

Evaluation of Tourist Attractiveness of the Communes in Chełm County in the Context of the Development of Cross-Border Tourism

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Abstract

Tourism in the eastern, border areas of Poland is based primarily on natural values, which are supplemented by regional cultural heritage. For this reason, Chełm County stands a fair chance of making tourism one of the pillars of its development, especially in rural areas. The purpose of the article was to evaluate tourist attractiveness of the communes and one municipality of Chełm County using the method of synthetic measure and attempt to identify real and potential directions for tourism development with particular emphasis on cross-border tourism. The results of the evaluation of tourist attractiveness indicated that the creation of comprehensive packages of products based mostly on the values of the local environment can be an opportunity for increased tourism in the communes in Chełm County. However, insufficient tourist development, poor transport accessibility and low recognition of the area as a tourist destination can be limiting factors in the development of tourism in this county, so it is necessary to take measures connected with the development of infrastructure and promotion of the region.

Keywords: Chełm County, cross-border tourism, tourist attractiveness, synthetic measure

Introduction

In the era of metropolitan development and the search of their inhabitants for opportunities for recreation outside the city, new favourable conditions have arisen for the intensification of tourism development in the border areas of Eastern Poland. There are favourable conditions for tourism development as these are areas with a low degree of industrialization and urbanization. The high value of natural and cultural resources of the border areas can be one of the main factors of their local socio-economic development (Zawilińska 2010, 119). An example can be Chełm County, which is characterized by a low level of urbanization and rich resources of non-degraded and ecologically clean areas, providing a setting for recuperation of mental and physical strengths.

For many years border areas have been treated as unattractive locales, struggling with many social and economic problems (Leśniak 1985). Therefore, opportunities and chances of the regions located near the state border are more visible (Rykiel 1991). Malkowski (2007, 147) notes that communities in the border areas are a reservoir of enormous potential of strength and means, which, used in a wise way, may contribute to the stimulation of the development of entire regions. However, using the existing potential is possible only after a thorough inventory and valuation of the resources located in the area. This concerns especially tourism, which through the development of the cross-border movement and cross-border cooperation can lead to rapid economic development.

Tourism in the eastern parts of Poland is developing especially on the basis of natural and cultural values, however, these seem to be little known (Balińska 2010, 491–504). For these reasons, eastern towns should be noticed and appreciated especially by tourists searching for a peaceful, idyllic rest away from the crowd. For the development of tourism, the needs of tourists must be met. Therefore a basic tourist infrastructure, such as accommodation, dining facilities and transport accessibility is indispensable (Gierańczyk and Gierańczyk 2013, 49). Due to the fact that all

these elements together contribute to tourist attractiveness, it should be always considered comprehensively. It should also be noted that each of these factors is a strong determinant of how a tourist chooses his travel destination (Bąk 2011, 7; Warszzyńska and Jackowski 1978, 28). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to talk about any tourist traffic in a place that does not have these very basic elements. Therefore, for the assessment of the development of tourism in various regions, it is necessary to identify their tourist potential.

Places located close to the border may play an important role in the development of cross-border tourism, which occupies an important place in the development of economic, social and cultural cooperation between border regions (Hajduk 2007, 88; Mykhasiuk and Osidach 2008, 77; Zabielska 2013, 50). In this context, Chełm County can be indicated. Chełm County is located on the eastern border of Poland in Lublin Voivodship and covers an area of 1885,6 km².¹ It encompasses 14 communes and 1 municipality. It is located in the Euroregion Bug, established in 1995 between Poland and the Ukraine. Three years later, in May 1998, Belarus also joined the Euroregion, which enabled tripartite, cross-border cooperation (Mindur 2001/2002, 203). The creation of the Euroregion Bug has enabled cooperation between the institutions of the above mentioned countries in the fields of economics, culture and tourism.

