

**POSSIBILITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTY OF MRĄGOWO
(POLAND)**

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Key words: sustainable tourism, lakeland regions, county of Mrągowo, rural areas.

A b s t r a c t

Tourist activities consistent with sustainable development are an important component of the development strategies of many communes and counties in lakeland regions, including the county of Mrągowo in the Masurian Lake District. In the county under study, the abundance of lakes (over 12% of its area) and forests (constituting 30% of its area) and expanded recreation infrastructure (third place in the province of Warmia-Mazury) create excellent conditions for many forms of tourist activities as well as solid foundations for the development of sustainable tourism. National and international events are organized in the county of Mrągowo and the majority of accommodation providers are available all year round. This county offers numerous attractions of the cultural heritage. Promotions include events promoting regional cuisine. Natural and cultural resources and expanded infrastructure serve as the basis for development of sustainable tourism in the county of Mrągowo.

**MOŻLIWOŚCI ROZWOJU TURYSTYKI ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ W POWIECIE
MRĄGOWSKIM (POLSKA)**

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Abstrakt

Działalność turystyczna zgodna z zasadą zrównoważonego rozwoju jest ważnym elementem strategii rozwoju wielu gmin i powiatów pasa pojezierzy, także powiatu mragowskiego na Pojezierzu Mazurskim. W powiecie mragowskim bogactwo jezior (ponad 12% jego powierzchni), lesistość na poziomie 30% oraz rozbudowana infrastruktura wypoczynkowa (3 miejsc w województwie warmińsko-mazurskim) stanowią znakomite warunki do uprawiania wielu form turystyki, jak również mocne podwaliny do rozwoju turystyki zrównoważonej. W powiecie mragowskim odbywają się cykliczne imprezy o zasięgu krajowym i międzynarodowym, a większość bazy noclegowej stanowią obiekty całoroczne. Znajduje się tu wiele atrakcji związanych z dziedzictwem kulturowym. Organizowane są imprezy promujące dziedzictwo kulinarne. Zarówno istniejące zasoby naturalne, jak i kulturowe oraz rozbudowana infrastruktura stanowią przesłankę do rozwoju turystyki zrównoważonej w powiecie mragowskim.

Introduction

The various approaches to interpret the phenomenon of tourism, its interdisciplinary character and multi-faceted nature in social, industrial, cultural and environmental spheres make it difficult to formulate a single, universal and commonly-accepted definition of tourism. Tourism is simultaneously a psychological, social, cultural, spatial and economic phenomenon. The multi-faceted nature of tourism necessitates an adequate tourist policy, which translates into creating conditions that favor the development of the tourist sector. Within the framework of tourist policies, the following components may be preferred (*Kompendium wiedzy...* 2009):

- types of communities that participate in tourism in a preferential way (e.g. youth, pensioners);
- selected types of tourist flow (e.g. ecotourism, educational tourism);
- regions, counties and cities for which the growth of tourism creates the potential for industrial development.

All human activities are seated in the natural environment and therefore have an impact on its current and future status. Article 5 of The Constitution of The Republic of Poland states that “the Republic of Poland (...) provides the protection of the environment with the principle of sustainable development”. It means that all management procedures should be conducted to secure the environment in an optimal condition for future generations. Among the methods of putting ecological policies into action, the priority is to implement so-called “good management practices” and environmental management systems which combine industrial effects with ecological results (HAKUĆ-BŁAŻOWSKA and TURKOWSKI 2011). The criteria for sustainable development should be taken into consideration in all strategic documents of industry sectors (*Polityka ekologiczna...* 2007) including the strategies of tourism development. In tourism, the idea of sustainable development is reflected in

the notion of “sustainable tourism” that defines environment-friendly tourist activities and refers to all areas, rural and urban, and all types of tourism after their “ecological transformation” (ZARĘBA 2000). While this notion is widely used in the literature, it is difficult to precisely determine and define sustainable tourism. Despite numerous studies undertaken by many researchers (e.g. BUTLER 1999, SWARBROOKE 1999, HARDY 2002, RITCHIE and CROUCH 2003, EDGELL 2006, WEAVER 2006, PAWLIKOWSKA-PIECHOTKA 2009; GÖSSLING et. al. 2009, *Turystyka zrównowazona*. 2010), the term “sustainable tourism” has not been yet described with one comprehensive and commonly accepted definition. In 1993, the World Tourism Organization (*Sustainable tourism...* 1993) defined sustainable tourism as an activity that fulfills the needs of modern tourists and receptive regions simultaneously protecting and supporting opportunities for future generations. However, according to the definition presented by the European Commission, sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that is cost-efficient economically and socially and does not harm the environment or local culture. It includes industrial and financial success, care for the environment together along with its protection and development and responsible management of society and cultural values – these three elements being correlative (*Communication...* 2003).

