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RURAL TOURISM IN COMPETITIVENESS IMPROVEMENT OF SELECTED COMMUNES IN THE PODLASKIE PROVINCE

TURYSTYKA WIEJSKA W POPRAWIE KONKURENCYJNOŚCI WYBRANYCH GMIN WOJEWÓDZTWA PODLASKIEGO

Key words: rural tourism, competitiveness, Podlaskie province

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka wiejska, konkurencyjność, województwo podlaskie

Abstract. Competitiveness of local government units may be established based on various regional and local resources. Improvement of competitiveness is also possible when based on specified forms of activity. A tourism activity, which may be, and frequently is, an important factor for the improvement of communes' and regions' competitive positions, may be an example here. In the article, an attempt was made to point out to opportunities for the competitiveness of the selected communes of the Podlaskie province based on tourism activity to improve. In the respondents' opinion, it is an attractive development direction which may bring measurable benefits to the local communities.

Introduction

Due to the multi-functional development, the rural areas are becoming increasingly more competitive as places of work and residence. Its competitiveness is to a large degree affected by location rent. In case of the borderland area, which is an area of our interest, the local location factors related to location rent with different kinds of economic activity may have an inhibitory or stimulating impact. A peripheral location disqualifies the area in terms of development of many forms of economic activity, including services and production. What is the situation like in case of tourism? With recreational trips, in particular long-term trips of minimum 5 days, the distance between the place of residence and the place of tourism reception is of secondary importance. However, it is of particular importance in case of peripheral areas. Poor technical infrastructure that inhibits development of most of the kinds of economic activity may be an important asset for the development of alternative forms of tourism, including rural tourism.

While observing the changes occurring in Poland and worldwide, it can be noticed that residents' activity within a selected form of economic activity, contributes to the promotion, recognition and improvement of competitiveness of a given location as a result. Forms of activity raising competitiveness of cities and regions also cover tourism. Not only due to tourists alone, but also to the media broadcast realised for the purpose of tourism, are we able to get to know the previously unknown regions. On account of tourism, many regional and local products (including food products) have also gained recognition by a large group of consumers and have paved the way to the chain store shelves.

The aim of this study is to obtain an answer whether rural tourism may affect the improvement in competitiveness of communes, in particular those located in peripheral areas? In order to realise this aim, a short characteristics of selected communes of the Podlaskie province located along the eastern borderline with Poland has been carried out as well as results of empirical study carried out in 2006 among 246 residents of the communes of study have been presented.

Characteristics of the area of study

The Podlaskie province is dominated by the agricultural and forestry activity. The communes of study can be concerned of as typical for this region. They are characterised by a low density of population, which, except for the Szypliszki commune, is lower than the average for particular provinces (Tab. 1). The share of farm land in particular communes is diverse, with the highest in the Szypliszki commune, and the lowest in the Płaska commune. A great diversity can also be observed with reference to forests, arable lands, grasslands and pastures (Tab. 1). Share of population of the productive age in the communes of study is lower than the country's average, which amounted 68.5% in 2008 [Regional Data...2009]. In the communes analysed, the index oscillated between 50% in the Szypliszki commune up to 60.6% in the Dubicze Cerkiewne commune.

Table 1. Area and population in the communes of study in 2008
Tabela 1. Powierzchnia oraz zaludnienie w badanych gminach w 2008 r.

Communes/ Gminy	Population [thous.]/ Zaludnie- nie [tys.]	Population 1 km ² / Zaludnie- nie na 1 km ²	Area in km ² / Powierzch- nia [km ²]	Share in the total area [%]/ Udział w powierzchni ogółem [%]			
				farm lands/ użytków rolnych	arable lands/ gruntów ornych	grassland and pastures/ trwałych użytków zielonych	forests/ lasów
Podlaskie province/ Woj. podkarpackie	1191.47	59	20 187	61.3	39.1	19.2	30.1
Dubicze Cerkiewne	1.81	12	151	44.7	27.6	17.0	51.0
Giby	2.95	9	323	16.8	12.6	4.1	76.9
Krynki	3.27	20	166	52.7	39.0	12.5	40.3
Mielnik	2.61	13	196	47.0	31.0	7.8	63.0
Płaska	2.55	7	372	12.0	6.0	4.0	84.5
Szypliszki	3.67	24	156	74.0	45.8	27.9	13.5

Source: own elaboration based on Area and Population ...2008, Regional Data ..., Demographic Yearbook 2009
 Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie Area and Population...2008, Regional Data...2009, Demographic Yearbook 2009

The agricultural sector is the main place of work and source of income for the majority of residents of the communes of study. Within the area of the communes, there are also entities related to outside-agricultural activity operating, with their number growing from one year to another. The greatest nominal number of economic entities is operating in the Płaska commune, while the lowest in the Mielnik commune (Tab. 2). As a one thousand equivalent, the Płaska and Dubicze Cerkiewne communes fare best, while the Szypliszki commune fares worst. In all the communes, the economic activity is dominated by the private sector.

