



STUDIA OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH

2016, volume 43, pp. 99–112

<http://dx.doi.org/10.7163/SOW.43.7>



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## THE CONCEPT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AS A FACTOR INCREASING THE TOURISM POTENTIAL OF RURAL COMMUNES – A CASE STUDY

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**Abstract:** Development of rural areas can include tourism attractiveness, which also can be developed with consideration for the natural, landscape, social and economic aspects. Tourism can also be a solution for the increase of economic values and life quality of the poorest rural communes. Hence, local authorities increasingly appreciate the role of tourism in their areas as a potential means of their social and economic development. When planning tourist routes, it is very important to remember about the natural potential, together with its protection. On the other hand, the forest, water and valuable protected areas are usually the most important touristic values influencing the general index of the tourism potential. The aim of the present study was to analyse the tourist potential of rural areas before and after the proposed tourism development and establishment of protected areas in a selected commune area – Łubianka, Poland. For this purpose, the tourist, associated and environmental indices were taken into consideration. The current general index of tourism potential classified the analysed area at the lowest level in the region. The proposed tourism development and creation of a nature protection area and objects caused an increase of tourist and associated values of analysed area, improved tourism potential, and placed the commune in a better position in the region. Overall, it can be concluded, that relatively simple activities can improve the tourism potential and furthermore, as a result an improvement in the social and economic status of the local community can be noted.

**Key words:** rural areas; tourist and associated values; protected areas; tourist route

### Introduction

Rural areas were traditionally considered only as areas with high agricultural activity. However, this has been changing during the past decades due to the establishment of other functions, such as natural aspects, residential properties and services (Czapiewski 2013). One of the non-agricultural functions, partly included in services, is tourism. It can be a significant factor for the future development and promotion of rural areas (Liu 2006). This is especially valid for sustainable tourism, meaning the type, intensity and scale of tourism which takes into consideration environmental aspects, as well as permanent maintenance of natural features for the future generations (Sikorska-Wolak 2009; Łuszczuk 2010). Moreover, areas with high natural values, are usually protected under the national or international law and a different type of tourism should be considered

in these areas. There are several types of preferred tourism in protected areas with high natural values, such as ecotourism, rural tourism, qualified tourism and landscape tourism (Kirylyuk 2005; Szczepanowski 2005). There is a special focus on ecotourism and rural tourism in rural and protected areas, due to the high concern for environmental protection (Sikorska-Wolak 2009; Ogârlaci and Popa 2011). Ecotourism and landscape tourism can be organised by the local authorities. However it is also important to understand that planners must take into account the interests and concerns of stakeholders in the planning, development and management processes (Kayat 2008). Rural tourism is usually preferred in rural areas with high natural values and is organised by the commune's citizens in their households (Kirylyuk 2005).

Several benefits of sustainable tourism in rural areas have been noted, especially in terms of the socio-economic aspects. This has been observed in many countries with a long tradition of tourism in rural areas and it has already been recorded in some Polish communes, where tourism in rural areas was initiated (Sikorska-Wolak 2007; Sawicki and Golian 2009). The previous investigations revealed, that common opinion about tourism in the local community has changed during the last decades. People have started to appreciate tourism as a part of the local development (Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh 2014). The total benefits are observed for all stakeholders, as well as for the natural and cultural environment. The social benefits include an increasing employment, development of the local infrastructure and improving quality of life (Majewski and Lane 2001; Szczepanowski 2005; Jędrzejczyk 2007; Rădac 2012). It also has been found that development of tourism has a positive influence on the local authorities by increasing the municipal revenues, as well as a decrease in the migration of the local community and commune's promotion (Majewski and Lane 2001; Szczepanowski 2005). The other benefits of tourism include enhanced knowledge of the local culture, customs and even food. In the case of rural tourism the offer often includes closer relations with the local inhabitants (Szczepanowski 2005; Sikorska-Wolak 2006). According to Andriotis (2011) among the other features the above mentioned are the most required by tourists in the rural areas. The other authors pointed out the benefits of tourism in rural areas for the natural and cultural environment, such as aiming to maintain valuable places, orientation of tourist traffic, as well as protection and revitalization of monuments and objects of the cultural heritage (Majewski and Lane 2001; Szczepanowski 2005; Angelevska-Najdeska and Rakicevik 2012; Rădac et al. 2012). However, it has been previously observed that tourism can also generate some losses, especially when it is operated without any rules (Fleischer and Felsenstein 2000; Cánoves et al. 2004). Furthermore, as a result, the destruction of the environment, exploitation of resources, disappearance of the local cultures, and economic losses can be observed. One of the possibilities of decreasing the negative effects of tourism on the natural and socio-economic aspects is the establishment of the concept of tourism development (Lu and Nepal 2009). This concept should define the proper proportions between requirements of the local community and authorities, tourists, the natural and cultural environment (Cater 1995). According to Kowalczyk and Derek (2010) it is possible to determine the concept of development of sustainable tourism, tourist region, tourist landscape, an evolution cycle of tourist town or development of tourism facilities and services. However, according to Williams (2000) in the case of protected areas, which are often located in rural areas, three basic tourism concepts can be determined: spatial zoning, concentration-dispersion of tourism and limited access.

