt turystyczny*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Instytutu Ekonomii i Zarządzania" 2014 no. 3; A.E. Szczepanowski, *Markowe produkty turystyczne*, Warszawa 2012; E. Dziedzic, *Obszar recepcji turystycznej jako przedmiot zarządzania strategicznego*, "Monografie i Opracowania" no. 442, Warszawa 1998.
  - <sup>2</sup> A. Rutkiewicz, *Leśne produkty turystyczne Puszczy Białowieskiej*, "Studia i Materiały Centrum Edukacji Przyrodniczo-Leśnej" 2013 no.15, vol. 37/4.
  - <sup>3</sup> M. Jalinik, *Obszary leśne w rozwoju turystyki*, "Ekonomia i Środowisko" 2016 no. 3, p. 313–323; M. Jalinik, *Czynniki decydujące o rozwoju sylwanoturystyki na obszarach leśnych*, w: M. Jalinik, S. Bakier (eds), *Turystyka na obszarach przyrodniczo cennych*, Białystok 2016.
  - <sup>4</sup> K. Janeczko, E. Janeczko, *Las jako produkt turystyczny na przykładzie Leśnego Kompleksu promocyjnego (LKP) Puszcza Białowieska*, "Turystyka i Rekreacja" 2005 t. 1.

## The concept and essence of the product of a tourist area

The concept of a tourist product is a complex category, hence in the literature there are many different definitions of it. In the narrow approach (in the strict sense – as a product of tourism enterprises) is defined as everything that tourists are buying, so both individual services (e.g. transport, accommodation, catering) as well and the whole package of benefits (which are a complex variety of services). In the broad sense, a tourist product is a composition of what tourists do and the assets and equipment, which they use for this purpose. From the point of view of a tourist, a tourism product constitutes the entire experience, i.e. “the sum of impressions and experiences, which a tourist had since leaving the place of residence until returning home”<sup>5</sup>.

Tourist products can be variously categorized (classified). Especially interesting is the division proposed by Kaczmarek, Stasiak and Włodarczyk<sup>6</sup> into simple (a thing, service) and complex (an event, performance, object, trail, area) products. In this study a broad view of the tourist product, seen spatially, is adopted, and the main subject of analysis is the tourist product of the area.

Tourist product of the area is “a special, geographically determined product of a surface nature, composed of selected elements of the tourism potential (or existing products) of a given area and connected with a primary idea, determining its market originality, individuality and attractiveness”<sup>7</sup>.

Due to the level of perception of the tourist product (both by the producer and the consumer) the following is distinguished in its structure most often:

- the core of the product (also called the primary product, the main essence of the product) – includes the items that are related to the main theme and purpose of tourist travel, i.e., they determine the choice of the product. It is believed that this level of the product does not have a material nature and is viewed through the prism of the benefits from its purchase;
- the actual product – includes a set of basic services that determine the execution of the trip;
- the expanded product (enriched, enlarged and improved) – includes elements that determine highlighting of the product on the market, its com-

<sup>5</sup> S. Wodejko, *Ekonomiczne zagadnienia turystyki*, Warszawa 1997, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk, *Produkt turystyczny. Pomysł – organizacja – zarządzanie*, wyd. II, Warszawa 2010, p. 88–167.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159, 167.

petitiveness and attractiveness (i.e. all additional services not included in the standard tourist offer).<sup>8</sup>

This concept is expanded with extra dimensions. From the manufacturers' point of view, additional potential product is distinguished – including the elements which in the future may become a component of the tourism product. However, in the perception of the product by the customer-tourist, besides the core, the actual and expanded product the expected product is distinguished, functioning in the imagination of the tourist, and the psychological product including everything that remains in the consciousness of the individual tourist after an overall assessment of the product<sup>9</sup>.

The tourist product of the area has a very complex structure and consists of many different elements. Middleton<sup>10</sup> includes the following among the basic elements of the area tourism product: attractions and the environment at the destination (as one of the basic components, which largely determines the choice of the product by the consumer), infrastructure, and services at the destination, the availability of the destination, the image and perception of the destination, and the price paid by the consumer. A little different classification is shown by Kaczmarek, Stasiak and Włodarczyk<sup>11</sup>. As the main elements of the area tourism product, they mention:

