

**TOURISM AND RECREATION
IN THE ŁĘCZYŃSKO-WŁODAWSKIE LAKE DISTRICT
(MIDDLE-EAST POLAND) SURVEY RESULTS**

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Key words: leisure, lakes, natural assets, tourist attractiveness.

Abstract

The Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District is one of the main tourist regions of Eastern Poland. The main form of tourism is here mass tourism, based on the use of lakes' shores. The article presents the results of surveys conducted on a group of 850 people rested on the most attractive lakes of area. The issues were mainly related to motives of arrival, ways of spending time and the assessment of tourist attractiveness of the area and the tourist infrastructure. The results indicate a high appreciation of the natural values of the area by tourists. Tourists perceived both positive and negative impacts of tourism development.

**TURYSTYKA I REKREACJA NA POJEZIERZU ŁĘCZYŃSKO-WŁODAWSKIM
(POLSKA ŚRODKOWOSCHODNIA) W ŚWIETLE BADAŃ ANKIETOWYCH**

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Słowa kluczowe: wypoczynek, jeziora, walory przyrodnicze, atrakcyjność turystyczna.

Abstrakt

Pojezierze Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie jest jednym z głównych regionów turystycznych Polski wschodniej. Dominującą formą turystyki jest tutaj turystyka masowa oparta na wykorzystaniu strefy brzegowej jezior. Przedstawiono wyniki badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych na grupie 850 osób wypoczywających nad najatrakcyjniejszymi jeziorami Pojezierza Łęczyńsko-Włodawskiego. Zagadnienia dotyczyły w głównej mierze motywów przyjazdu, sposobów spędzania czasu oraz oceny atrakcyjności turystycznej obszaru i elementów infrastruktury turystycznej. Wykazano wysoką ocenę walorów przyrodniczych badanego obszaru przez turystów, którzy jednocześnie wskazywali pozytywne i negatywne aspekty rozwoju turystyki na tym terenie.

Introduction

Lake districts, alongside coastal and mountain areas, belong to the most important areas for tourism. Natural bodies of water and their shores are a component of the natural environment that is commonly used for tourist purposes. In many parts of the world lakes are an essential element of tourism and recreation as both location for leisure activities, as well as an attraction in their own right (HALL, HÄRKÖNEN 2006). Tourism has great importance and economic impact for people and areas near lakes. Lake tourism is defined as a recreational activity (or activities) that involve travel away from one's place of residence and which have as their host or focus the water environment (MILLER 1990).

One of the most popular tourism destination in mid-eastern Poland is the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District (Ł-WLD). This geographical region, is situated in Lublin Province, in area where boundaries of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine meet (Figure 1). Because of its physical and geographical features, the Ł-WLD is part of Polesie, which belongs to eastern Europe (it also includes parts of Belarus and Ukraine). The Polish part of the region is called Western Polesie or Lublin Polesie (CHAŁUBIŃSKA and WILGAT 1954).

The Ł-WLD (covering approximately 1160 km²) is the only group of lakes in Poland situated beyond the reach of the last glaciation. Existing of the lakes is connected with chalk karst processes. Absolute elevations in the area of the Lake District are around 170 m above sea level and show little variation. There are 67 lakes covering more than 1 hectare and many other water reservoirs of natural and anthropogenic origin (WILGAT et al. 1991, CHMIELEWSKI 2001). The Lake District features mainly small lakes (the biggest one covers 284 ha), their shapes exhibiting little variation and often resembling a circle or oval. The lakes' depths vary, but shallow lakes predominate (only 3 lakes are deeper than 30 meters). An important asset of the Lake District is its high level of afforestation. The average afforestation rate for the communes concerned is 31.3% (with the national average of 28.5% and the Lublin Province average of 22.4%); in some communes, the afforestation rate exceeds 40%.