It has been noted that only 16 percent of communes in Poland have beneficial conditions for tourism development, while about 10 percent revealed some values, which can be important (Gralak and Długokęcka 2004). However, the tourism potential, here understood as all the elements of geographical environment and human activities, which can be used for tourism development, is much greater in rural areas in comparison to the urban ones. This is associated with the diversity of the rural landscape, several protected areas, huge forest areas, water reservoirs and rich resources of cultural heritage. Hence, it seems to be extremely important to extend the tourism function and increase the existing tourism potential of rural communes, in order to enhance the socio-economic conditions while taking into consideration a sustainable policy and the multifunctional aspects of rural communes (Sikorska-Wolak 2009). One of the possibilities of tourism potential evaluation is the Polish method proposed by Gołembski (1999) and Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007), based on multidimensional comparative analysis. Another way to assess the tourism potential is the Weighted Linear Combination method (WLC) with application of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (Ashouri and Fariyadi 2010), the Multiple Linear Regression method (Iatu and Bulai 2011), the Multi-Criteria Decision Method (Al Mamun and Mitra 2012) or application of GIS tools (Van der Merwe and Van Niekerk 2013).

The aims of the study were as follows: (i) to evaluate the influence of proposed tourism development based on certain measures of tourism potential; (ii) to determine the effect of establishment of nature conservation areas and objects on attractiveness for tourists.

## **Materials and methods**

Evaluation of the tourism potential of the studied area included three phases. The first initial phase included the collection of all necessary data about the area. These data (status for 2013) were mainly collected by the local authority institutions. In the next phase the collected data were organized and weights for certain elements of tourism potential were given. The weights of individual elements were the modified weights proposed by Gołembski (1999) and Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007), with consideration for the influence on certain values (if the weight is higher, the element is more significant). Tourist values of the analysed commune were determined by using indices, which included natural factors, such as the land use structure, protected objects and areas, as well as the non-natural aspects, such as transport availability and associated objects. Additionally the state of the natural environment and spatial management were also analysed (Witkowska-Dąbrowska 2007).

The last phase of analysis and evaluation was based on evaluation of tourism potential of the presented area. The obtained results revealed the weakest and the strongest points of area and allowed designation of the directions of tourism development in this area. For evaluation of the tourism potential, both the existing and planned multidimensional comparative analysis was used. The general index of tourism potential is the result of all proposed values (Gołembski 1999). For this purpose, 21 indicators were analysed, split into three groups: tourist, associated, state of the environment and spatial development.

A certain weight was assigned to each group in terms of their importance for tourism potential, according to the weights proposed by Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007): tourist

values – 0.6; associated values – 0.2; state of environment and spatial development values – 0.2.