Direct proximity of Chełm County with the Ukraine is one of its biggest assets. Through the area of the county runs a transit route of international importance, which with the border crossing in Dorohusk connects Warsaw with Kiev. It is a significant element for the development of cross-border tourism. Chełm and its communes are promoted, among others, on the Cross-border Tourism Information Centre web sites established by the Cross-border Association Euroregion Bug. Chełm County, as a part of the Polish eastern region, was promoted in 2007–2013 by the Polish Tourist Organisation in the campaign under the name “Beautiful East.” The aim of this project was to set new trends in tourism and encourage travellers to search for little-known and little-visited places in Poland which they could explore.

Two aims have been set in the article. The first was to assess the tourist attractiveness of the communes of Chełm County using the method of a synthetic measure. This provided a way to indicate the diversity of the communes in terms of their natural and cultural values, as well as tourist development, in which tourism can be the basis for local development. The data for the synthetic measure were gathered from several sources including the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the National Heritage Board of Poland and the query of literature and materials posted on the official websites of the communes and associations from Chełm County. In the second part of the article an attempt has been undertaken to identify real and potential directions of tourism development in Chełm County, with particular emphasis on cross-border tourism.

1 The natural environment and cultural heritage in the tourist areas of Chełm County

Chełm County is located in the basin of the Bug and Wieprz Rivers. The most important water area of Chełm region is the river Bug, which, as one of the last rivers in Europe, has preserved its natural character. Moreover, it is situated at the junction of two distinct regions: Polesie Lubelskie and Lublin Upland. Therefore, the region is known for its great diversity of nature and landscape (Benedykciński and Perkiewicz 2009, 69–86). The attractiveness of the county is increased by the existence of very interesting valuable and verified wildlife. Within the borders of the county there is a part of the Poleski National Park (Complex “Bagno Bubnów”), which, connected with the Belarussian park Priбу́зьско́е Polesie and Ukrainian Szacki National Park in 2012, became part of the cross-border Biosphere Reserve “Polesie Zachodnie.” Within the study area there are also Chełm Landscape Park, Strzelecki Landscape Park, Chełm Protected Landscape Area, Pawłowski Protected Landscape Area, Grabowiecko-Strzelecki Protected Landscape Area and monuments

1. [In the journal (in both Polish and English texts) European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style). Furthermore in the International System of Units (SI units), fixed spaces rather than commas are used to mark off groups of three digits, both to the left and to the right of the decimal point.—Ed.]

protection (65 individual trees, 11 groups of trees, 7 glacial erratics or their groups, 4 plant communities, 4 lower spring waters, 1 scenic view hill, 1 plant position, 1 avenue of trees). In addition, within the county area, there were designated Natura 2000 areas that protect bird sanctuaries (Bagnó Bubnów, Dolina Środkowego Bugu, Chełmskie Torfowiska Węglanowe, Lasy Strzeleckie) and habitat sanctuaries (Stawska Góra, Torfowisko Sobowice, Ostoja Poleska, Torfowiska Chełmskie, Dobromyśl).

The cultural heritage of Chełm County is varied, however, it does not play a key role in the development of tourism and has a rather complementary character in relation to the natural values. Many of them are in poor condition and require a thorough restoration and repair works. Therefore, to strengthen the county as an area attractive to tourists, restoration is inevitable to make monuments accessible to tourists. Many interesting sights of this region are not known to tourists, and therefore are not visited by them. The most important cultural values of the region include, *inter alia*, fortified park and manor complexes. Among them there may be mentioned: the tower in Stołpie, a fortified manor house converted into a palace in Srebrzyszcze, Suchodolskich family Palace in Dorohusk, Zamoyski family hunting palace in Maziarnia Strzelecka and a castle complex in Sielec. However, in the group of the most interesting religious monuments there are among others the church complex in Wojsławice, the Orthodox church of Our Lady of Kazan in Wojsławice, and religious buildings in Klesztów.

The presence of hiking, cycling trails and horse trails foster the exploration of the natural and cultural assets of the county. The most famous route is a hiking and cycling trail along the Bug River (320 km long), which begins in the neighboring Włodawa County, and further passes through the county of Chełm and Hrubieszów. It leads along the valley of the Bug River on the border with Belarus and the Ukraine, then the eastern edge of Polesie Lubelskie and Lublin Upland. Along the route, there are valuable natural areas, landscape parks and nature reserves and numerous architectural monuments. Other tourist cycling routes include: Przyjaźni Trail, "Moczarowa Kraina" Trail, "Kolonja Kamień – Zalew Husynne" Trail, and "Kolonja Kamień – Dębowy Las" Trail. Among the hiking trails can be mentioned: Tadeusz Kościuszko Trail, the Trail of "Rezerwaty Przyrody," and "Bagna i Moczary" Trail (also called "Chełmskie Torfowiska").