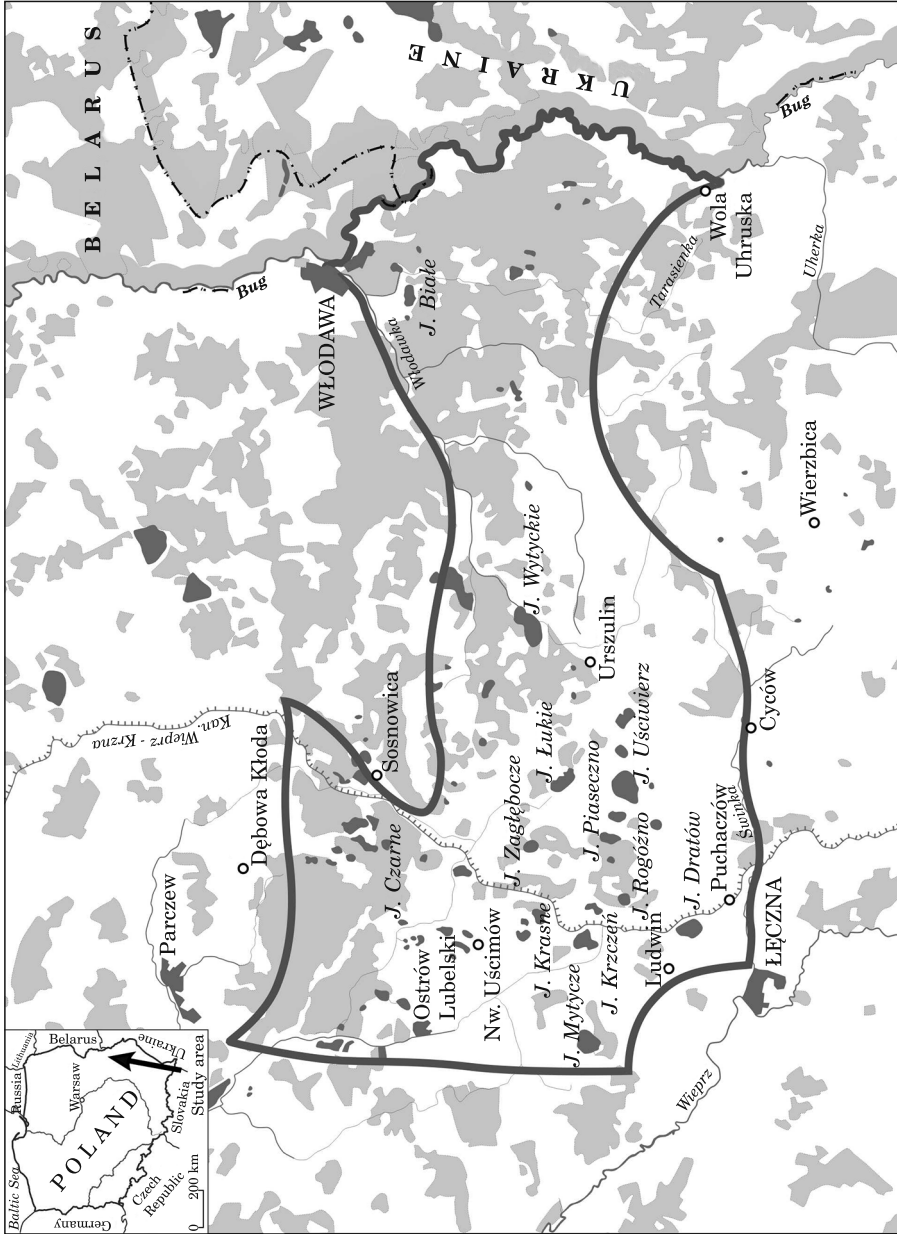


Fig. 1. Localisation of Leczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District

Despite numerous land improvement works connected with the construction of the Wieprz-Krzna Canal and starting the exploitation of hard coal deposits, the Ł-WLD has retained its natural, landscape and scientific attractiveness. The most valuable fragments are protected within the Poleski National Park which is the part of UNESCO Biosphere Reserve West Polesie and belongs to the NATURA 2000 project.