The touristic values, which include natural conditions and tourism infrastructure, were analysed with the aid of 9 indices (Tab. 1). The most important include the water and forest areas, which are the most significant for tourism development. Similarly important are the occurrence of protected areas and tourist routes. Other parameters, such as cultural events, museums and the tourist information point, are the important supplements of tourist values increasing the final score of local tourism potential.

Associated values, which provide the tourism infrastructure independently of tourism occurrence in a specific area, were determined with the aid of eight indices (Tab. 2). Transport availability, determined based on the length of local, regional and national roads, was recognized as the most important. Accessibility of accommodation and institutions responsible for tourist safety and comfort were also found as very important.

**Table 1.** Indices describing the tourist features.

| Symbol    | Index                                  | Pattern  | Weight |
|-----------|--|--|--------|
| $I_{tv1}$ | Forest area to total area              | Forest area (ha) / commune area (ha)                             | 0.20   |
| $I_{tv2}$ | Water area to total area               | Water area (ha) / commune area (ha)                              | 0.25   |
| $I_{tv3}$ | Meadows and pasture area to total area | Meadows and pasture areas (ha) / commune area (ha)               | 0.05   |
| $I_{tv4}$ | Natural monuments                      | Number of natural monuments in commune area / 10 km <sup>2</sup> | 0.05   |
| $I_{tv5}$ | Protected areas                        | Protected areas (ha) / commune area (ha)                         | 0.15   |
| $I_{tv6}$ | Tourist routes                         | Length of tourist routes (km) / commune area (km <sup>2</sup> )  | 0.15   |
| $I_{tv7}$ | Annual cultural events                 | Number of events / 365 days × 100                                | 0.05   |
| $I_{tv8}$ | Museums                                | Number of museums in commune area / 10 km <sup>2</sup>           | 0.05   |
| $I_{tv9}$ | Cultural objects in commune area       | Number of stationary historical monuments / 10 km <sup>2</sup>   | 0.05   |

Source: author's study based on Golebski (1999) and Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007).

**Table 2.** Indices determining the associated values.

| Symbol    | Index                                     | Pattern   | Weight |
|-----------|---|---|--------|
| $I_{av1}$ | Length of local, regional, national roads | Length of roads (km) / commune area (km <sup>2</sup> )                                | 0.20   |
| $I_{av2}$ | Number of active railway stations         | Number of active railway stations / 10 km <sup>2</sup>                                | 0.15   |
| $I_{av3}$ | Number of interregional bus stops         | Number of interregional bus stops / 10 km <sup>2</sup>                                | 0.15   |
| $I_{av4}$ | Safety institutions                       | Number of police offices, municipal guard / 10 km <sup>2</sup>                        | 0.05   |
| $I_{av5}$ | Health care                               | Number of pharmacies, pharmacy points, health centres, hospitals / 10 km <sup>2</sup> | 0.05   |
| $I_{av6}$ | Accommodation                             | Number of accommodation units / commune area (km <sup>2</sup> )                       | 0.20   |
| $I_{av7}$ | Sports facilities                         | Number of sports facilities / 10 km <sup>2</sup>                                      | 0.10   |
| $I_{av8}$ | Tourist information points                | Number of tourist information points / 10 km <sup>2</sup>                             | 0.10   |

Source: author's study based on Golebski (1999) and Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007).

Four indices were selected for analysis of the state of environment and spatial development (Tab. 3). Water and air pollution, as well as soil pollution, should be treated as the key indices. For the spatial development index, the ratio of area included in local land use planning to the whole commune area was employed.

The analysed features were normalized by calculation of the ratio of a certain index value to the reference value. The highest value of the certain index noted in a rural commune within the county was treated as its reference. The general index, which was calculated for determination of the tourism potential of the analysed commune, was calculated based on the indices of each analysed group (Gołembski 1999).