In addition to numerous hiking and cycling trails in the county, there is also Polesie Horse Trail (280 km). It passes through the most valuable natural areas of Chełm County: Poleski National Park, 3 scenic parks (Poleski, Sobiborski, Chełmski), and numerous nature reserves. On the trail there are a lot of forests and lakes. This route also runs partly along the Bug River. The attraction of these trails is complemented by the existence of nature trails, which play a significant role in the development of cognitive, educational, sightseeing or school tourism. Examples are paths in Białopole Commune called „Lasy Strzeleckie” and „Starorzecze Bugu.” They lead through different types of forest habitats, which allows travellers to discover different types of forest communities and diverse fauna and flora.

2 Evaluation of tourist attractiveness of the communes of Chełm County

Evaluation of the conditions for the development of tourism was conducted for the communes of Chełm. The strongest centre is the county town of Chełm (excluded from the evaluation due to different conditions for tourism development), which is the centre of the economic and social activity of the county. For the evaluation, a synthetic meter method proposed by Gołembski (1999) was used. This method consists in extracting a number of features to which the corresponding value of the indicator is ascribed. At the first stage, two indicators have been identified: natural and cultural resources (S1) and tourist development (S2). For each of the above indicators certain characteristics have been assigned, to which in turn weights are assigned (tab. 1).

To assess tourist attractiveness, the indicators (S1)—natural and cultural resources, and (S2)—tourist development have been added together, which in turn allowed the determination of the synthetic measure (S) for particular communes (tab. 2). The final result of the synthetic measure (S) allowed the classification of a commune into the appropriate class interval, according to the limit values of below 0,44; 0,45–0,60; 0,61–0,96; above 0,97.

Tab. 1. Indicators used to assess tourist attractiveness of the studied communes

Feature	Measure	w^a
Natural and cultural resources:		
Topography	The ratio of the height difference in the commune to the maximum height difference in the tested area	0,10
Flowing and standing waters	Points from 0 to 3 for each watercourse: I quality class—3 points II quality class—2 points III quality class—1 point for each bathing site approved for swimming – 1 point (up to 3 points)	0,10
Forests	Percentage of forest area in the commune	0,10
Protected areas (scenic parks and national parks)	Percentage of the protected areas in the commune (for the national park the size of its area in the commune is counted double)	0,15
Nature reserves	Area of nature reserves in the commune in km ²	0,10
Nature monuments	Number of monuments per 1 km ²	0,10
Architectural monuments	Number of monuments per 1 km ²	0,10
Historic buildings entered in the register of the Regional Conservator	Number of buildings	0,15
Religious sites	Points for each site according to: nationwide importance—3 points regional importance—2 points local importance—1 point	0,05
Museums, cultural centers and open-air museums	Number of facilities	0,05
Total		1,00
Tourist development:		
Accommodation facilities	Number of accommodation facilities per 1 km ²	0,15
Accommodation facilities	Number of accommodation facilities per 100 inhabitants	0,15
Dining facilities	Number of dining facilities per 1 000 inhabitants	0,10
Hiking trails	Length of hiking trails per 1 km ²	0,15
Tourist Information centers, PTTK branches	Number of facilities per 10 000 inhabitants	0,10
Bathing facilities (swimming pools, natural bathing sites)	Number of sites	0,10
Other tourist facilities of accompanying base (stadiums, tennis courts, sports facilities, etc.)	Number of facilities per 1 km ²	0,10
Pharmacies, health clinics	Number of facilities per 10 000 inhabitants	0,05
Post Office, banks	Number of facilities per 1 km ²	0,05
Petrol stations and service points	Number of facilities per 1 km ²	0,05
Total		1,00

