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FINANCING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTALLY VALUABLE AREAS IN REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES FOR 2007-2013 AND 2014-2020

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ABSTARCT: One significant instrument used for self-government activities are EU funds, accessed through Regional Operational Programmes, which influence particular areas of social and economic life in the region. Special support areas in next EU financial perspectives are tourism economy as well as natural environment and protection of its resources. The main aim of this study is to present the scope of support from the EU funds for the tourism industry provided in two consecutive EU financial perspectives for 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. The tourism economy received significant financial support in the period of 2007-2013, especially for the activities conducted by local authority bodies. Financing tourism economy actions in the 2014-2020 perspective has been strongly limited. A significant support area are, in this case, funds for protected areas (environmentally valuable areas). Objectives related to the development of tourism economy can be accomplished through the use of financial resources earmarked for actions related to the protection of natural environment and efficient exploitation of its resources. The study shows that there has been a key change in the development policy of tourism economy – from direct dedicated financing (2007-2013) to indirectly financed actions, including the use of funds for natural environment.

KEY WORDS: tourism economy, European Union funds, tourism in environmentally valuable areas, regional tourism development

Introduction

In Poland, the regional tourism policy is within the competence of regional authorities responsible for devising tourism development strategies. Local self-government is responsible for carrying out tourism-related actions on the local level. One significant instrument used for self-government activities are EU funds, accessed through Regional Operational Programmes, which influence particular areas of social and economic life in the region, including tourism economy. A special area related to EU financing are the issues connected with natural environment and its preservation. The main aim of this study is to present the scope of support from the EU funds for the tourism industry provided in two consecutive EU financial perspectives for 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. The main problem arising from the fact that tourism economy is included in EU financing in two consecutive financial perspectives is lack of continuation of tourism economy support policy. The tourism economy received significant financial support in the period of 2007-2013, especially for the activities conducted by local authority bodies. Financing tourism economy actions in the 2014-2020 perspective has been strongly limited. Both local authority bodies as well as tourism enterprises and organizations are left with the possibility to apply for financial support within general purposes, not directly dedicated to tourism economy. In such case, funds for environmentally valuable areas are a significant source of support. Objectives related to the development of tourism economy can be accomplished through the use of financial resources earmarked for actions related to the protection of natural environment and efficient exploitation of its resources. The study shows that there has been a key change in the support policy for the development of tourism economy – from direct dedicated financing (2007-2013) to indirectly financed actions, including the use of funds for natural environment. It means that the possibility of developing tourism in environmentally valuable areas is of special significance in the EU financial perspective for 2014-2020. Thanks to the EU funds available through ROPs, there is an opportunity to combine natural environment and tourism objectives.

Role of Regional Operational Programmes in Financing the Development of Tourism Economy

Tourism economy is a system of market interdependencies created during the process of satisfying tourist needs by entrepreneurs and institutions (Nowakowska, 1988, p. 169-171; Kornak, Rapacz, 2001, p. 11). Such a system

encompasses all the activities of entities in this economy that are carried out in the process of servicing tourism movement (Meyer, 2006, p. 39-40). Tourism economy consists of all entities that are focused on tourist needs and are not solely geared to service the tourist traffic (Page, Connell, 2006, p. 16-17). On the regional level, the prerequisite for the effective operation of entities of regional and local tourism economy is the development of a cooperation system for: entities conducting an economic activity (tourism enterprises), local and regional authorities, tourism industry organizations and associations, including economic self-government and regional tourism organization (Panasiuk, 2008, p. 25). Regional self-government, a tourism policy entity, has the primary role in the development of social and economic effects arising from the operation of tourism economy on a regional level. The main objectives of regional tourism policy include the following: satisfying the tourism needs of the society, rational use of tourism resources, labour resources and funds in the area of tourism economy, developing optimal volume and structure of tourism movement, coordinating tourism development, taking account of its various functions and connections with other areas of economic life (Kurek, 2007, p. 388).

The competences of regional authorities are mainly aimed at the functioning of so called direct tourism economy, which encompasses affecting the tourism economy entities that operations are based on the demand directly indicated by tourists, i.e. hotel industry, catering, tourist transport, travel agencies, entities operating tourist attractions, tourism information offices, tourism organization activities as well as local authority bodies (mainly on the municipal level) of touristic areas (Panasiuk, 2014b, p. 27-33). The potential beneficiaries of EU funds for tourism economy are entities of direct tourism economy and, as the practical experience has shown, mainly local authority bodies.