**Table 3.** Indices characterising the state of environment and spatial development.

| Symbol      | Index               | Pattern   | Weight |
|-------------|---------------------|---|--------|
| $I_{sesd1}$ | Air pollution       | Emission of air pollutants:<br>• Below limits – 1 point,<br>• Above limits – 0 points                 | 0.40   |
| $I_{sesd2}$ | Water pollution     | Inhabitants connected to the sewage system (%) / inhabitants connected to the water supply system (%) | 0.40   |
| $I_{sesd3}$ | Soil pollution      | Length of local roads (km) / commune area (km <sup>2</sup> )  | 0.10   |
| $I_{sesd4}$ | Spatial development | Area included in local land use planning (km <sup>2</sup> ) / commune area (km <sup>2</sup> )         | 0.10   |

Source: author's study based on Gołembski (1999) and Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007).

### Location of the studied area

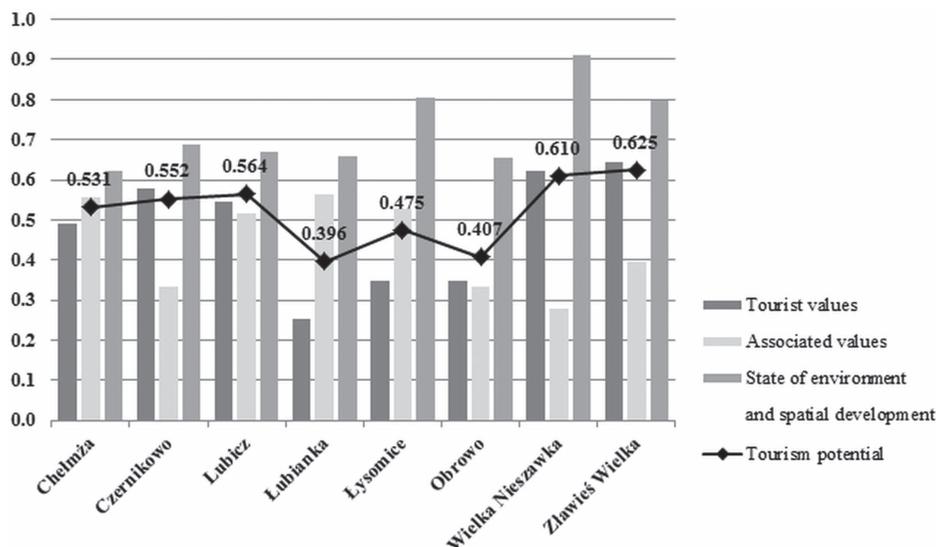
The Łubianka commune is located in the Toruń County, in the central part of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. The commune is located between two large cities, at a distance of about 6 km from Toruń and 22 km from Bydgoszcz. The analysed commune has the smallest area in the county, 84.64 km<sup>2</sup>, about 7 percent of the whole county area. The land use is dominated by agriculture (87.9 percent of the total area). The forest area covers only 4.8 percent, while water does not exceed 1.0 percent of the total commune area.

The concept of tourist-recreation development for the proposed protected area was conceived for the park and palace complex located in the northern part of the Łubianka commune in Wybzc village. The boundary in the north-west, north and north-east runs along woodlots determining the boundary between the park and the road. The south-east boundary is mainly agricultural, while the southeast boundary is determined by a water ditch. The whole park and palace complex covers approximately 4.5 ha. The shape of the park resembles a quarter of a circle (Fig. 3).

### Results

#### The current tourism potential of the Łubianka commune

The analysis of tourism potential based on tourist, associated and state of the environment and spatial development values revealed that the analysed commune area has currently the lowest general index value of all the Toruń County communes (Fig. 1).

