

Ewa Ferens, M.Sc.

Warsaw University of Life Sciences

Nowoursynowska 166 02-787 Warsaw, Poland

Address for correspondence:

Nowoursynowska 159 02-776 Warsaw, Poland

building nr. 33, room nr. 36

Telephone number: 0048 22 593 52 26

E-mail: ewa_ferens@sggw.pl

Short author's biography: PhD student at Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Faculty of
Economic Sciences

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF MAZOVIA REGION IN POLAND

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to establish a baseline of knowledge about the role of local government in tourism development in Poland and to explore the engagement of local authorities in tourism area on the example of communes of Mazovian Voivodeship in Poland. The paper presents the theoretical background as well as the findings of the empirical research conducted in the first quarter of 2013.

In Poland the primary role in tourism development play the local self-government, whose involvement appear in five areas: planning, organizational matters, promotion, economic and financial aspects as well as infrastructure investments. However, tourism is one of the many others competing socio-economic priorities in local development. The results shows that local authorities underestimate the role of tourism in local economy, what reflects in the lack of proper planning of tourism development. The actions of local government in tourism filed are mainly limited to the improvement of technical and social infrastructure and organization of cultural and tourist events. The main barrier in supporting tourism for local authorities is the lack of financial means for the tourist infrastructure and promotion and too complicated procedures of application for external funds.

Key words: tourism development, local government

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays tourism is perceived as one of the most important factors determining social and economic development. Stimulation of this sector of the economy gives an opportunity for development of local entrepreneurship or a solution to the problem of unemployment especially in areas experiencing structural change in their traditional economic base. Although tourism today is mainly a private-sector driven industry, a reasonable level of government

involvement particularly the local authorities in terms of infrastructural development, investment, regulation and marketing is necessary (Ogechi & Igbojekwe, 2013).

In the 90's of 20th century fundamental changes took place in Poland. There was the transformation, leading to decentralization of public administration and establishing a new territorial division of the country. The first stage of these changes was the reform of community.¹ In the later stages occurred the reform of the county² and voivodeship³ that created self-government administration also at these levels. Therefore development of tourism is by law the responsibility of communal, county and provincial self-governments. However, at present tourism happens mainly at the local level. Up to 70% of the tasks are implemented at the level of communes (Gąciarz, 2008). As a result of territorial reform local government autonomy consists mainly in the financial independence. Community received the full independence of the legal attributes, independent budget and independent source of income. Local authorities represent the third level of public sector tourism management, which is often the scale at which most interactions with businesses occur and decisions regarding policy and tourism development are made (Nodder, Cate, Slater, & Milne, 2003). Thus decisions taken by local government have great importance for the development of tourism sector. In Poland especially the rural and peripheral areas face big challenges related to the lack of non-farm employment and depopulation. One potential source of income, which contributes to the multifunctional development of such areas can be rural tourism. Hjalager (1996) mentions in its study that “tourism by its very nature draws outside capital into the local community which can lead to positive economic benefits that may be the essential attributes for the survival of a rural community undergoing economic transition”. Rural tourism can also constitute an alternative to keep young population in rural areas, if they achieve good welfare conditions (Calado, Rodrigues, Silveira & Dentinho, 2011). Success in

¹ The Polish Act of 8 March 1990 on Community Self-Government

² The Polish Act of 15 June 1998 on County Self-Government

³ The Polish Act of 5 June 1998 on Voivodeship Government

tourism development without considerable involvement of the local government is unlikely. Tourism planning requires strong local government support (Stevenson, 2002).

In the light of the aforementioned prerequisites it is significant to investigate the involvement of local authorities in tourism matters.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to establish a baseline of knowledge about the role of local authorities in tourism development in Poland and to present and evaluate the engagement of local authorities in tourism area on the example of communes of Mazovian Voivodeship. The article puts forward a research thesis on key role of local government in tourism development. The author researches the scale of involvement of local authorities in tourism field as well as the factors obstructing the tourism development on the local level in opinion of local authorities.

The paper presents the theoretical background based on the literature and law acts review as well as the findings of the empirical research, which was conducted among local authorities of 51 communes of Mazovian Voivodeship. Empirical data was gathered using a survey questionnaires in the first quarter of 2013. The selection of communes was intentional. The sample group includes entities which are characterized by moderate, good or very good development of tourism sector and located in urban as well as in rural areas. The description of criteria used in communes selection is presented in the table 1.