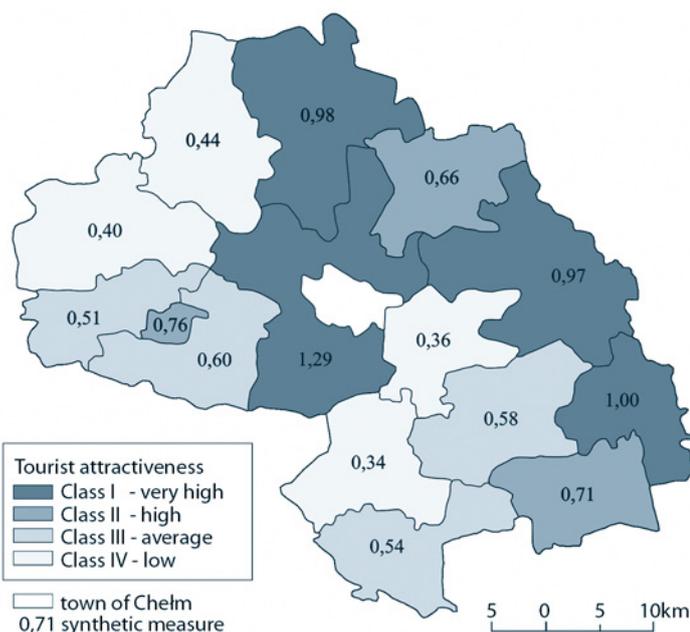
Source: own study based on Pawlusiński (2005)

^aweight

Tourist attractiveness of the communes within Chełm County is characterized by spatial differentiation (fig. 1). The studied communes have been divided into four classes of tourist attractiveness. The four most attractive communes in Chełm County have been selected in the course of the research: Chełm (1,29), Dorohusk (0,97), Dubienka (1,00) and Sawin (0,98) have been classified to the interval of the highest values of indicator (S) classified as Class I, which is the most attractive (the interval above 0,84). In Class II, described as highly attractive (indicator values between 0,61 and 0,96), there are Białopole, Rejowiec Fabryczny (municipality) and Ruda-Huta. In Class III

Tab. 2. The values of the synthetic measure of tourist attractiveness and group indicators for the studied communes

Commune	Indicator (S1)	Indicator (S2)	Synthetic measure (S)
	Natural and cultural resources	Tourist development	
Białopole	0,42	0,29	0,71
Chełm	0,75	0,54	1,29
Dorohusk	0,45	0,52	0,97
Dubienka	0,38	0,62	1,00
Kamień	0,20	0,16	0,36
Leśniowice	0,22	0,12	0,34
Rejowiec	0,34	0,26	0,60
Rejowiec Fabryczny ^a	0,30	0,46	0,76
Rejowiec Fabryczny	0,32	0,19	0,51
Ruda-Huta	0,38	0,28	0,66
Sawin	0,49	0,49	0,98
Siedliszcze	0,29	0,11	0,40
Wierzbica	0,26	0,18	0,44
Wojśławice	0,36	0,18	0,54
Żmudź	0,39	0,19	0,58

^amunicipality**Fig. 1.** Spatial classification of the researched communes in terms of their tourist attractiveness

(with the indicator values from 0,45 to 0,60) 4 communes have been selected. They are Rejowiec, Rejowiec Fabryczny, Wojśławice, and Żmudź. The last group in the classification of communes constitute the communes which were found least attractive in terms of tourism. They belong to class IV (indicator value below 0,44), and they are the four communes: Kamień, Leśniowice, Siedliszcze and Wierzbica.

