The VALUE OF ECOTOURISM in rural areas: lessons from POLAND

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Background

- Poland, 38.5 mln inhabitants, 1.8 million farmers
- Small farms - average size 10 hectares
- **A living countryside**
- Biodiversity - still good
- 30% of forests, sustainably managed by The National Forestry
- a tradition of holidays in the countryside, forests, lakes (camping), using nature (mushroom picking, fishing, kayaking…)

= some good conditions for the development of ecotourism
The white stork - more than a symbol, a biodiversity indicator: 25% of world population is born in Poland (40 000)
What do we miss?

Market economy discovered in late 90’s=still a lot to learn in terms of:

- Quality standards
- Sustainability
- Customer service
- Interpretation
- Marketing and sales (few tour operators at national level)
- Language abilities (but in progress)
The specificity of Polish agrotourism

- It is tax exempted if in working farm
- Allows farmers to sell home made food together with accommodation, without need to fulfill all norms required for gastronomy
- It provides sometimes excellent local food quality with still low prices
- However this situation leads to some abuses (avoiding taxes) and might therefore end some day
Local and home made food
What is ecotourism?

- New concept in 80’s with green movement development
- Different terminology in use: Green, Sustainable, Nature-based, also Geotourism and „SLOW Tourism”
- But a common definition now starts to emerge
“Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local people”

www.ecotourism.org
Definition by Ecotourism Norway:

«Ecotourism is enriching nature and cultural experiences, organized by responsible tourism companies with consideration for their guests, the environment and the local community that they are a part of»
3 PILLARS OF ECOTOURISM

**NATURE**
(nature based activities contributing to the conservation of the natural heritage)

**+CULTURE**
(promotion, cultural heritage, traditions, history, authenticity)

**+LOCAL COMMUNITY**
(local people empowerment, respect, participation)

= ECOTOURISM
2 main ecotourist long term projects in the region:

Initiated by the Social Ecological Institute (NGO from Warsaw):

- The ecotourist network between Bug and Narew
- The Polish Ecotourism Certificate
Ecotourism project example in North East Mazovia: The Ecotourist network between Bug and Narew
Miedzy Bugiem a Narwią

- First ecotourist network in Poland [www.bugnarew.pl](http://www.bugnarew.pl)
- Promotion of the whole area
- cooperation
- Common marketing and PR
- Synergy
- Revenue increase
Sieć „Miedzy Bugiem a Narwią”
Network between Bug and Narew
www.bugnarew.pl
What is a NETWORK?

• Cooperation for common goals and **profits**
• synergy **1+1= 3**
• Increasing area of reach, reaching more customers, getting information
• Network can be formal or not
• Basic principle: no hierarchy, all members equal, everybody gives input and gets profit
Why an ecotourist network?

- Good examples from abroad
- **marketing, promotion cost a lot for a small business**
- Good product - easy to understand, easy to find, easy to buy
- Higher standards
- **Be attractive - make the customer stay longer**
HOW it WORKS

1. Who are the members
2. Principles and profile
3. Goals, cooperation
Sieć Między Bugiem a Narwią - the area

- 13 rural communes
- 2 rivers BUG i NAREW
- 4 protected areas

NATURA 2000:
- Puszcza Biała
- Dolina Dolnego Bugu
- Ostoja Nadbużańska
- Bagno Pulwy
… Bug river
Sieć Między Bugiem a Narwią – map & logo
Who can be a member?

✓ The network is a group of people

✓ Non registered formally but with own statutes and declaration of membership

✓ People who run any ecotourist business/service in the area can be members. Including:
  • tourist information points,
  • museums,
  • restaurants,
  • food, small gastronomy,
  • hotels, pensions, B&B, agrotourism,
  • handicraft,
  • guides, excursions
  • shops and other services,

=> provided they respect **basic ecotourist principles** as in the network statute…
members

26 different places:

- Agrotourist places with accommodation and food: 9 (3 of them offer kayaks). Includes 3 organic farms.
- Hotel with restaurant: 1
- B&B /small hotel: 1
- Horse riding places: 2
- Education farms: 2
- Muzeums: 4
- Organic farms without accommodation: 1
- Local artist/sculptor: 1
- Handicraft and workshops: 1
- Renting a bike: 3
- Fish ponds

...
Places
Activities
- The network is marked (signs, logos, maps)
- It has a NAME and a LOGO
- Own statutes
- The members meet every 2 months, pay membership fees
- They have a common website

www.bugnarew.pl
COOPERATION IN THE NETWORK

Difficult but very important for small businesses
- website
- leaflet
- common events
...