Poleski National Park was the first National Park in Poland to be established with the aim to protect peatbog and swamp areas. The Park encompasses a unique territory, which is a miniature of tundra at its extreme south-west European location. Poleski National Park is unique because of the presence of a large number of plants typical to the northern climatic zone as well as the Atlantic zone. One of the most interesting animals in the Park is the mud turtle – the Park's population of this animal is one of the largest in Europe. The Park protects the most precious parts of Polesie Lubelskie, including lakes and floodplains, as well as swamps and peatbogs, which survived in a relatively unaltered shape (*Polski Park Narodowy*. 2002).

Those mentioned above natural assets have determined the development of forms of touristic movement in this region. On the one hand, in area of Ł-WLD there are almost inaccessible lakes under various forms of environmental protection (eutrophic and hyper eutrophic lakes – often they are in the process of turning into a swampy area or a peatbog); on the other hand, there are lakes with sandy bottom and beaches (mesotrophic lakes, e.g. Białe Lake which has I class of water quality – “water for human consumption”). The latter environment has completely different use, typical for lakelands: all kinds of water activity, including diving and fishing.

The impact of tourism on lake environment is a function of the type of activity being engaged in, the number of people engaged and the nature of lake environment itself (HALL, HÄRKÖNEN 2006). Lakes represent resource-based tourist attractions, demanding high levels of management and coordination between users (COOPER 2006). One of the group of stakeholders are tourists and that was the reason for undertaking research on characteristics, preferences and expectations of the Ł-WLD tourists.

The main aim of article is to present the characteristics of tourism at Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District with special emphasis on the tourist attractiveness, and the tourists' perceptions of tourism development in the region.

Materials and Methods

Analysis of tourist movement in the Ł-WLD indicates that the most popular form of tourism is a leisure/recreational tourism, mostly on the lakes. The scale and intensity of the phenomenon is related to the attractiveness of the lakes and surrounding areas. Tourist movement in both one day and longer (weekend, 1–2 weeks) focuses primarily on the most attractive lakes and lakes with tourist infrastructure.

The tourist attractiveness of Ł-WLD is mainly influenced by the presence of lakes and the type of vegetation. Lakes considered as attractive for recreation, should be characterized by the good water accessibility and proper land use of the shore zone. An important form of land cover for tourism is forest, which has important recreational and aesthetic values and improves environmental conditions (bioclimate). Large part of ecotourism experience and the recreational landscapes depends on the maintenance of forest land, and forests are crucial pockets of biodiversity conservation. Forests are part of the countryside that visitors enjoy, sometimes are the purpose of visit and other times just the setting for recreational activities (FONT and TRIBE 2000).

Therefore into consideration were taken: lakes area, maximum depth, type of bottom, accessibility to water, type of surrounding environment, transport accessibility (Table 1).

Parameters of Łeczyńsko-Włodawskie lakes attractiveness rating

Table 1

Parameters	Scoring				
	0	1	2	3	4
Lakes area	–	up to 50 ha	50–100 ha	above 100 ha	–
Maximum depth	up to 5.0 m	5.1–10.0 m	10.1–20 m	20.1–30 m	above 30.1 m
Type of bottom	muddy	sandy	–	–	–
Transport accessibility	lack or week	medium	good	–	–
Accessibility to water	lack	medium	good	–	–
Type of surrounding environment	swamps, fields	meadows	forests	–	–

Scoring method was used – above parameters were divided into classes which were accordingly scored. Attractiveness ratings were made for 53 lakes (the study omitted lakes, which was not possible to determine all the parameters – e.g. depth). On the basis of the above criteria and total points achieved, analysed lakes was divided into three groups of tourist attractiveness:

- I – less attractive lakes (1–4 pts.) – 24 lakes,
- II – medium attractive lake (5–8 pts.) – 23 lakes
- III – very attractive lakes (9–13 pts.) – 6 lakes.

The most attractive – six classified in the third group – have been lakes: Bialskie, Rogóźno, Zagłębcze, Krasne, Piaseczno and Białe. These are large lakes, belonging to the deepest in the area with good transport accessibility. Around this lakes there are many objects of tourist infrastructure: holiday resorts, bungalows and summer houses.