The European Union has prepared a procedure, so called budget perspectives, which structure implies planning and financing actions in 7-year periods. Since 2004, Poland, as a member state of the EU, has been directly using the funds earmarked for subsequent financial perspectives for 2000-2006, 2007-2013 and for the current period of 2014-2020.

The largest source of financing for tourism initiatives from the the EU funds is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and its 16 Regional Operational Programmes (ROP) which operate in each voivodeship in Poland. The main objective of ERDF is to finance the EU programmes aimed at helping the least developed regions in the EU. In the perspective 2007-2013, one of the strategic objectives of ERDF support was the development of tourism and investment in culture. This objective was the main axis of financing actions which were at the heart of tourism development in the assisted areas.

In the perspective 2014-2020, the key assisted area is protection of natural heritage.

The main development objectives defined within the scope of ERDF have also been reflected in next perspectives of each of the 16 Regional Operational Programmes in Polish voivodeships. The legal basis for construction and implementation of RPOs in Poland is Act of 6 December 2006 on the principles of conducting development policy (Ustawa, 2006). The provisions of the Act state that ROPs are planning documents which specify the area and activities that regional self-government bodies carry out or plan to carry out to support the development of the region. They are of an operational character which means that actions are included there in a detailed form and subordinate to the regional development strategies, as well as regional sector strategies. As mentioned above, the boards of the voivodeships are responsible for the management (preparation and implementation) of ROPs, what proves that the development policy is decentralized in Poland and improves the effectiveness of the use of funds in the regions.

The structure of all 16 Regional Operational Programmes includes a priority axis, which specifies the main support areas of each ROP, and within its scope there are actions and measures determining particular investment types that are financed through the programme.

Tourism in Environmentally Valuable Areas

Environmentally valuable areas are highly biodiverse areas which resources must be managed in a planned and sustainable way (Żegleń, 2010, p. 549-550). These areas are crucial factor for the development of many forms of tourism, including: ecotourism, heritage tourism, specialized tourism, agri-tourism. Tourism goods become the purpose of travelling and determine the strength of the tourism potential (Panasiuk, 2010, p. 229-231). Area that features atmospheric and biosphere conditions favourable for humans are environmentally valuable areas, and are thus intensively used by tourists. Not only should existing and potential environmentally valuable areas be publicly available in accordance with defined rules, but they also under appropriate legal regulations that would limit extensive tourism anthropoppression. The presence of tourists in environmentally valuable areas and their various behaviours can lead to negative effects (Panasiuk, 2015, p. 187). Therefore, the applied legal regulations should help to eliminate the tourist-nature conflict, whilst enabling the co-existence of nature with tourists and tourists with nature (Sikora, 2010, p. 180-181).

Environmentally valuable areas are a crucial factor for the development of tourism. They include protected areas, mainly in the form of national and landscape parks, nature reserves and natural monuments.

Polish legislation has identified the following forms of nature protection:

- large area protection forms (traditional – national parks and nature reserves, modern – landscape parks and protected landscape areas);
- landmark protection forms – natural monuments, documentation sites, ecological areas, landscape-nature complexes;
- plants, animals and fungi species protection forms (Ustawa, 2004).

Due to the development of tourism, protected areas were a crucial element for local and regional development in the EU financial perspective for 2007-2013. Environmentally valuable areas are subject of EU policy and are financed via ROPs in the 2014-2020 perspective. Actions within that scope may be combined with objectives related to the functioning of the tourism economy.

Regional Operating Programmes as Sources of Financing Tourism Development in the EU Financial Perspective for 2007-2013

Tourism and culture were one of the main priority axes in as many as 14 Regional Operating Programmes in the financial perspective for 2007-2013. Such an important place of tourism in the analysed documents may indicate that tourism has a high position among the determinants of development for particular regions of Poland. Two exceptions in this case were the Regional Operational Programmes of Łódzkie and Opolskie Voivodeships as there, the initiatives focused on the development of tourism were identified only on the level of ROP priority actions.