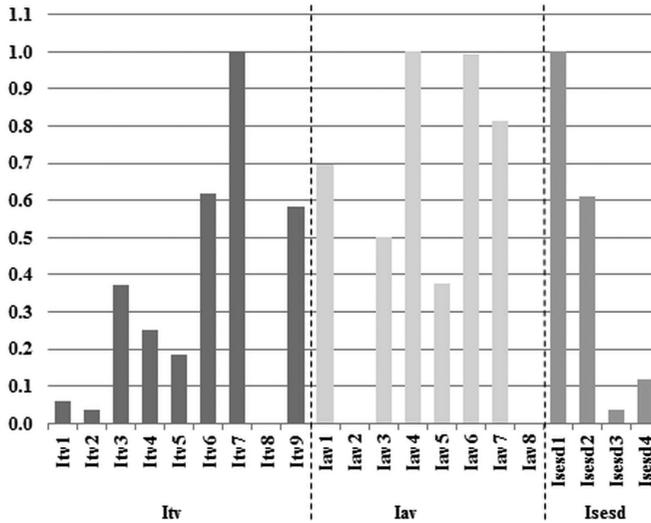


**Fig. 1.** Current evaluation of tourism potential of Toruń County communes  
Source: author's study.

The low level of the tourist values index had a strong influence on the final score. The area is featured by a low level of forest area, as well as meadows and pastures, which are the most important for recreation. There is also a small number of natural monuments and other protected areas, as well as tourist routes. However, in comparison to other communes, there was quite a number of regular cultural events recorded, such as sport competitions and cultural performances. There is a lack of museums, which could be an additional value for a local scale. There are many stationary historic monuments, which are unfortunately not well recommended or promoted.

Associated parameters revealed good road access, public transport and safety facilities, and a large number of recreation facilities. Moreover, quite a large number of accommodation places is noted, which is crucial for the future tourism development. However, no tourist information points were found.

The state of the environment is comparable to the whole county area. There are no factories emitting exceeded levels of air pollutants. However, the sewage system is not sufficient. The road network is well developed, which makes it easier to reach valuable areas, however it can also cause a higher level of air pollution. Local land use planning covers only 3.3 percent of the commune area (Fig. 2).

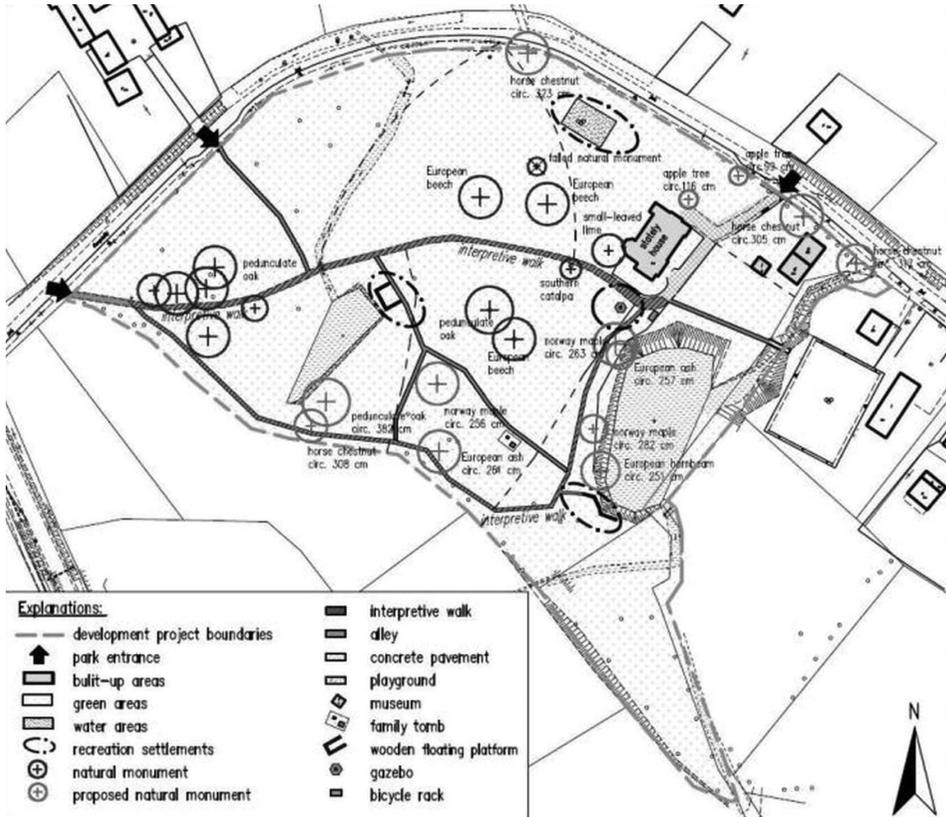


**Fig. 2.** Current levels of tourist, associated and state of environment and spatial development values of the Łubianka commune  
Source: author's study.