The state of the development of the tourism economy in particular communes is difficult to evaluate¹. In the Polish Classification of Activity (PKD 2007), as amended in 2007 and in force since 1 January 2008, tourism activity in terms of providing accommodation and gastronomy services is included in Section I "Activity related to accommodation and gastronomy services"².

With regard to the number of entities registered in Section "I" PKD, the Płaska commune takes the highest position (Tab. 2). In this commune, the share of the entities in the hotel and gastronomy sector is the highest among all the economic entities.

The lowest number and simultaneously the lowest share of the economic entities in Section "I" PKD operates in the Dubicze Cerkiewne commune. It also should be remarked that the entities in the section belong to the private sector (except for one in the Dubicze Cerkiewne commune).

A poor development of industry in the area of study had an impact on the quality of natural environment. All the forms of environmental protection can be found here, i.e.: national parks (including the Białowiecki National Park), landscape parks (e.g. the Podlaski Przełom Bugu Landscape Park), lago, nature monuments. The communes of analysis are located within the area of the Green Lungs of Poland. Part of the area belongs to the European Ecological „Natura 2000” Network.

Turbulent history, changes of borders and migrations have affected the uniqueness of cultural qualities of the area of study. The signs are historic buildings of secular and sacred architecture (of different religions), national costumes, rites and customs³.

The position of tourism in strategies of local development of the communes of study is worth of interest. All the communes of study hold documentation of this kind. In the document developed for the Dubicze Cerkiewne commune, tourism was given the greatest attention. Regardless of the strategy of local development for this commune, "Tourism Development Strategy for the years

¹ At the country level, such evaluations are conducted by a team at the Institute of Tourism in Warsaw, within the Satellite Account methodology.

² Travel agencies are classified in Section "N" "Administrative and support service activities". In none of the communes of study did a travel agency operate, therefore the section has been omitted.

³ The tourism qualities of the area of study may widely be discussed. However, this is easily accessible information included in tourist guides by respected publishers and on numerous websites; therefore they have merely been mentioned.

Table 2. Economic entities* registered in the National Official Register of Economic Entities (REGON) within the area of the communes of study in 2008 in figures

Tabela 2. Przedsiębiorstwa zarejestrowane w systemie REGON w badanych gminach w 2008 r.*

Communes/ Gminy	Number of economic entities/ Liczba przedsiębiorstw		Number of economic entities as per 1 thousand of residents/ Liczba przedsiębiorstw na tysiąc mieszkańców	The number of tourism entities registered in Section "I" PKD/Liczba przedsiębiorstw turystycznych zarejestrowanych w Sekcji i PKD		
	total/ ogółem	including private sector/ włączając sektor prywatny		total/ ogółem	% of the total number of economic entities/ % ogólnej liczby przedsiębiorstw	including private sector/ w tym sektor prywatny
Podlaskie province/Woj. podlaskie						
Dubicze Cerkiewne	178	169	98.3	2	1.1	1
Giby	203	192	68.8	15	7.4	15
Krynki	189	178	57.8	4	2.1	4
Mielnik	148	138	56.7	3	2.0	3
Plaska	272	261	106.7	20	7.4	20
Szypłiszki	171	157	46.6	6	3.5	6

* excluding persons running individual farms/wylęczając osoby mające gospodarstwa rolne

Source: own study based on Regional Bank ...2009

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie Regionalny Bank...2009

2005-2015” was elaborated by the employees of the Institute of Tourism. In the remaining provinces, except for the Rokitno commune, the development of tourism is mentioned as one of priority aims as well as an assignment to realise social and economic objectives. Merely in the “Development Strategy of the Rokitno commune” was tourism omitted.