The concept of sustainability has been extended and supplemented with the integration of tourist flow into local communities and social and industrial activities. The aim of this concept is to integrate tourist activities with the protection of the environment as well as to create new attitudes and behaviors among tourists and the organizers of tourist flow. The following rules should be implemented (*Kompendium wiedzy...* 2009):

- development of tourism should be adapted to the type and quality of natural resources and should not contribute to their degradation,
- local communities should participate in all undertakings related to tourism that are conducted in a given region,
- the tourist offer should be based on local resources, both human and material; small facilities adapted to the surrounding area should be constructed,
- development of tourism should be integrated with local industrial development and should bring ethical, social and economic benefits to local communities.

Lakeland regions are characterized by varied landscape with numerous postglacial lakes as well as diverse types of postglacial formations. The specific character and the need to protect and preserve precious natural values which shape the tourist attractiveness of these areas justify the development of sustainable tourism. The main concepts of sustainable tourism development are aimed at ensuring its economic effectiveness by means of protection and

rational use of environmental resources, both natural and cultural, with simultaneous improvement of the quality of life of local communities. It is connected with the assumptions of sustainable development of rural areas in accordance with The Common Agricultural Policy outlined in “The Programme for Development of Rural Regions 2007–2013” (HAKUĆ-BŁAŻOWSKA et al. 2012). Tourist activities consistent with sustainable development are an important component of the development strategies of many communes and counties in lakeland regions, including the county of Mrągowo in the Masurian Lake District. This paper focuses on an analysis of the developmental potential in one of the counties in The Masurian Lake District, i.e. the county of Mrągowo and associated rural communes.

Methods

This paper reviews the literature on the concept of sustainable tourism in Poland, including rural regions, and observation of indices of sustainable development of tourism on a selected area. The statistical data from the publications discussing the examined issues in the county of Mrągowo and strategic documents prepared for selected area were also analyzed. The review of indices used to evaluate the sustainable development of tourism (WEAVER and OPPERMAN 2000, *Indicators...* 2004, The VISIT 2004, GÖSSLING et. al 2009, JANIŃKOWSKI 2010, *Turystyka zrównoważona*. 2010) has revealed a lack of a widely-accepted method of monitoring sustainable tourism. The studies were conducted on a local level and therefore only indices that applied to local communities were selected from a variety of parameters of sustainable tourism.

The aim of the paper was to present the background of development of sustainable tourism in the county of Mrągowo and implement a method of observing the indices of sustainable tourism by means of field studies as well as a method of critical analysis of the indices of sustainable development available in strategic documents. The Strategy for Social and Industrial Development of the County of Mrągowo in 2007–2020, The Strategy for Development of Tourism in the Province of Warmia and Mazury, The Investment Plan for the County of Mrągowo in 2008–2013 (*Wieloletni Plan...* 2008), Tourism in Warmia and Mazury in 2009 (*Strategia rozwoju...* 2008) and numerous websites, e.g. www.powiat.mragowo.pl, it.mragowo.pl, are the basic source of information on the tourist potential of the county. The publications “Warmia and Mazury 2020. Which direction towards development?” and *The Regional Operational Programme Warmia and Mazury (Regionalny Program...* 2007) are a valuable source of information on tourism in the county of Mrągowo.

The results of detailed analysis of the indices of sustainable tourism development, including the surveys of local communities in the individual communes of the county of Mrągowo, will be presented in separate publications.

Tourist potential in the county of Mrągowo

The county of Mrągowo is situated in north-eastern Poland in the central region of the province of Warmia and Mazury. The territory of the county constitutes app. 5% of the area of the province. The county neighbors five counties: Olsztyn, Kętrzyn, Giżycko, Pisz and Szczytno. The county of Mrągowo comprises five districts:

- the district of Mrągowo Town,
- the district of Mrągowo,
- the town and district of Mikołajki,
- the district of Piecki,
- the district of Sorkwity.

It terms of physiographic location, the county of Mrągowo is situated within two regions:

- the western part to the line of Lipowo – Kosewo – Baranowo – Cudnochy is the area of The Lakeland of Mrągowo,
- the eastern part is The Great Masurian Lake District (a vast lowland within the lakelands of north-eastern Poland).

The geography and lithology of both areas are typical of post-glacial regions and the unique feature of their landscape is the abundance of large, natural water reservoirs, which constitute app. 14% of the area of the county (in the county of Mikołajki this index amounts to app. 23%).