The following type of actions dominated among the primary actions included in the priority axes on the development of tourism in the analysed regions:

- construction, expansion and modernization of the tourism base in regions;
- construction, expansion and modernization of the public tourism and recreation infrastructure;
- development of regional and trans-regional tourism products;
- development of regional tourism information systems;
- tourism promotion (on domestic and international levels).

In the analysed ROPs, there were additional sources for tourism-related investment in the form of priorities connected to revitalization of urban space and the development of metropolitan area, as well as the development

and modernisation of social infrastructure, including cultural one. Within the scope of these priorities the following actions were identified:

- the development of tourism infrastructure in the metropolitan area and creation and promotion of local tourism products;
- revitalization of degraded urban space and adjusting it to the needs of tourism;
- construction, expansion and modernisation of cultural infrastructure facilities as elements enhancing the tourism attractiveness of an area;
- support of cultural heritage protection in the area and investment in cultural and historical facilities.

Even though, pursuant to the provisions of particular ROPs, the objective of these actions was supposed to be the improvement of the quality of community life of a given area, the majority of the programmes had underlined, in their groups of specific objectives, a key role of such undertakings in the improvement of tourism attractiveness of the region.

Among 16 ROPs from the 2007-2013 perspective only three have clear links between achieving the objectives related to tourism and natural environment. In one of such cases, this relation pertains to one of the priorities axes in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (*Using the Natural and Cultural Resources to Stimulate Development of Tourism and Recreation*). In the other two cases, this relation occurred on the actions level. In Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, within the scope of the priority axis *Support for the Development of Tourism*, there was an action specified named *Development of Tourism Services Based on Tourism Resources*. In Pomorskie Voivodeship, within the scope of the priority axis *Tourism and Cultural Heritage*, there was an action specified named *Support and Conservation of Environmental Resources* (Panasiuk, 2014a, p. 118-121). Financing tourism in environmentally valuable areas in other regions could potentially be done through other actions but without any special funds dedicated to such objectives.

The total amount of allocated funds, as part of the priorities directly related to tourism, in all 16 ROPs was EUR 1.22 billion, which represents over 6% of all ROP funds. If the funds allocated to priorities indirectly related to the development of tourism economy in each region are taken into consideration, the total amount equals EUR 2.77 billion and represents 14% of all ROP funds.

The analysis show that there is a lack of direct relations between the role of a particular region in handling tourism movement and the level of ROP funds used for actions focused on the development of regional tourism economy. This can be exemplified by Pomorskie and Małopolskie voivodeships, which are one of the most popular tourist destinations in Poland, but where the amount of funds allocated to pro-tourism actions within the scope of

both programmes represented 3.4% and 6.3% of total ROP funds, respectively.

Objectives for tourism in environmentally valuable areas could be financed via funds dedicated to tourism economy in the 2007-2013 perspective. The scope of EU policy is entirely different in this area in the next perspective.

Regional Operating Programmes as Sources of Financing Tourism in Environmentally Valuable Areas in the EU Financial Perspective for 2014-2020

The funds allocated to tourism projects were limited in the new financial perspective for 2014-2020. It is a significant change in the EU policy and it directly determines the scope of policy carried out by each individual member state. A part of the actions from the previous perspective can be continued to a certain degree but not through the resources dedicated solely to tourism economy. Actions carried out on a regional level via ROPs are mainly related to:

- development of regional brand tourism products;
- promotion of cultural tourism and industrial heritage;
- support for the development of new forms of tourism (Buczak, 2014; Piekarczywska, 2014).

Table 1 presents the place of tourism in each ROP of Polish voivodeships, including the priority axes and actions related to financing matters of tourism in environmentally valuable areas.

Table 1. The place of tourism in Regional Operating Programmes in Poland in 2014-2020 with particular focus on tourism in environmentally valuable areas

Voivodeship	Priority Axis	Action
Dolnośląskie	4. Environment and Resources	4.4. Protection and Opening Up Nature Resources
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	4. Environmentally-Friendly Region	4.6. Protection of Natural Environment and Cultural Resources in the Area of Integrated Territorial Investments
Lubelskie	1. Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection	7.2. Protection of Natural Biodiversity
		7.3. Nature Tourism
		7.4. Protection of Biodiversity for Integrated Territorial Investments of Lubelskie Functional Area
Lubuskie	4. Environment and Culture	4.4. Culture and Cultural Heritage Resources
		4.5. Nature Capital of the Region