Tourism as an activity stimulating development of rural areas, including those in the eastern borderland of Poland, and thus raising its competitiveness, found its place in government programmes and strategic documentation, including: “The Rural Development Programme for 2007-2013” (Axis 3 “Improvement of the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural economy”), “Innovative Economy Operational Programme” (mainly Measure 3.3. “Creating a system facilitating investment in SMEs” and 4.4 „New investment projects of high innovative potential”), “Tourism Development Directions to 201” as well as Operational Programme “Development of Eastern Poland”. In case of the latter, support for tourism is possible within Priority Axis 5 “Sustainable development of tourism potential based on natural conditions”. Tourism has also found its place in the Regional Operational Programmes.

The opportunity for the improvement of the borderland regions competitiveness is also pointed to in the documentation specifying the scope of cooperation within euroregions. Along the eastern border of Poland, within the Podlaskie province, there are two euroregions located, i.e. The Niemen Euroregion (established in 1997) and the youngest Puszcza Białowieska Euroregion (established in 2002). The cross-border cooperation in the euroregions creates the opportunity take advantage of the EU assistance funds, appointed for member states and their direct neighbour states. The borderland of our interest is covered with the assistance within the „Neighbourhood Programme Poland-Belarus-Ukraine (INTERREG IIIA)”. The role of tourism in the improvement of competitiveness was emphasised in one of the two priority areas „Increasing competitiveness of the border area through the modernisation and development of the cross-border infrastructure” in Measure 1.3. “Development of Business-related Infrastructure and Tourism”.

Competitiveness in local government units in reference literature

The term “competitiveness” is not unequivocally defined. The scope of the definitions to a large extent depends on the level of the competitiveness analysis. The most frequent are as follows:

- micro (micro competitiveness) – the level of an enterprise or a product,
- mezo (mezo competitiveness) – level, industry, branch of production, region,
- macro (macro competitiveness) – the level of a country e.g. with reference to international exchange.

The above mentioned levels are interrelated. The competitiveness of local government units to a large extent depend on the competitiveness of the enterprises operating therein. Competitiveness can be evaluated by both static and dynamic analysis. "In a dynamic sense, relating to a longer time period, it refers to the analysis of factors determining a long-term capacity to compete. In a static sense, it refers to the evaluation of the capacity at a given time" [Strzelecki 2008].

An assumption may be adopted that the area of study is an equivalent of a tourism destination. "Competitiveness of a tourism destination is a multidimensional term and is both related to the competitiveness of the companies of the tourism sector and the destination's attractiveness to tourists, competitiveness of the economic, social and cultural environment" [Analysis of Poland's...2003]. In literature, there are numerous definitions of competitiveness of a tourism destination, i.a.:

- "capacity of a destination to manufacture and integrate the value added with a simultaneous maintenance of resources and retaining market position" [Hassan 2000],
- permanent capacity to compete and raise profits on tourism, with the profits applying to the whole social and economic system [Crouch et al. 1999].

The area of study is analysed on the basis of communes. The competitiveness of communes is also a collection of qualities (also attributed to regions) specified as a capacity to [Chądzyński et al. 2000]:

- generate a high level of employment,
- increase the level of work efficiency,
- sustainable increase in life standard of the local community,
- achieve success in economic competition by economic entities operating in local environment,
- adapt to the changing environment,
- generate and use the strategic resources of the local environment,
- be innovative – only innovative communes can efficiently compete.

In case of tourism competitiveness, the following claim on regions "to build competitiveness based on differences and not similarities" is gaining particular importance [Zielińska-Głębocka 2008]. In order to improve competitiveness, individual potential of the region, in this case the tourism potential, should be taken advantage of. Tourism potential encompasses anything what contributes to its attractiveness. Observing the tourism market allows to claim that not only tourism qualities make a given area attractive in terms of tourism. A specific tourism highlight attracting tourists may be sports, cultural, religious events, sports infrastructure facilities (e.g. aqua parks), craft workshops, market places, etc. The United Kingdom may serve as an example, with already around 800 tourism attractions in 1960, 2300 in 1983, and over 6100 at present [Pytko 2010]. Over the period, the number of historic buildings or nature monuments has not increased. In Poland, such reference registers are unfortunately not kept. However, given the fact that mines and steelworks have become tourism attractions as well as the fact that all kinds of fruit and vegetables have their own „holidays" (e.g. National Strawberry Day in Korycin, Potato Day in Mońki), it can be assumed that the number of tourism attractions in Poland is also increasing.