- heritage (natural, historical and cultural of the area) – resources of the area genetically not related to the development of tourism, but forming the part of the area potential, making the development of tourism possible in the first place (e.g. geological structure, topography, water, climate, landscape, natural curiosities, vegetation, culture, history, economy, human potential);
- infrastructure – resources of the area related to the development of tourism, supplementing primary elements (heritage), making the tourist offer of the area more attractive (e.g. accommodation facilities, catering, paratouristic base, external and internal transportation accessibility);
- added value – attributes of the area bringing certain satisfaction to tourists (emotions, impressions, experiences). They are the symbolic elements, such as: the current image of the area existing in the public consciousness and the functioning stereotypes; an idea for a product, which is the main idea uniting all the activities in the field of tourism in the area; elements supporting the identification of the product: name, logo, adver-

<sup>8</sup> G. Gołębowski (ed.), *Kompendium wiedzy o turystyce*, Warszawa-Poznań 2002, p. 69–70; J. Altkorn, *Marketing w turystyce*, Warszawa 1994, p. 100–102.

<sup>9</sup> J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk, *Produkt turystyczny, albo jak organizować poznanie świata*, Łódź 2002, p. 89–91.

<sup>10</sup> V.T.C. Middleton, *Marketing w turystyce*, Warszawa 1996, p. 89–90.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk, 2010, op. cit., p. 160–162.

isement slogan; brand identity – unique values, traits that should be permanently associated with the area, and ultimately to become a part of the image of the whole area. In the absence of a unique heritage or infrastructure, they allow for distinguishing the area from other areas that have a similar offer.

- organization and management – all structures and activities allowing the above elements to function as a tourist product<sup>12</sup>.

Generally, heritage is the core of the area tourism product, as a primary element, which enables the development of tourism (however, it is not a condition, which is necessary and sufficient for creating new products). The process of creating new tourist products in most cases starts with the diagnosis of the tourist resources and valuables of the region.

## The importance of forests in tourism and forest heritage of the Białowieża Forest

Forest areas, which in Poland occupy 29.4% of the country<sup>13</sup>, represent a huge natural capital for the development of tourism. Forest is an attractive place to engage in various forms of tourism and recreation, demand for which has been increasing in recent years (the so-called forestry tourism is developing). In Poland, making the State Forests available for the society is a statutory obligation, regulated by the rules of the Forest Act of 28 September 1991<sup>14</sup>. Forests have a variety of functions: natural (safety), social and productive (economic)<sup>15</sup>. Forest resources, and the tourism space associated with them, are on the one hand a consumer good (suitable for direct use by tourists), and on the other hand, a production good (for purposes of investment and production, used by other entities operating in tourism). Limitation of the space and its resources is a primary cause of the need to apply the principles of rational and sustainable forest management, including sustainable tourism development, and nature and woodland education. The main objective of this education is to disseminate knowledge about the forest environment, about multifunctional and sustainable forest management, raising awareness on the rational and responsible use of the forests, and the need to protect their resources for future generations).

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> *Środowiska 2015, Informacje i opracowania statystyczne*, Warszawa 2015, p. 315.

<sup>14</sup> The Act of 28 September 1991 on forests (Journal of Laws of 1991 No. 101, item 444, as amended).

<sup>15</sup> *Lasy Państwowe w Liczbach 2015*, Warszawa 2015, p.16, [www.lasy.gov.pl](http://www.lasy.gov.pl) [20–11–2016].

So far, the State Forests, which are the main entity managing forest areas owned by the State Treasury, have undertaken many valuable initiatives aiming at making forests accessible to tourists (including reduction of the anthropo-pressure by directing tourism in forest areas), and the implementation of various forms of nature and woodland education. An example of good practice in this area can be the own LP program entitled "Aktywne udostępnianie lasu" [Active sharing of the forest], which includes specific solutions for construction of tourism and recreation infrastructure in the forest areas<sup>16</sup>, or "Las bez barrier" [Forest without barriers], which includes solutions for adapting tourism and educational facilities to the needs of people with disabilities. In spite of the many activities in this area, tourist infrastructure in the Polish forests is still poorly developed<sup>17</sup>.

The problem of the tourist use of forests is being increasingly undertaken also in the literature. A number of papers published by the Centre for Nature and Forest Education in Rogów<sup>18</sup> may be an example.

One of the most valuable, unique on the national and European level, is the Białowieża Forest. Its forest resources are an important natural capital for the development of tourism in the region, generating the potential for creating attractive and competitive tourism products, particularly forest products. The Białowieża Forest includes the last primeval forest fragments at the Central European Plain, hence it represents the model object for forest ecosystems of Poland and Europe. The woodland of the Forests includes mixed, multi-level and centuries-old stand (an average age calculated for the entire Promotional Forest Complex "Białowieża Forest" is one of the highest among all the administrative units of the LP<sup>19</sup>). The Białowieża Forest region has a very high biological diversity, both at the gene, species, and ecosystem as well as landscape levels.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Hyży, *Aktywne udostępnianie lasu – program własny Lasów Państwowych*, "Studia i Materiały Centrum Edukacji Przyrodniczo-Leśnej w Rogowie" 2011 no. 13, vol. 4(29), p. 144–149.