Table 1: Description of criteria used in communes selection

Step	
1 General	The research covers all types of communes: urban, urban-rural, and rural.
2 Geographic scope of the research	The intentional selection of Mazovian Voivodship. This region is characterized by big disparities in economic and social development. At the same time it has unused tourism potential.
3 Determination of the scale of tourism development in the communes.	For this purpose five levels of tourism development in the communes have been identified. It has been decided that the research will focus only on those communes where tourism is very good, good or moderately developed (the first three levels). The defined categories refer to tourism movement, tourist infrastructure and amount of tourist enterprisers in the local units. In sum 90 communes have been assigned to survey research.
4 The final conducting of questionnaire survey	The questionnaires were sent to selected local units. 54 communes responded.

Source: Own elaboration

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The role of local government is to ensure the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their communities and their involvement in tourism must be related to that. Competencies of a commune in Poland „cover all public affairs of a local importance, not reserved by the law for other entities” (Annual Tourism..., 2012). Particularly tasks of local units include fulfilling of collective needs of a community.

Each municipality carries out two types of tasks, namely commissioned ones and its own tasks. Commissioned tasks are tasks ordered in the framework of governmental administration. Communes receive financial means from the state budget for their implementation. The act on tourist services⁴ specifies the following tasks in the framework of governmental administration:

- running of camp sites register and other facilities in which accommodation services were provided;

⁴ The Polish Act of August 29th, 1997 on tourist services

- inspecting, within their territorial jurisdictions, all accommodation facilities and other facilities in which accommodation services were provided;
- informing of organs conducting registers of accommodation facilities on infringements noticed;
- giving an order of suspension of services performance in accommodation facilities, camps sites, and private apartments by the time of infringements removal.

What concerns own tasks of the commune, these are public tasks exercised by local government, which serve to satisfy the needs of the community. This tasks can be twofold: compulsory and optional. Compulsory task are the tasks which the commune have to carry out and include in a budget in order to provide the inhabitants with the basic public benefits. Optional tasks are carried out in accordance with available budgetary means and are set out only to specific local needs. The majority of activities concerning tourism field belong to this group. Thus the scale and range of undertaken activities depend on the engagement of local authorities in tourism matters. However, it is important to underline the fact, that tourism is a multidisciplinary sector and is influenced by a variety of matters such as: the spatial harmony, the environmental protection and nature conservation, the water management, technical infrastructure, cultural facilities, sport facilities, green spaces and public parks, public order and safety as well as cooperation on the regional and local level with other entities and non-governmental organizations.

As Niezgoda (2004) points out collective needs of the community in case of tourism can be dual. Firstly, they might include the desire of the inhabitants to participate in tourism as customers. In this respect the role of local government is to provide conditions for practicing tourist activities and recreation for their local citizens. Secondly, tourism development can meet the needs of local people as representatives of the supply side, providing economic benefits to the community. In this scope the role of local authorities relates to the issue of

accommodation, agrotourism, procurement of funds, support for local entrepreneurs, cooperation with other communes in the field of tourism, and finally dissemination of tourist information and promotion of the commune as an attractive tourist destination.

In order to improve the local tourism economy, local authorities must undertake suitable stimulatory activities adapted to and depending on the character of the particular municipality as well as of tourist potential. Opportunities for tourism development depend first of all on the tourist resources of a municipality, which generate tourism movement and provide the basis for tourism sector development. Dwyer and Kim (2003) distinguish three groups of factors which make the destination attractive to visit. These are inherited and created resources as well as supporting factors and resources. While the first group include natural and cultural values, the created resources contain factors which constitute a contribution to the complex tourism product, such as tourism infrastructure, festivals, events, entertainment, shopping or fairs. Supporting factors and resources include elements which influence the tourist's satisfaction and enhance the quality of tourism product, like general infrastructure, quality of service, accessibility, hospitality or safety. Moreover, at present factors connected with the quality of human resources and leadership are often listed among the success resources of tourism destination (Kozak, 2008). Together, all these factors provide the foundations for a successful tourism development in a commune. It is important to underline the fact that in case the territorial unit does not have natural or anthropogenic values, it is groundless for local authorities to implement a tourism strategy and invest in tourism infrastructure.

Analyzing the literature and legal acts it can be concluded that engagement of local government in tourism development appear in five areas, namely: planning, organizational matters, promotion, economic and financial aspects as well as infrastructure investments. The examples of instruments within each area are presented in the table 2.