According to Zielińska-Głębocka [2008], in poorly developed regions mostly investment of a lower technology level takes place. This applies to tourism (except for business tourism), to be willingly adapted in areas of a poor level of economic development.

Tourism in improvement of competitiveness improvement of communes in respondents' opinion

The survey sample consists of 246 residents of 6 communes located in the eastern peripheral area of the Podlaskie province. In the sample, there was a majority of women, making up 60.2% of the respondents. The average age of the persons surveyed amounted to 42.3 years. The majority consisted of persons with secondary education (49.2%) and further with basic vocational education (22%), higher education (8.9%), primary education (18.4%) i incomplete primary education (1.6%). Only one out of four respondents declared running a farm.

The improvement of competitiveness of the local governments through tourism can mainly be observed by positive effects on account of development of this form of activity. Rural tourism development brings economic and non-economic benefits to accommodation providers and local communities. These are mainly budget takings on account of taxes and local charges, drop in unemployment, the commune's promotion, creating an attitude of entrepreneurship and tolerance towards people of different cultures and value systems. Tourism may also cause unfavourable effects, including inflation, environmental pollution, and excessive commercialisation of the local culture. While positive effects of tourism development raise the competitiveness of a given area, the negative ones decrease it.

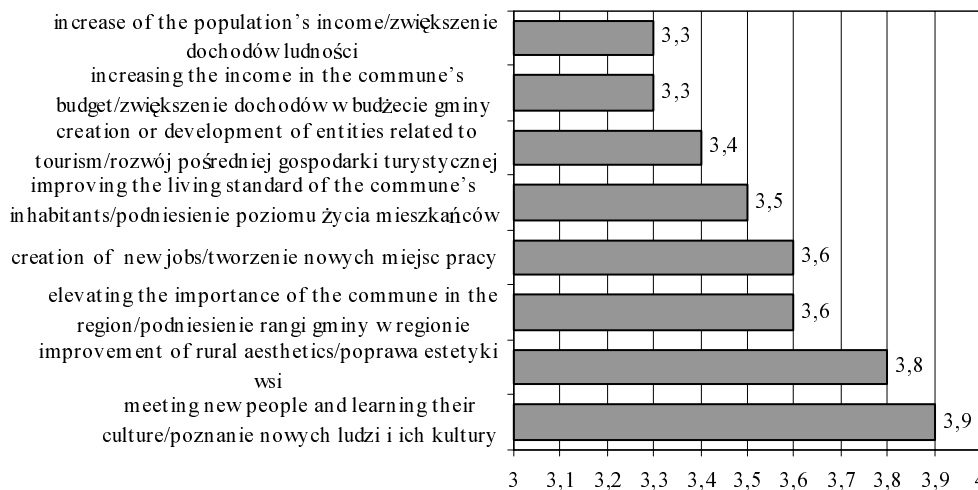


Figure 1. Benefits of tourism development in the opinion of respondents not involved in tourism activity
Rysunek 1. Korzyści z rozwoju turystyki w opinii badanych niezaangażowanych w działalność turystyczną
 Evaluation scale: 1-5, with: 5 – highest, 1 – lowest/skala oceny: 1-5, gdzie: 5 – najwyższa wartość, 1 – najniższa wartość
 Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

According to the persons surveyed, the most noticeable effect of tourism development was meeting new people and their culture (Fig. 1). Drop in tourism competitiveness in the development of local government units may be a result of unfavourable occurrences taking place due to tourism. Merely one-third (36.2%) of the respondents noticed negative impact by tourism, i.e.:

- natural environment pollution by increasing the amount of waste and exhaust fumes (pointed to by 25.6% of the residents surveyed),
- adopting improper behaviour models and values by the local community (mainly young people) – (13.8%),
- increase in prices (6.9%).

Individuals also mentioned: increased car traffic, causing noise and leading to an increased number of collisions and accidents, alcohol and drug usage, smuggling, illegal migrations and various forms of crime.

The respondents placed their hopes in the development of tourism. According to them, the commune's development, thus the competitiveness improvement, is related with the development of tourism activity (Fig. 2). The commune's development direction differed in particular units. In the Płaska and Szypliszki communes, the option – a tourism commune with a complex sports and recreation facility and a well-developed infrastructure – was particularly focussed on. In the remaining communes, the option – a tourism commune with its tradition remained (Fig. 3) – prevailed. The competitiveness improvement based on development of industry and trade was mostly pointed to by the residents of the Dubicze Cerkiewne commune. The most conservative attitude was presented by the respondents of the Krynki commune.