Analyzing group indicators, it may be noted that in terms of natural and cultural resources (S1) the most attractive communes are: Chełm (0,75), Sawin (0,49) and Dorohusk (0,45). The commune of Chełm has the largest area of nature reserves, the biggest number and the best quality of flowing and standing waters. Moreover, in the commune there are numerous historical objects of regional importance. The attractiveness of the commune Sawin, which was placed in this category

in second place, is mainly determined by the natural values. Protected areas in the commune constitute part of the Landscape Park of Chełm and nature reserve Bachus. In Sawin Commune there are also valuable historical monuments, among which it is worth mentioning the late Baroque church under the invocation of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Dorohusk Commune, ranked in the third place, provides unique areas of carbonate pit-bogs, where two nature reserves have been isolated. The most interesting and at the same time the most valuable historic building in commune is the Palace of the Suchodolskich family. Białopole Commune is also worth mentioning due to its high natural and cultural values (0,42). The reserves Siedliszcze and Liski, where a historic stand of oak and pine trees are under protection, are of great importance. Moreover, among the noteworthy historic sights is the Uniate Orthodox church. However, the low level of development reduced the value of the synthetic measure which qualified the commune for the second group of attractive tourist destinations. The least attractive in respect of natural and cultural values are the communes of Kamień (0,20) and Leśniowice (0,22). Low natural values in Kamień Commune are caused primarily by the negative impact of cement plant operations in Chełm, which contributed to the degradation of the environment in the surrounding communes. In contrast, Leśniowice Commune has a typical agricultural character, having no important historic buildings as well as natural values.

In terms of tourism development (S2 indicator), Dubienka (0,62), Chełm (0,54) and Dorohusk (0,52) communes have the best infrastructure. Dubienka has the most extensive database of accommodation and dining facilities, which is mainly due to its location in the Bug River area. It is also the site of frequent vacationers come to recharge their physical and mental strength. This commune also has the largest number of tourist trails. Chełm and Dorohusk are the communes through which runs the transit route to the Ukraine, hence the tourist development in these communes is the largest. Accommodation and dining facilities are particularly well-developed. Furthermore, in Dorohusk Commune there is the largest number of tourist information centres. Moreover, through these communes runs the Bug River Trail. Sawin Commune and Rejowiec Fabryczny municipality also have a well-developed tourist infrastructure, where the accompanying base prevails with recreational facilities. Moreover, there is a large number of hiking, cycling and horse trails here. In the case of Leśniowice Commune the lack of natural and cultural values also resulted in the lack of any tourist development, especially in terms of accommodation and dining facilities.

3 Cross-border cooperation as an opportunity for tourism in Chełm Commune

Chełm County Development Strategy for 2008–2015 indicates that the natural and cultural values should be in the region of fundamental significance in the process of the development of tourism and provision of tourist services. However, poor transport accessibility is a negative factor. In this respect, the construction of cross-border road and tourist infrastructure seems to be necessary. Due to the geographical location of Chełm County, the perspective direction of socio-economic development is, therefore, cross-border cooperation with the Ukraine and Belarus.

Strong protection of the eastern borders of Poland associated with the integration of Poland within the Schengen area constitutes a barrier for the development of cross-border tourism in Chełm County, thus regions of the Polish and the Ukrainian side of the border area are referred to as “sensitive areas of Europe” (Kawałko 2011, 41). Difficulties which appear in cross-border tourist traffic are mainly caused by the tightening of visa policy for the citizens from outside of the European Union and the introduction of new control procedures at the border in Dorohusk. The consequence of such activities may be the reduction of cross-border contacts and co-operation between various entities operating in the tourism industry. It should be noted, however, that the border may be at the center of international cooperation aiming at the creation of cross-border tourist products based on the promotion of common natural and cultural heritage. However, the things which undoubtedly must be done include: modernization and improvement of the existing communication system, as well as the legal and legislative solutions at the central level (e.g., for the establishment of a network of tourist border crossings).

Bug Euroregion constitutes a good basis for the development of cross-border contacts of the city and Chełm County, which, as an active member of the Euroregion Bug (headquarters in Chełm) is responsible for managing part of the cross-border Co-operation Programme “Poland-Belarus-Ukraine”. It is an opportunity for the county to develop various forms of cross-border cooperation, including in the field of tourism and in the creation of branded local products for the environmental and ecological tourism (Kawałko 2011, 47).