### The proposed tourist-recreation management of the analysed area

To increase the tourism potential of the analysed commune, the idea of protected areas and objects are proposed, together with a proposition of tourist routes. The proposed natural-landscape complex protected area is located in Wybcz village. The main reason for nature conservation in this area is the high level of natural values, especially valuable trees. Thirteen trees of natural monument size are located there. The additional value is the unique composition system of park and water ponds located in the south and south-western parts of the park. Establishment of a nature conservation and landscape protection area will make it possible to determine the limitations of this area. Moreover, it will allow activation of this area's potential for tourism. At the same time, individual protection of trees as natural monuments will help to preserve the specific and unique objects.

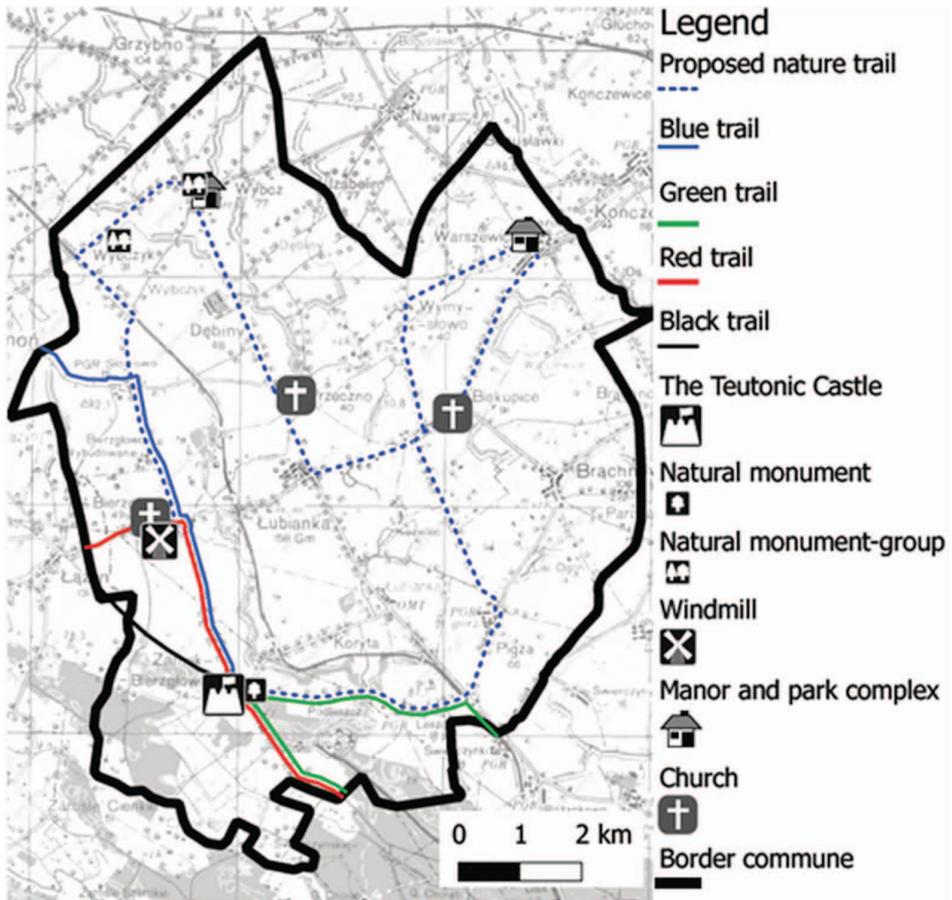
The main assumption of the proposed project was to maintain the primary park conception, especially with respect to the arrangement of pathways. To enhance the tourism potential of this area, some items of recreation infrastructure were proposed according to the concept of development of tourist facilities and services (Rogalewski 1979). Most of them should be constructed from wood, which should complement the primary composition system of the park and the existing spatial structure. Four functional-recreation zones would be created. Two of them would be located near water ponds and simultaneously the creation of a wooden platform is planned. This would create a possibility to enjoy the nature without destroying it. The third zone would be located near the palace. Moreover, location of a wooden arbour near the palace would be a place for education and protection against rain. The fourth zone would be located near the existing playground and a sport recreation area is proposed here (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** The concept of tourist-recreation development of the palace and park complex in Wycbcz village located in the Łubianka commune (scale 1:2 500)  
Source: author's study.