In surroundings of four most attractive lakes (Białe, Zagłębcze, Bialskie, Piaseczno) a survey was carried out in the summer months in 2005–2006. The methodology used to gather information about tourism included structured interviews with tourists. Total number of 850 questionnaires were collected.

Results and Discussion

Surveyed tourists were strongly dominated by Poles. Only two persons were from abroad: one person (participant of the excursion) came from Lutsk (Ukraine) and one from Ireland (Polish woman living in Dublin). The other 848 respondents lived in Poland. Polish visitors came from 14 provinces with the exception of Lubuskie Province and Warmia-Masuria Province (Table 2, Figure 2). They represented 158 towns (including 67 – 42.4% – from the Lublin Province), located in 90 counties.

Table 2

Place of living of respondents by province

Province	Number of respondents	In %
Lublin	587	69.2
Mazovia	149	17.6
Podkarpacie	48	5.7
Małopolska	18	2.1
Silesia	16	1.9
Świętokrzyskie	7	0.8
Lower Silesia	6	0.7
Łódź	4	0.5
Podlasie	4	0.5
Pomerania	3	0.4
Opole	2	0.2
West Pomerania	2	0.2
Kujawy-Pomerania	1	0.1
Wielkopolska	1	0.1
Suma	848	100.0

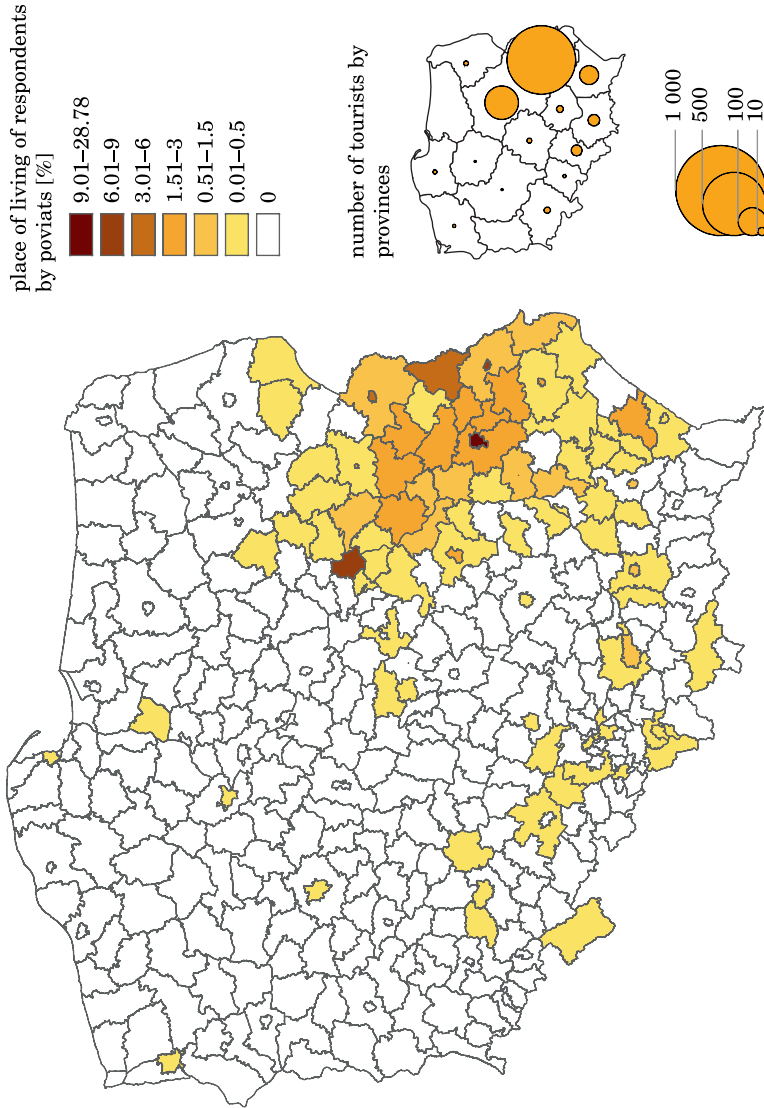


Fig. 2. Place of living of respondents rested on Lęczynsko-Włodawskie Lake District (survey results)