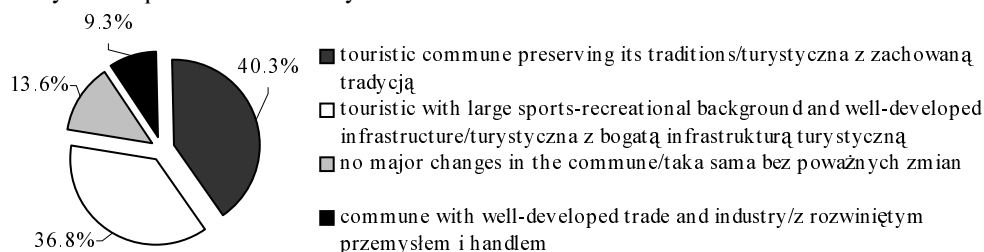


Figure 2. The commune's development direction expected by its residents (% of respondents)*
Rysunek 2. Kierunki rozwoju gmin oczekiwane przez ich mieszkańców (% badanych)

* Respondents were given more options to choose/Respondenci mieli możliwość wyboru więcej niż 1 odpowiedzi
 Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

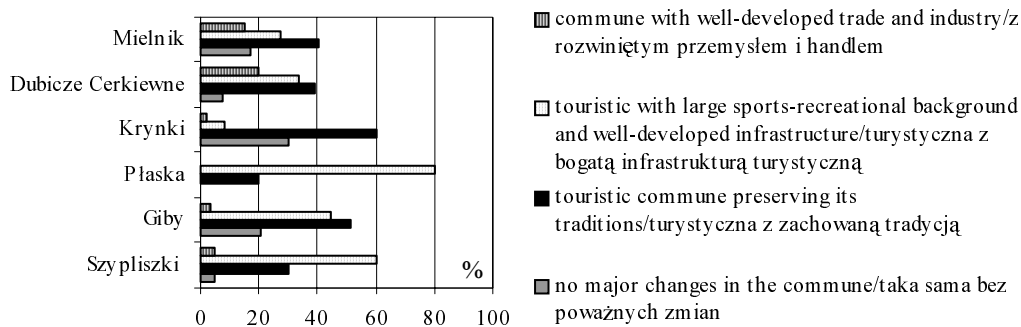


Figure 3. The commune's development direction expected by residents with respect to particular local government units (% of respondents)

Rysunek 3. Kierunki rozwoju gmin w opinii ich mieszkańców w odniesieniu do konkretnych jednostek samorządowych (% respondentów)

Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

Conclusions

The areas of the eastern borderland of Poland, including those covered by the study, hold a weaker competitiveness position. It mainly results from their peripheral location and poor technical infrastructure. This constitutes an essential obstacle which disqualifies this area as a place of investment allocation. The situation looks slightly different in case of tourism. While seeking opportunities to meet tourism needs (mainly in terms of holidays and excursions), tourists are capable of covering considerable distances. The competitiveness of the area of study for tourism development appears to be higher than for the development of other forms of economic activity. However, there is a powerful and reciprocal correlation between competitiveness and tourism development. Popularity of a given place with tourists, followed by its promotion and intensive tourism penetration affect local development, both in economic and social terms. The number of working places is increasing, the local budget takings are growing and the standard of residents' lives is improving. Therefore, the competitiveness of a given place undergoes improvement. Tourism may become a key development direction and a factor for competitiveness improvement of areas of unfavourable conditions for development of non-agricultural activity, including peripheral areas.

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Streszczenie

Konkurencyjność jednostek terytorialnych może być budowana w oparciu o różnorodne zasoby regionalne i lokalne. Poprawa konkurencyjności jest również możliwa w oparciu o określone formy działalności. Przykładem jest działalność turystyczna, która może być i często jest ważnym czynnikiem poprawy pozycji konkurencyjnej gmin i regionów. W artykule podjęto próbę wskazania możliwości poprawy konkurencyjności wybranych gmin województwa podlaskiego w oparciu o działalność turystyczną. W opinii respondentów jest to atrakcyjny kierunek rozwoju, który może przynieść wymierne korzyści społecznościom lokalnym

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