Due to many natural attractions, the educational route with a total length of 520 m was proposed in the planned natural-landscape complex. The starting point would be located in the wooden arbour place. Eight educational-information points would be located along this route. Information tables would be placed in each of them, and information about interesting species existing in this area would be included.

To enhance the tourist potential of the selected commune area, a tourist route was proposed, and furthermore the above-mentioned park and palace complex would be included in this pathway (Fig. 4). The route is proposed along the existing local roads within the whole commune area, linking the most interesting cultural and natural aspects of the analysed area. The designed tourist bicycle route is 36.5 km long and is a circular trail, with the start and end in the centre of Łubianka. The trail is full of cultural attractions, such as churches, windmills, a castle, as well as natural components (i.e. natural monuments). It is also proposed to organize a special exhibition in one of the outbuildings presenting the history of a famous historical family of the region – the Parpats. It is also suggested to establish a tourist information point in the Bierzgłowski Castle.



**Fig. 4.** Proposed tourist bicycle route and existing routes in the Łubianka commune area (scale 1:100 000)  
Source: author's study.

#### Tourism potential after proposed changes

The proposed conception for establishment of a nature conservation area and objects, as well as tourist development, improved the tourist and associated values of Łubianka commune. A re-evaluation of the touristic potential classified the analysed area in the 6<sup>th</sup> place among provincial communes (Fig. 5). The value of the general index with the proposed ideas taken into consideration was at the level of 0.501 and increased by 0.105 as compared to the previous value.

The proposed idea of tourist-recreation development mainly influenced the tourist values by increasing the index concerning natural monuments, as well as the ratio of protected areas to the whole commune area. Also, inclusion of the sport facilities intended for the inhabitants and visitors caused the improvement of the associated values of the commune.

The proposed tourist route caused an over 100 percent increase of trail density in the analysed area. Additionally, the exhibition presenting the history of the local Parpats fam-

ily and palaces could be treated as a local museum. Moreover, a tourist information point is also a very important attraction for tourists. The castle with information would be a very good solution, because an accommodation point is usually also a place where tourists are looking for information. The proposed conception did not influence the values related to the state of the environment and spatial development (Fig. 6).

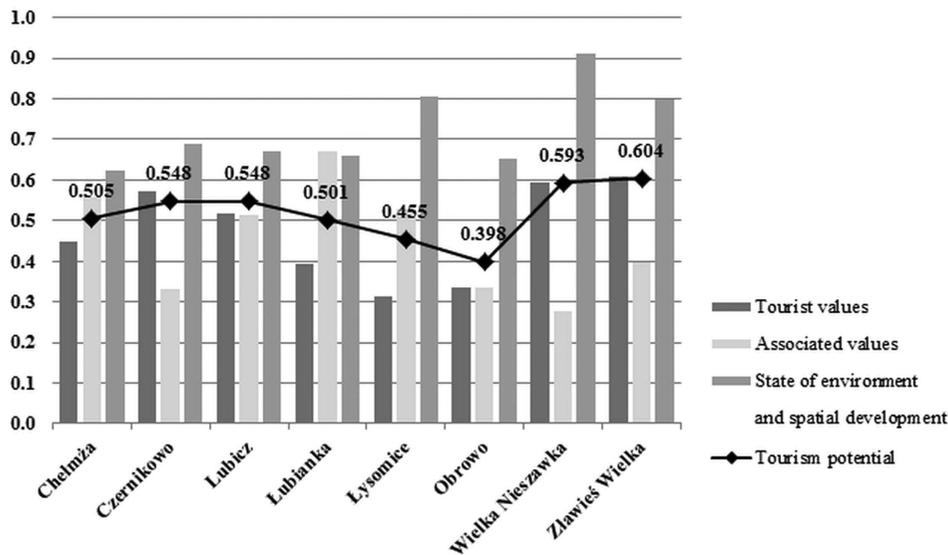


Fig. 5. Evaluation of tourism potential of the Toruń County communes with considered proposals of tourist development  
Source: author's study.