<sup>17</sup> M. Smoleński, *Turystyka w Lasach Państwowych*, w: R. Ziółkowski (ed.), *Praktyczne aspekty rozwoju turystyki i rekreacji na obszarach przyrodniczo cennych*, Białystok 2006, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. A. Perlińska, M. Rothert, *Działania Lasów Państwowych w zakresie turystycznego udostępniania lasu*, „Studia i Materiały Centrum Edukacji Przyrodniczo-Leśnej w Rogowie” 2013, no. 15, vol. 37/4, p. 245–247; M. Pigan, *Rola Lasów Państwowych w propagowaniu turystyki przyrodniczo-leśnej*, „Studia i Materiały Centrum Edukacji Przyrodniczo-Leśnej” 2009 no. 11, Vol. 4(23); *Turystyka w lasach i na obszarach przyrodniczo cennych*, „Studia i Materiały Centrum Edukacji Przyrodniczo-Leśnej” 2015 no. 17, Vol. 45/4.

<sup>19</sup> M. Ksepko, J. Dawidziuk, *Analiza założeń i realizacja planów urzędzenia lasu sporządzonych dla nadleśnictw Puszczy Białowieskiej na lata 2002–2011 i 2012–202*, in: *Stan ekosystemów leśnych Puszczy Białowieskiej*, Warszawa 2016, p. 10, [www.lasy.gov.pl](http://www.lasy.gov.pl) [20–11–2016].

The most valuable natural fragment of the Białowieża Forest is managed by the Białowieża National Park (BNP). The rest of the forest is managed by three forest inspectorates: Hajnówka, Browsk and Białowieża. In 1976 BNP was recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve M & B ("Man and Biosphere"), and in 1979 it was entered onto the UNESCO World Heritage List – (since 1992 the status of the object was extended to include the adjacent from the east fragment of the Belarusian national park "Bieławiežskaja Forest", and in 2014 the entire Białowieża Forest was included on the list). The result was the creation of one of seven in the world and three European cross-border World Heritage objects. "Białowieża Forest and Białowieża National Park, therefore, constitute a kind of a brand of the region, recognized on the domestic and foreign markets. Unfortunately, there are still too few varied tourist products in the region (e.g. on the basis of forest resources), which would be competitive on the domestic, European, or global tourist market, and could hold tourists in the area for longer. Currently such a product is the Białowieża National Park (and its facilities – the Nature and Forest Museum in Białowieża, the Bison Exhibition Reserve, Palace Park, Protective Area of the Reserve). Currently, actions are needed, which would lift the burden of tourism traffic from BNP, for which excessive anthropo-pressure has become a serious threat.

### Creating integrated tourist products of the Białowieża Forest

The natural and cultural heritage of the region and, above all, the rich and unique tourist attractions of the forest environment constitute a great potential to create new products. Forest and its functions (promoted by various forms of education concerning the environment and forestry) may be the core of the integrated tourist product of the Białowieża Forest.

An important element of any product is its brand (name), under which the product will be introduced to the market, which often determines its commercial success (it should be associated with the characteristics possessed by the product)<sup>20</sup>. Creating a tourist product of an area it is necessary to focus on the activities in which a given area would be best. In the case of the Białowieża Forest, the name of such an integrated tourist product of the region could be "Forest Heritage of Europe". In 2015, within the framework of the implementation of the "Białowieża Forest – Forest Heritage of Europe" programme (involving the State Forests, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, Białowieża National Park, and local governments), a concept of such a product was developed, consisting of a

<sup>20</sup> M. Molenda, *Regionalny przemysłowy produkt turystyczny*, Warszawa 2015, p. 52.

wide variety of “tourist products’ (mainly in the segment of environmental-educational tourism)<sup>21</sup>. The idea is to create new partial products, which will be linked thematically by a common idea.