The largest group of tourists were residents of Lublin Province – 587 pers. (69.2%) and Mazovia Province – 149 pers. (17.6%). Then a fairly large share of tourists were from Podkarpacie Province – 48 (5.7%), Małopolska Province – 18 (2.1%) and Silesia Province – 16 (1.9%). Tourists from other provinces had a much smaller share – less than 1% (Table 2, Figure 2). Among cities largest tourist representations had: Lublin 242 persons (28.5%) and Chełm 68 (8.0%). When taking into account cities located outside the Lublin Province most tourists came from Warsaw (6.1%), Siedlce (2.7%) and Radom (2.4%) (all situated in Mazovia Province).

The vast majority of respondents (82.6%) rested once again on the Ł-WLD. This group was dominated by people who come here from few years (1–9) – 55.9%. From several years (10–19) come here 27.2% of respondents, and from over 20 years – 16.9%. In the surveyed group there were 13 persons (2.5% of all) who come on Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District from about 40 to 50 years.

The main motive of arrival, which was usually pointed out by respondents was the possibility of spending a holiday on the waterside – 87.4% of responses. Subsequently, the decision to arrive was determined by the attractiveness of the landscape (22.7%), proximity of residence (22.5%) and ecological values of region (forests) (19.9%) – Figure 3.

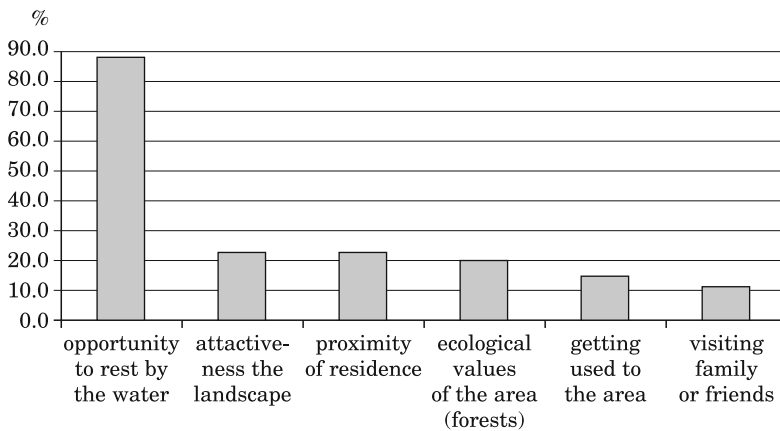


Fig. 3. Main motives of tourists arrival (survey results)

Surveyed tourists usually come on Ł-WLD in July (99.9% of responses) and August (66.8%). The least popular month is November, which indicated only 6 persons (Figure 4). People relaxing in analysed region usually come here once (40.4%) or few times (38.7%) in the year. A large group is the people coming

here frequently (20.9%). Analysis of length of stay indicates that are usually spending here weekends (43.3% of responses), 1–2 weeks (35.0% of responses) and one day (21.7%).

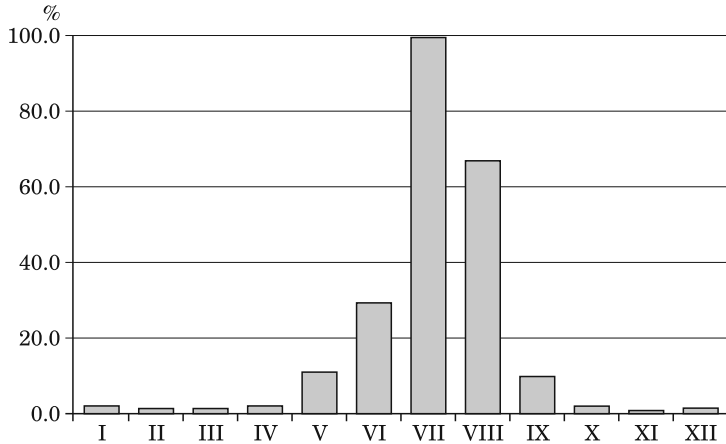


Fig. 4. Seasonality of tourist arrivals (survey results)

The largest group of people using the accommodation on the Ł-WLD are people staying at holiday resorts (39.7%). Almost every fifth surveyed person (18.6%) is staying in a summer house. A large group of people rents private rooms or agrotourism farms – 16.8%, and camping sites – 14.8% (Figure 5).