• For the future: common LOGO on local and traditional food products
ECOTOURIST CERTIFICATION

Worldwide

Many different certificates exist:

1- certificates „environmental friendly”
2- for a specific service/activity
3- for sustainable tourism/ecotourism

In the USA: 30.000 different certificates!
Green Key
Responsible Tourism
Ecotourism
Sustainable Tourism
EMAS
Green Travel
Environmental hotel
VISIT
ISO 14001
Geotourism
CSR
EU-flower
Blue Flag
www.greenhotels.no
GRIP destination
G-Leaf
Olavsrosa
The Swan
1- Environment friendly examples
2-specific services examples
ecotourist certification

3- sustainable tourism and ecotourism certificates
- Norwegia
- Szwecja
- Rumunia
- Estonia

... POLAND
Polski Certyfikat Ekoturystyczny—how it works?

Inspired by Romanian and Norwegian system. List of criteria that needs to be fulfilled to receive the label.
1. Quality and management
2. Criteria related to the services (accommodation, food, activities).
3. Reducing impact on environment
4. Local development and cooperation
5. Information, promotion, labelling
How it works?

- Launched in 2010 as result of a pilot project in Northern Mazovia region
- Set up by an NGO (non-profit, private)
- Council - 3 NGOS together SIE+2 agrotourist associations, others can be included
- Currently 9 certified objects
- 3 new applications in process
- Growing interest in Poland in the ecotourism topic
Polski Certyfikat Ekoturystyczny - Criteria

Who can get certified?

- max 25 rooms = smaller businesses, no big hotels
- Not only accommodation - all ecotourism related services (restaurants, shops, museums, local artists...)
- Must fulfill all 103 detailed requirements
1. Quality and management

- written plans, procedures, information
- appropriate insurance and responsibility
- vision
- knowledge about nature and culture
- monitoring of environmental impact (like water and energy use, waste …)
2. Criteria related to the product/service

- General criteria: offer based on nature and culture, educational content, no negative impact on nature, minimisation of noise and waste

- Accommodation- principles of environmental management –

- FOOD
  - minimum half from local sources
  - at least 4 organic products
  - coffee and tea fair trade
  - mineral water from 2 different producers
  - at least 2 regional dishes
  - no eggs from intensive farming („3”)
  - fruits and vegetables - min 50% Polish origin
  - NO GMO
Organic food, tea and coffee
2. Criteria related to the product/service

- NO plastic wrappings and single use plastic dishes
- Rules for using nature, fishing, picking, approaching wild animals. NO hunting in polish ecotourism
- Culture and cultural landscape: promotion, conservation, aesthetics, local handicrafts and locally made souvenirs
- Minimising motor transport and pollution
3. Reducing impact on environment

- Buy local, less packing and transport
- Monitoring energy use, no coal heating
- Reducing chemicals use – minimum 80% of cleaning products environmental friendly labelled. No herbicides and pesticides in the garden
- If in a farm- sustainable farming methods
- Waste segregation and recycling
- Water saving, waste water proper management
Ecotourism criteria - renewable energy use
Proper waste segregation
5. Information, promotion, labelling

- Required signs, labels
- Information on website
- Easily available and transparent information for guests
Kuźnia Kurpiowska-stow. "Puszcza Biała"
Halina Witkowska
Gmina Zatory
Gospodarstwo agroturystyczne Dom nad Wierzbami
Barbara Polak
Gmina Somianka
Ekologiczne gospodarstwo agroturystyczne
Bielińska Góra
Joanna i Wojciech Rykaczewscy
Gmina Brańszczycy
Andrzej Sosiński – Stary Młyn, agroturystyka i hodowla ryb, Gmina NUR
Alicja Paradowska, agroturystyka i małe muzeum, gmina Długosiodło
Conclusions...

- Ecology is a worldwide trend
- Ecotourism is the only well growing tourism sector
- Poland has good conditions for ecotourism development particularly in rural areas
- Ecotourism brings more profit and positive side effects
Future plans

• Keep in touch with European and Worldwide ecotourism movement, ngos and small businesses

• Develop teh ecotourism certificate in Poland, increase standards

• Develop the polish ecotourism movement (new association?)
The Polish Ecotourism Certificate future?

- Plan to enlarge to small hotels - growing interest and demand
- Establish a fee that would help to finance the certification system
- Increase the quality standards and stronger criteria for all the applicants
Ecotourism in Poland – what next?

- To become more professional is a chance for small tourism owners and a necessity for staying competitive on the European market

BUT…

- We must be careful to not lose the authentic and human experience in the process! Owners’ personality can make the big difference.