As part of an integrated tourist product of the Białowieża Forest, one of the main partial products could be the creation of the European Centre for Nature and Forest Education in the region (e.g. following the example of the Copernicus Science Centre), which will allow for active engagement of the visitors with learning about the nature and function of the forest, and will constitute an attractive form of environmental education. The forest resources of the region should constitute huge natural capital, not only of the region, but also Europe as a whole and should be the basis for the creation of new, innovative forest products. In the region, the field educational offer should also be developed. As an example of such products it is possible to mention eco-museums, which means objects scattered around the region, which will present the advantages of the natural and cultural heritage of the Białowieża Forest, right in the place of its occurrence. Objects of this type allow for the participation of the visitors in the created offer (e.g. Through a tasting of local culinary products made of berries, wood carving workshops, gardening lessons). A new forest tourist product constituting a part of the integrated tourist product of the of the region of the Białowieża Forest, which in the future could be a major tourist attraction of the region, would be the path in the treetops. In Europe, there are examples of good practices in this area, e.g. Lipno on the Vltava River in the south of the Czech Republic and in Bavaria, Germany.

When expanding the field educational offer, which would relieve the tourism traffic in the Białowieża National Park, there is a need to create Theme Parks in the forest districts, concerning, for example, the refuges for animals (including for the bison – since the “Białowieża Forest is being promoted as the European Capital of the Bison), as well as forest traditions. Theme villages, the creation of which should actively involve local authorities, which will show different ways of using and processing forest resources, could constitute a supplement to such an offer, integrated with the activities of forest districts. Ultimately, one may consider creating a forest arboretum in the region, which would present the advantages of “The Forest Heritage of Europe”.

In the region of the Białowieża Forest, there is also a need to enrich the offer of natural-forest tracks, which constitute one of the main forms of forest education of society. This should be accomplished both through the modernization of the existing tracks as well as laying out and attractive development

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<sup>21</sup> J. Ejdyś et al., *Koncepcja organizacji ruchu turystycznego w regionie Puszczy Białowieżskiej*, Białystok 2015.



of the new ones, e.g. through the use of small wooden architecture, educational playgrounds for children and parents, and the development of quests. Environmental education for children should be achieved through play to a greater extent, because the paths and information boards alone are not a very attractive form of sightseeing. Such products can be developed by laying out similar path e.g. Mushrooms, herbs, Birds, Insects, phonological tracks in the Bialowieza Forest or the paths of animals (showing changes in nature occurring in different seasons). In the region of the Bialowieza Forest, there is a need to create various, mutually complementary forest products, integrated with each other, which will exhibit the various functions of the forests. The idea is to create a complementary tourist product that would complement the natural offer of the Bialowieza National Park (relieving the park's excessive concentration of tourist traffic), as well as to develop attractions in the towns constituting the so-called "Gates" to the forest. Tourism in this area, through the development of a wide educational offer, should constitute an important element of active conservation. The so-called fitness trails in different parts of the forest habitat (for children and adults), which will present the impact of individual trees, or habitats on the human body, can constitute a supplement to the offer.

Ultimately, it is important to strive for the creation of a tourist attraction on a European scale in the region, e.g. a forest sanatorium (exposing the health functions of the forest), around which other services will develop (e.g. in the field of aromatherapy, hippotherapy, rehabilitation, medical). New tourism products can be an important impulse for the development of the local tourist economy.

## Conclusions

The conducted analysis of the conditions for the development of tourism in the region of the Bialowieza Forest showed that the region outside of the Bialowieza National Park lacks attractive and diverse tourist products that would be competitive on the domestic, European, or global tourist market, that would entice the tourists to stay longer and encourage them to return in the future.

The supply of the tourist services of the region of the Bialowieza Forest should be transformed into a coherently functioning whole – the integrated tourist product of the region, which will create a bundle of benefits for tourists. This requires an integrated development of many different, partial tourism products, created mainly on the basis of unique forest resources and other resources of the natural and cultural heritage of the region. These

products should be connected with a specifically defined thematic line (“The Forest Heritage of Europe”), determining its originality, individuality, and attractiveness on the market. The qualities of the forest’s natural heritage should be at the core of the integrated tourism product.

The main feature of this tourism product would be its dynamic nature. Its size – qualitative and quantitative structure – will be subject to change through the activities of various entities operating in the local tourism economy.

Creating a complementary, integrated tourism product of each area requires the cooperation and coordination of the actions of multiple entities within local and regional tourism economy. In the Region of the Białowieża Forest, the main entities creating the integrated tourist product of the forests - “Forest heritage of Europe” will be the units of the National State Forests (forest districts), Management of the Białowieża National Park, and local governments, in cooperation with the tourist companies and local tourist organizations. The process of creating products, building the brand and image of the Białowieża Forest should also include local communities, which are an important component of an integrated tourist product of an area, affecting various components of its structure<sup>22</sup>.

## Acknowledgements

This article was prepared within the research project no. S/WZ/5/2015 and financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland.

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