Table 2. Instruments of local government to support tourism development in the commune

ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT	
Area	Examples of instruments
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formulation of tourism polices, plans and projects; - preparation and implementation of: Local Tourism Development Strategy, Municipal Marketing Plan/Strategy; - to include tourism aspects in Municipal Development Strategy and in Long-term Investment Plan; - to carry out the right policy with regard to issuing planning permissions so that tourism projects harmful to the environment and incompatible with traditional infrastructure are not allowed to proceed;
Organizational matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to appoint an organizational unit responsible for the implementation of the tourism strategy, embracing representatives from various social groups that have interest in tourism; - to conduct professional trainings for the personnel, local entrepreneurs or for inhabitants who plan to start tourism business; - cooperation with another municipalities, regional government, tourism organization in tourism area;
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to provide an integrated market development program to attract people to visit the municipality; - to promote municipality through the internet, newspapers, calendars, festivals; - to open tourist information centre and to mark tourists attractions; - to present the community as an attractive location to companies seeking to invest in new sites; - to promote ideas for tourism development among residents and to foster a correct attitude among the local people towards tourists;
Economic and financial aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to create a favorable climate for the inflow of tourism investments by local fees and tax reliefs; - regulation o local taxes rates;
Infrastructure investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - infrastructure changes for enhancing the tourist experience and visitor management; - development of a social and technical (municipal) infrastructure; - investment in tourist routes and trails, information and education centers, waste disposal and energy saving projects; - provision of recreation grounds and sports facilities.

Source: Own elaboration based on Mika & Pawlusiński (2003), Majewska (2012), Niezgodą (2004)

In case of planning area local government is essentially responsible for preparing policy statements and such documents as tourism, marketing and development strategies or long-term investment plan. For this reason, Elliot (1997) claims that local authorities are critical partners in tourism, “as it is only governments, which have the power to provide the political stability, security, and the legal and financial framework which tourism requires”. What concerns organizational matters the importance of cooperation should be underlined. Tourism needs an integration of actions by all players contributing to the creation of a tourism product (Niezgoda, 2004). The complex nature of tourism requires a full cooperation between local and regional authorities, organizations and entrepreneurs representing various fields involved in the development of tourism.

The next area of involvement of local government in tourism development is broadly defined promotion. Tourism is a sector which needs a strong marketing and promotion. In this field local authorities are responsible mainly for opening tourist information centers, marking tourists attractions or promoting community as a interest place to visit or to invest. Local government is also an important actor to organize different events and festivals promoting community, its heritage sites and culture. Such event tourism is an activity in which territorial authorities are becoming increasingly interested due to its potential to: stimulate the development of new facilities, to promote the host area, and the significant economic benefits it can bring to an area, such as increased employment (Fry, 1993; Kean, 1993).

Regarding the economic and financial aspects, these are instruments that enable self government to create a favorable climate for the inflow of tourism investments as well as to support local entrepreneurship.

Development of tourism is not possible without the necessary infrastructure. The supply of social, technical and tourist infrastructure is within the competence of local government. Local authorities by investing to create and improve the quality of all needed infrastructure

for tourists and tourism development like water, electricity, waste management, roads, tourist routes, recreation grounds or sport facilities. etc. can significantly help local tourism sector.

STUDY AREA

Mazovian Voivodeship is the most populated and largest administrative region in Poland. It is located in the central-eastern part of the country and represents 11.4% of Poland's area. Mazovia is inhabited by a population of 5 301 760⁵ persons which constitutes around 14% of Poland's population. Administratively the voivodeship is divided into 42 counties. The counties consist of 314 Masovian municipalities: 229 rural ones, 50 urban-rural and 35 urban.

Mazovia is the top region in terms of the dynamics of economic development and business activities and it attracts the largest volume of foreign investment. However, the region is very differentiated and characterized by disparities in development. On the one hand there is Warsaw Agglomeration, the most developed area with economic growth rates above the national average and the lowest level of unemployment. On the other hand there are rural and peripheral communes which suffer from big unemployment and net migration rate. What concerns tourism development the big spatial disparities can be observed as well. Mazovia region has a big potential in tourism development due to geographical location, natural and cultural assets as well as political and administrative functions. The region enjoys a good geographical position, both in Poland and Europe. At the same time, in comparison to other Polish voivodeships, Mazovia has a very good transport accessibility, particularly in the context of air transport and a network of rail and road links.

Natural assets, it means all elements of the natural environment, which affect the attractiveness of the tourist area, influence the possibility of tourism. Most of the Mazovia region is located in the lowlands. 20% of the area of the entire region is covered by forests

⁵ According of data of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) from 31 December 2012.

and almost 30% of the voivodeship's area is protected land. There are: the Kampinos National Park, 9 landscape parks, 171 nature reserves and 62 protected landscape sites. The structure of land and its natural values indicates that the region can be used for numerous forms of tourism, mainly associated with physical activity, practicing sport like hiking, cycling, horse riding or just relaxing in rural areas. The region has also a big potential for the development of agrotourism. However, the tourism potential is still unused. Especially rural communes are characterized by lack or low level of tourism development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism planning is an essential activity to achieve the goals of tourism development. It is important because it provides a common vision, direction and commitment for tourism which are the result of participation of many representatives. The local governments of researched communes in Mazovia region were asked whether they had developed a tourism strategy and promotion strategy in the last 5 years. The results shows that only 9,8% of surveyed communes have current promotion strategy. What concerns tourism strategy, only 3,92% of researched units have such a document. Lack of proper planning demonstrates that local authorities seem to attach no great importance to the role of tourism in local economy.