An example of a project implemented by the Euroregion Bug, in which Chełm County participates, is “Supporting the Bug River eco-tourism as an element of the sustainable development of Eastern Lubelskie Area.” One of the aims of the project is cooperation of local companies, in this case agrotourist farms offering environmentally-friendly services (recreation, popularisation of a healthy lifestyle, organic and regional food production) to create an integrated agrotourist product and joint promotion. Agrotourist companies from the communes of Dorohusk (1 agrotourism company), Chełm (2), Dubienka (4), Wojsławice (1) from Chełm County participate in this project.

Another example of the cross-border cooperation are territorial partnerships between the cities of Chełm and Kovel in Ukraine (since 1996) and between Chełm County and Kovel Regional State Administration of the Volyn District (since 2001). The second twin town of Chełm is a Ukrainian town of Liuboml. The cooperation within these agreements includes implementation of joint projects and exchange of experiences in the field of socio-economic development (economy, trade, social care, education) and nature conservation. An important place in the undertaken activities is reserved also for the mutual promotion of the tourist attractiveness and organisation of cultural events for the development of the cross-border natural, cultural and ecological tourism. The example of joint initiatives within the partnership of the towns of Chełm and Kovel was the project “Frontier food.” Ecological workshops, cycling races and canoeing trips were organised with the help of agricultural farms and border associations promoting traditional and ecological regional cuisine. Similar initiatives and events are organised within the partnership of Chełm County and Kovel Region (e.g., the Bug River Festival of Bee, County Harvest Festival, organisation of holidays for children and teenagers in Kovel and Dubienka), where more emphasis is placed on the development of economic cooperation. Besides the city of Chełm and Chełm County, cross-border cooperation is systematically undertaken by subsequent regional units, both in Poland and Ukraine (e.g., within Local Action Groups).

Conclusions

In shaping the tourist attractiveness of Chełm County areas with natural values (over 43% of the area are those legally protected) have predominant significance, such as those connected with the geographical location of the communes, forest cover, vegetation or the presence of bodies of water; cultural heritage complements the tourist attractiveness created particularly by the natural values. The areas of Chełm County are ecologically clean and not degraded by bigger industrial and production plants

The above-mentioned conditions create opportunities for various forms of relaxation and cognitive tourism to develop, including environmental, ecological, cultural tourism and agrotourism. The areas are valuable because of their natural assets, the valley of the Bug River, protected areas and monuments of architecture and construction, and they contribute to the formation of numerous tourist and educational routes in this area. The potential target groups of the tourist offer of the county are families with children, the elderly, children and schoolchildren participating in short-term or long-term stay tourism.

Due to the geographical location of Chełm County next to the Polish-Ukrainian border and the adjacent Polesie National Park, cross-border tourism based mostly on the natural values seems to be a prospective direction of the development. As shown in the evaluation of the tourist attractiveness of Chełm County, it should concern especially the communes: Chełm, Dorohusk, Dubienka and Sawin.

Activities within the cross-border cooperation are implemented by Polish and Ukrainian regional governments through partnership agreements — e.g., Euroregion Bug, partnership cooperation

of the city of Chełm and Kovel and Chełm County and Kovel Regional State Administration of the Volyn District, and Local Action Groups. The aim is the creation of a comprehensive and unique tourist product. However, this requires the involvement of the local community, that is entities of the public, private and social sector, so that all activities undertaken in Chełm County in a direct or indirect way could influence the creation of the conditions for tourism development.

It can be said that accommodation facilities and the gastronomic infrastructure of the county are insufficient. Therefore the indispensable condition for the development of tourism in the communes is creating suitable service infrastructure. This condition, coupled with an increasing activity of the regional governments concerning promotion, will allow the selected communes to become more attractive for tourists.

The accessibility and suburban location of the communes of Chełm County in relation to a big metropolitan areas is one of the key problems limiting the possibility of tourism development in this area. In order to develop tourism in Chełm County it is necessary to undertake infrastructural and promotional activities. On the one hand, these activities must involve creating an attractive image of the region based on the local natural and cultural heritage; on the other hand, there is an urgent need to adjust the existing tourist offer, including as well tourism development, to the increasing demands of domestic tourists. The tourist product of this region, based on natural assets of the environment, can become the factor offering benefits for the local community. In addition, suitable management of tourism with simultaneous preservation of the natural values can contribute to sustainable development in the region.

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