Voivodeship	Priority Axis	Action
Łódzkie	5. Environment Protection	5.4. Nature Protection
	6. Revitalization and Endogenous Potential of the Region	6.1. Cultural Heritage and Culture Infrastructure 6.2. Tourism Economy Development
Małopolskie	6. Regional Heritage	6.1. Development of Cultural and Natural Heritage
		6.2. Protection of Biodiversity
		6.3. Development of Indigenous Potential of the Region
Mazowieckie	5. Environmentally-Friendly Economy	5.3. Cultural Heritage
		5.4. Protection of Biodiversity
Opolskie	5. Protection of Environment, Cultural and Natural Heritage	5.3. Increased Accessibility to Cultural Resources of the Region
Podkarpackie	4. Protection of Environment and Cultural Heritage	4.4. Culture
Podlaskie	6. Environment Protection and Rational Management of its Resources	6.3. Protection of Biodiversity and Geodiversity Resources and Landscape
Pomorskie	8. Conversion	8.3. Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage
		8.4. Support of Attractiveness of Natural Heritage Resources
	11. Environment	11.4. Protection of Biodiversity
Śląskie	5. Environment Protection and Effective Use of Resources	5.3. Cultural Heritage
		5.4. Protection of Biodiversity
Świętokrzyskie	4. Natural and Cultural Heritage	4.4. Preservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage
		4.5. Protection and Use of Environmentally Valuable Areas
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	5. Natural Environment and Rational Use of Resources	5.3. Protection of Biodiversity
	6. Culture and Heritage	6.1. Culture Infrastructure 6.2. Natural Heritage
Wielkopolskie	4. Environment	4.4. Preservation, Protection, Promotion and Development of Natural and Cultural Heritage
		4.1. Cultural Heritage
Zachodniopomorskie	4. Human-Natural Environment	4.2. Strengthening Cultural Institutions
		4.5. Support of Infrastructural Forms of Environment and Landscape Protection

in bold – priority axes and actions where there is a convergence of actions related to tourism and environmentally valuable areas

Source: www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl [05-07-2016]

In general, priority axes and specific actions in ROPs from the 2014-2020 perspective only indirectly involve tourism. Tourism is only an element of a broader group of actions in the detailed scope of financing actions in this period. Thus, there is no possibility to state what amount of funds from each ROP may be allocated to the tourism economy. The main source of financing tourism are actions related to the natural environment and its resources. Combining those issues seems to become the main manner of affecting regional and local tourism development.

Furthermore, tourism economy entities may try to find other opportunities for financing from RPO funds by referring to other areas of economy that may indirectly be connected to tourism (Panasiuk, 2014a, p. 279-293). Thus, tourism economy entities should search for possibilities to apply for funds dedicated to, for example: culture, sport and recreation, infrastructure (including transport), innovation, creative industry (art, media and entertainment, creative business services – architecture, publishing, advertisement), small and medium enterprises sector, development of rural areas, labour market, support for economically disadvantaged social groups. These actions may be combined with objectives in environmentally valuable areas.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis of availability of European Union funds for the development of regional tourism economy in two consecutive EU programme period, presents many ambiguities but first and foremost, a lack of continuation. Despite its large size, a significant inflow of EU funds to the tourism economy between 2007 and 2013 was not effective enough. The main beneficiary of funds for tourism project were local authority bodies, whereas the financed objectives often encompassed affecting the development of local (cultural, recreational and sport) infrastructure, what responded to the needs of citizens but not necessarily the needs of tourists. Actions related to tourism and natural environment had limited opportunities for support. Only three voivodeships had such provisions in their ROPs.

Tourism economy has been marginalised in the EU funding of the 2014-2020 perspective. The most significant scope of relations connected to accessibility to EU funds for tourism objectives includes priority axes and actions of given ROPs in the area of natural environment and, in particular, the protection of its heritage. All voivodeships have included actions for natural environment in their priority axes and within them there are actions related to tourism in environmentally valuable areas. Until the end of the EU financial perspective for 2014-2020, i.e. until 2020, one should expect implemen-

tation of tourism projects related to making environmentally valuable areas available to tourists and those related to brand tourism products. Just as in the previous perspective, these activities will be mostly carried out by local authority bodies.

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