Further, the local authorities were asked about the actions undertaken in order to improve tourism development in their commune. Survey results indicates that the majority of local authorities (82,35%) focuses on the technical infrastructure improvement. It means technical infrastructure is perceived as basis for the tourism development in the commune. The most probably it results from the fact that still there are areas in Mazovia region, especially rural ones, that suffer from an undersupply of technical infrastructure. Hence, the improvement of this infrastructure is a priority for the local government.

In the next place, the surveyed communes organize the cultural and tourist events (64,71%) and improve the social infrastructure (58,82%) to support tourism. Half of the

researched units (50,98%) undertake the activities in order to promote the commune. Next in line at 19,61% there are such actions as development of new tourism infrastructure and obtaining funding for tourism projects.

Only 11,76% of surveyed authorities declares cooperation with other local government units and non-governmental organization in range of creation comprehensive tourist products. The other actions listed in questionnaire are undertaken in less than 10% of the researched communes. It should be noted that the majority of local authorities do not support or cooperate with tourism organizations. The data obtained from the study are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Local government actions to improve tourism development

Actions	% of researched communes
Technical infrastructure improvement	82,35%
Organization of cultural and tourist events	64,71%
Social infrastructure improvement	58,82%
Promotion of the commune	50,98%
Development of new tourism infrastructure	31,37%
Obtaining funding for tourism projects	31,37%
Protection of nature values	19,61%
Cooperation with other local government units and non-governmental organization in order to create comprehensive tourist products	11,76%
Modernisation of existing tourism infrastructure	9,80%
Creating of unique offer distinguishing the commune	7,84%
Cooperation with tourism organizations	5,88%
Conduct of training courses for the inhabitants, who run agrotourism bussines	3,92%
Support of tourism organisations	1,96%

Source: Own elaboration on the base of empirical research conducted in 2013.

In the next step of questionnaire research the local authorities were asked for factors impeding the tourism development in their communes. The gained results are presented in the table 4. According to the majority of surveyed (80,39%) the main barrier in this field is the lack of financial means for the tourist infrastructure development. Almost half of the

researched authorities (45,10%) indicates also the lack of financial means for the complex promotion campaign. In case of almost 40% of researched units the local authorities face the barriers connecting with too complicated procedures of application for EU funds or other external funds. It can demonstrate the lack of property qualified personnel or organizational unit in the communes. Almost 30% of researched authorities state that their communes have poor natural or cultural values. The other factors hindering tourism development are connected with local community, namely: weak social activity of local people, the lack of qualified personnel for conducting tourism projects or the lack of interest in starting non-agricultural business by inhabitants of rural areas.

Table 4: Barriers in tourism development in the opinion of local authorities

Barriers	% of researched communes
The lack of financial means for the tourist infrastructure development	80,39%
The lack of financial means for the complex promotion campaign	45,10%
Too complicated procedures of application for EU funds or other external funds	39,22%
Poor natural or cultural values of the commune	29,41%
Weak/lack of social activity and initiatives of local people	23,53%
The lack of qualified personnel for conducting tourism projects	21,57%
The lack of interest in starting non-agricultural business by inhabitants of rural areas	15,69%
The pollution of natural environment	1,96%

Source: Own elaboration on the base of empirical research conducted in 2013.

CONCLUSIONS

In Poland the primary role in tourism development play the local self-government, whose financial independence and the scope of tasks results from Polish law regulations. However, the majority of activities concerning tourism area belong to optional tasks of the commune, which are carried out in accordance with available budgetary means and engagement of local authorities in tourism matters.

The local government of researched units in Mazovia Voivodeship appear to underestimate or even ignore the role of tourism in local development. It reflects in the lack of

proper planning of tourism development. The majority of researched communes invest in the technical and social infrastructure improvement which is significant because poor infrastructure holds back tourism. However, development of such infrastructure is related to big financial cost what might be the reason of the lack of financial means for strictly tourist infrastructure and complex promotion of the communes. Therefore obtaining the EU funds or other external funds for tourism projects is of great importance. It is recommended that local authorities intensify actions in order to secure financing for tourism projects.

Local government should establish better cooperation with other local units and non-governmental organizations in the area of tourism in order to create complex tourist products. Especially that tourist space is connected with natural or cultural values and tourism infrastructure, what usually do not coincides with administrative borders. Such cooperation offers opportunities for more effective use of limited finances and for more effective fulfillment of tasks, especially when they extend beyond the area of one commune.

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