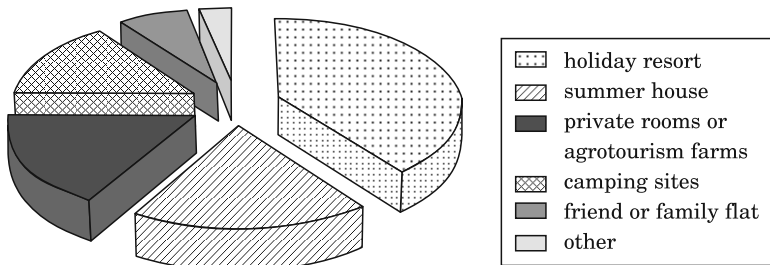


Fig. 5. Accommodation used by respondents (survey results)

Respondents were also asked about how they spend free time during staying at lakes. Approximately 95% of respondents indicated that they mainly rest on the water. About 25% said they spending time in places of entertainment, and walking around nearest surroundings. Nearly 19% of respondents in their spare time enjoys sports (especially cycling and water sports). Only about 7.5% of responses is sightseeing.

The vast majority of tourists (96.5%) estimated the Ł-WLD as an attractive area, in which 59.4% as “rather attractive” and 37.1% – “very attractive”. The smallest percentage of indications – 0.1%, pointed out that it is “unattractive” (Figure 6).

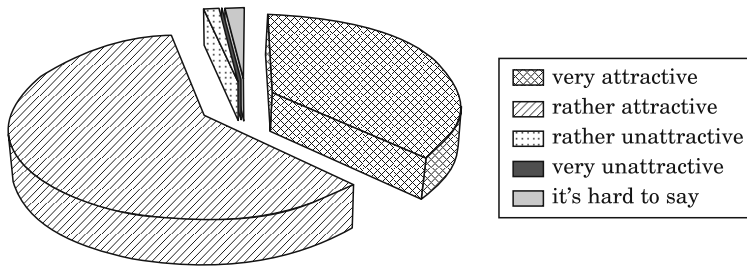


Fig. 6. Rating of tourist attractiveness of Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District by tourists (survey results)

According to the respondents the attractiveness of the analysed area is largely determined by the presence of lakes (96.3% of responses), forests (30.5%) and opportunity to practicing water sports (22.9%) (Figure 7).

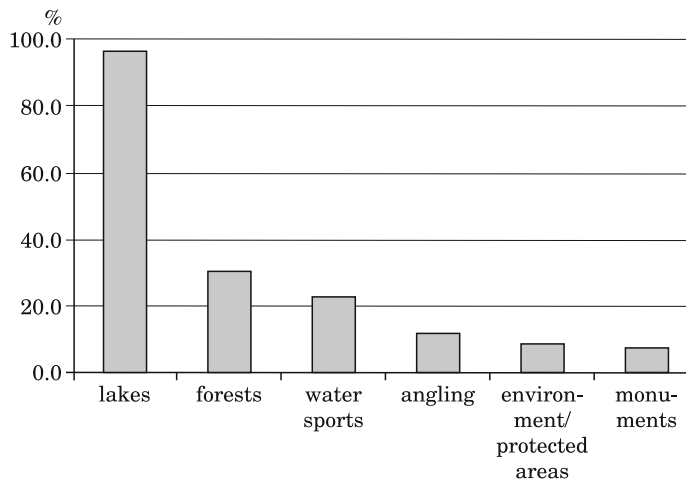


Fig. 7. Elements that determine tourist attractiveness of the region (survey results)

Surveyed tourists were also asked to assess, on a scale from 1 – very bad to 5 – very good, existing tourist infrastructure. Highest rated was catering facilities – 55.9% rated it “good” and 22.6% “very good”. The lowest ranked

element of tourist infrastructure transport accessibility – possibility to travel to and around the region. Over 15% of respondents rated it “bad” (11.5%) and “very bad” (3.8%) – Figure 8.