Beaded lakes are most common (Tały-Ryńskie, Mikołajskie, Wągiel, Juno, Gielądzkie, Mokre, etc.) along with thaw lakes as well as lakes with complex genetics (e.g. Lake Śniardwy) are far less numerous.

The second characteristic component of the landscape of this region, apart from lakes, are vast well-stocked forest complexes. In the county of Mrągowo, forests constitutes app. 31% of its area and are represented mainly by the Piska Primeval Forest. The forests and water reservoirs cover app. 45% of the area of the county, i.e. app. 480 km². The farmland and urban fields (towns, villages, and communication) constitute the rest of its territory. Numerous floral and faunal reserves have been established in the county of Mrągowo. Many plant species originating from diverse climatic environments are found in the county; these are often very rare species in Poland and Europe and their protection is maintained in numerous reserves, such as “Jezioro Lisiunie”,

“Krutynia Dolna”, “Strzałowo”, “Zakręt”, “Królewska sosna” with died-back pine and common oak called “The oak of Karol Małek”, “Krutynia”, “Pierwos” and “Gązwa”. The Piska Primeval Forest is the main sanctuary for animals and the lakes are inhabited by many precious fish species such as eel, pike, tench, pike perch, perch, bream and roach. European white-fish and Baltic whitefish are still found in the purest and deepest reservoirs (Piłakno and Mokre Lakes). The abundance of fish makes the region attractive for anglers. The faunal and floral-faunal reserves have been created to protect the most precious animal species; the most important reserves include the “Jezioro Łukajno” Reserve, entered on the list of UNESCO World Natural Heritage Sites and covered by the international RAMSAR Convention which protects wetlands and swamps; the “Czapliniec” Reserve and the “Czaplisko – Ławny Lasek” Reserve. In 1977, The Masurian Landscape Park was established in order to protect the natural values and landscape features of the southern part of the Great Masurian Lake District, The Lakeland of Mrągowo and the lower course of the Krutynia River. The area of the park covers app. 53,700 ha and, together with the protection zone, it amounts to app. 72,300 ha, of which about 50% (i.e. app. 26,800 ha without the protection zone) is situated within the county. The park hosts numerous natural monuments, such as the boulder located near “Gązwa” Reserve or “Pomnik Wolności Ojczyzny”. The protected landscape zones further contribute to the protection of nature and landscape. The Protected Landscape Zone of the Legińsko-Mrągowskie Lakes and three natural landscape complexes (“Rzeka Brabant i Jezioro Białe”, “Jeziora Sorkwické” and “Zydrój”) were established in the area of the county of Mrągowo.

The historical monuments representing different architectural styles show the attractiveness of the area of Mrągowo. Tourists interested in sightseeing may visit numerous historical building, for instance:

- architectural complexes, such as the manor and farm complex in Boże,
- castles, e.g. the ruins of Teutonic castle in Szestno,
- historical tenements and buildings in, for example, Mrągowo,
- Masurian cottages in, among others, Ruska Wieś, Warpuny, Choszczewo, Inulec and Piecki,
- palaces and manor houses such as Baranowo, Sorkwity and Szestno,
- technical monuments such as water mills in Babięty and Zielony Lasek or the smithy in Boże,
- Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox churches (e.g. the former synagogue in Mrągowo),
- cemeteries, eg. in Mrągowo, Szestno, Krzywe, Gizewa, and Żelwagi,
- monuments.

The museums, memorial chambers or galleries are also worth visiting. In the county of Mrągowo there are the remains of the heritage of Prussian tribes

such as gords (e.g. Boże, Kiersztanowo, Wyszembork, Sorkwity), kurgans (e.g. in Sorkwity, Warpuny, Stary Gieląd), embankments (e.g. Lemburk, Boże) and sacrificial stones (e.g. Devil Stone in Słowiczy Wąwóz).

During their stay, tourists may participate in cyclic or occasional cultural events, such as Masurian Night of Cabarets, The Festival of Borderland Culture, Mikołajki Days, Pieckowiada, The Festival of Shanties and other national, regional and local events. Some of these attractions are recognized as The Best Tourist Products or Services: Country Picnic and the Mrongoville Western Town, rafting in an old-masurian boat along the Krutynia River or the all-year sport center "Góra Czterech Wiatrów". The town of Mrągowo was honored with the certificate "Mrągowo: a town of festivals". The attractiveness of the region is further enhanced by events that promote the cultural heritage such as the Regional Festival of Pork, Beef, Lamb and Goat Meat Dishes, the Pork Knuckle Festival and The Baked Potato Festival.

The well-developed road infrastructure and potentially good train network are the advantages of the county of Mrągowo. Two major communication routes run across the territory of the county from west to east:

- national road No 16 (Grudziądz – Olsztyn – Mrągowo – Mikołajki – Ełk – Augustów),
- train network Olsztyn – Mrągowo – Mikołajki – Ełk.

In addition, there are numerous communication routes in a north-south arrangement with the following being the most important:

- road No 602/601 Mrągowo – Piecki – Szczytno – Pułtusk
- road No 591 Mrągowo – Kętrzyn,
- road No 610 Mrągowo – Piecki – Ruciane Nida,
- road No 600 Mrągowo – Rybno – Szczytno,
- road No 642 Mikołajki – Ryn,
- road No 608 Mrągowo – Ryn – Giżycko.

The sailing route of The Great Masurian Lakes (Węgorzewo – Pisz) whose central part runs across the territory of the county (the district of Mikołajki) plays an important role. However, the poor technical condition of roads which are not adapted to heavy traffic may create some transportation and communication problems.

The county of Mrągowo is the leader in the number of accommodation places in the province of Warmia and Mazury and outdistances Olsztyn, the capital of the region (*Turystyka... 2010, Regionalny Program... 2007, Strategia rozwoju... 2008, Strategia rozwoju turystyki... 2010*). It confirms the excellent potential for development of tourism and agritourism.

An analysis of tourist group accommodation facilities indicates that national and foreign tourists who visited Warmia and Mazury in 2009 most often chose lodgings situated in Mrągowo, Olsztyn, Giżycko and Ostróda.

The highest number of accommodation places was provided for tourists in the counties of Mrągowo, Giżycko, Ostóda and in Olsztyn (*Turystyka...* 2010).

The rural areas in the county provide mainly seasonal lodgings. The small percentage of year-round facilities in rural communes significantly limits the tourist offer and further contributes to a seasonal effect of tourist flow on industrial activities in some towns in the county. The tourist flow in the county centers around the district of Mikołajki (app. 68% of the total tourist flow), which is undoubtedly a tourist center on a regional and even national scale. Mrągowo has a special place (app. 23% of total tourist flow) since it is a starting point for sightseeing trips and it attracts tourists with its cultural and social events organized on a national and international scale. About 70% of visitors stay in the county from June to September with the peak of tourist flow in July and August (*Strategia rozwoju...* 2008).

The development of tourism is associated with business entities that provide accommodation places and short-term lodgings and run restaurants, bistros, canteens and catering services. As far as the number of gastronomic companies is concerned, the county of Mrągowo is fourth after Olsztyn, Elbląg and the county of Olsztyn. The territorial distribution of business entities categorized as hotels and restaurants reveals that the county of Mrągowo is overtaken only by the biggest cities of the region, i.e. Olsztyn and Elbląg (*Turystyka...* 2010).

The strategic supralocal documents (*Warmia i Mazury 2020...2010, Strategia rozwoju...* 2010) enumerate the county of Mrągowo, in particular its towns, as the developmental tourist centers on supra-regional scale. The territory of the county has been defined as an area with the best management practices and the highest attractiveness and concentration of the tourist industry.

Conclusion

The basic developmental potential of the county is associated with its geographical location and natural features. The location of the county on unique tourist and recreational areas, situated near big urban complexes, determines to a large extent the current and future directions of development and creates the possibility to support local industry with a tourism sector that has recently grown very dynamically. The abundance of lakes (over 12% of the area), 30% forestation and expanded recreational infrastructure (third place in the province of Warmia and Mazury) create excellent conditions for many types of tourism and a solid foundation for the development of sustainable tourism.

The most important tourist values that determine further development of tourism in the county include:

- location in the heart of the region which is one of the most attractive tourist locations in Europe (forests, lakes, Krutynia River, the sailing route along The Great Masurian Lakes, landscape, nature),
- the possibility to participate in different forms of tourism, including active and natural as well as the so-called conference tourism, based on the natural resources of the region,
- interesting architectural, cultural and historical monuments of the region,
- location in the region with multinational and diverse culture and turbulent history,
- relatively short distance from Warsaw (app. 3 hours by car),
- the existing tourist base, offering different standards and functions,
- convenient conditions for the development of “ecological” agriculture to supply demand which exceeds the local market.

The tourist potential of the county of Mrągowo involves many market sectors which, according to World Tourism Organization, will play an important role in tourism (BARTOSZEWICZ and ŁOPACIŃSKI 2007). They include:

- natural tourism,
- cultural tourism,
- tourism in rural areas,
- well-being tourism.

Tourism in lakeland regions, which mainly comprise rural areas, supports the development of non-agricultural ventures, the restructuring of agriculture and improvement of living conditions of local communities through generating additional income. The existing natural and cultural resources and expanded infrastructure promote the development of sustainable tourism in the county of Mrągowo.

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