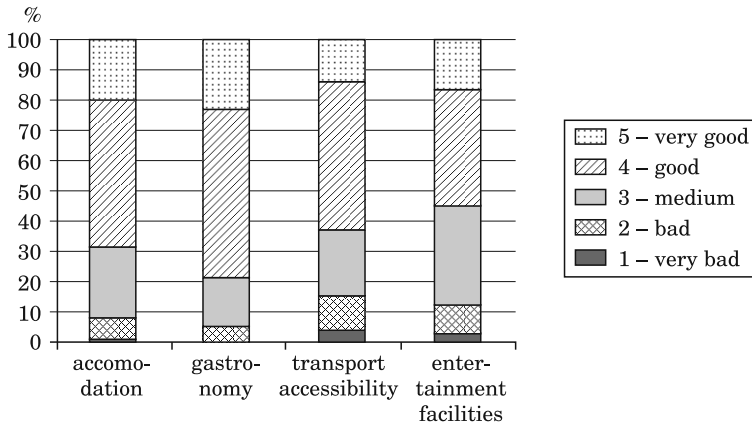


Fig. 8. Assessment of tourist infrastructure (survey results)

In the next question respondents were asked to identify the weaknesses of the tourist infrastructure of the area. The largest group of people pointed to the insufficient number of hiking trails and bicycle paths, and at too low standard of accommodation (respectively 36.9% and 33.7%). Respondents also negatively evaluated the existing transport connections (28.2%), and indicated the lack (or small number) of water equipment rental (22.1%).

Most of changes proposed to increase tourist attractiveness of area involved the expansion or improvement of existing sports and entertainment infrastructure (including sports fields, water slides, playgrounds, water equipment rental) (19.2%). A large group of respondents (15.8%) also indicated the need for greater attention to cleanliness (including setting rubbish bins near the beach). Moreover beaches and piers on the lakes of respondents should be fixed or created (15.0%). Many people also points out the need to raise the standard of existing accommodation (10.5%) and catering (6.7%). Including the elements of the sport and entertainment infrastructure a particular emphasis was on tourist trails (mostly cycling), or rather lack of them – 4.4% response. Among the less numerous, but important, responses, element of lack of promotion and information folders appeared.

Conclusions

In tourism development it is important to know opinions of people who are coming in “our” region. Their “likes” and “dislikes” can decide if they will come here again, and will take friends together. That’s why it’s valid to take into consideration their propositions of changes.

Analysis of tourist movement in the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District indicates that the most popular form of tourism is leisure/recreational tourism, mostly in the lakes. The scale and intensity of the phenomenon is related to the attractiveness of the lakes and surrounding areas, the main role is played by forests. Tourist traffic in both one day and longer (weekend, 1–2 weeks) focuses primarily on the most attractive and urbanized lakes (Białe, Zagłębocze, Bialskie, Piaseczno). A popular and highly developed form of recreation is fishing. Analysis of tourists indicated that the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District is a supraregional destination area – also for people coming from outside the Lublin Province.

But we should remember that lakes are significant tourism destinations in their own right and as such demand careful management and planning not only to retain their physical integrity, but also to ensure the quality of the experience of visitors (COOPER 2006). In the case of Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District tourist are delighted with natural values of the region, but they have quite numerous critical remarks on tourist infrastructure. And one of the major problems of tourism development in the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lake District is excessive concentration of tourist infrastructure objects in some areas. Surroundings of some lakes (e.g. Białe Lake, Bialskie Lake) are overloaded, which reduces the quality of recreation in their neighbourhood. Local authorities and entrepreneur should take it into account.

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