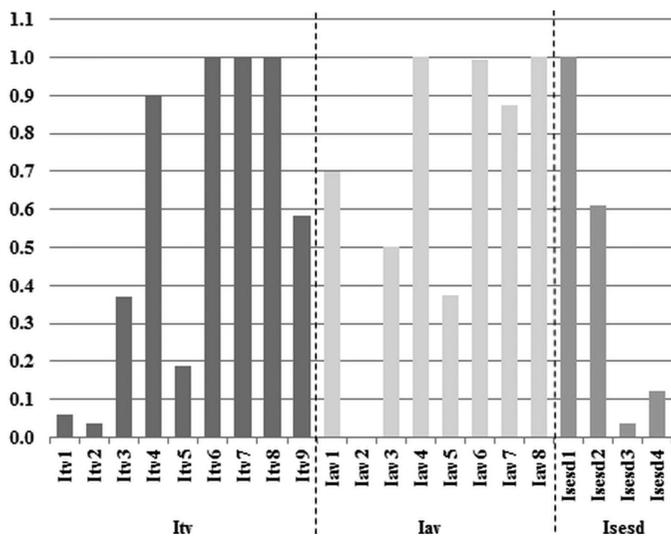


Fig. 6. Levels of tourist, associated and state of environment and spatial development values of the Lubianka commune with considered proposals of tourist development  
Source: author's study.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The analysed indices allow a very simple evaluation of the attractiveness of a commune, including simultaneous analysis of natural and non-natural factors. Blancas et al. (2010) and Lozano-Oyola et al. (2012) previously emphasized that indices concerning sustainable tourism, as well as the attractiveness for tourists factors, are necessary for objective evaluation of an area. They help in identification of commune values, evaluation of tourist potential and planning decisions at every level of the decision-making process (Park and Yoon 2011).

According to Baum (2011), as well as Berkel and Verburg (2011), the traditional tourist values in Poland are present mainly in the communes located in the northern part (near the Baltic Sea) and the southern part of country (the Sudetes and Carpathian Mountains), while most of the communes are located in the central part. Durydiwka (2013) investigations conducted in 1995-2005 determined the Łubianka area as a commune with poorly developed tourist functions, similarly as most of the rural areas in this country. The results obtained by the authors for the Łubianka commune revealed the current attractiveness for tourists as the lowest on the provincial scale. The current general index is at the level 0.396, and is also lower than in the other communes located in a very attractive area of Poland (Witkowska-Dąbrowska 2007). Similarly to the investigations presented by Witkowska-Dąbrowska (2007), higher attractiveness for tourists was revealed by communes with high touristic values, such as high forestry area, surface water and natural protected areas and cultural objects. The proposed conception of a new tourist route and creation of a natural landscape area will enhance the natural values of the studied commune. The general index of attractiveness for tourists calculated after the proposed changes would be comparable to the average value for the Toruń County, as well as that of another county, Olsztyn, which is rich in natural values (Witkowska-Dąbrowska 2007). However, it is very difficult to compare the obtained results with those obtained in other counties (Gołębski 1999; Witkowska-Dąbrowska 2007), due to a very subjective element, which is the reference value, different for every county (Blancas et al. 2010).

According to Berkel and Verburg (2011) the Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, are competitive due to their highly productive agricultural conditions and limited restrictions. The Eastern European countries have yet to be largely exploited and so can be targeted for tourism development. In comparison to Western European the countries like Poland still offer cleaner natural environment and authentic rural lifestyle (Polucha and Žukovskis 2010). The planned tourist-recreation development will adjust the analysed area to public use and allow the creation of new places of recreation as well as the protection of many valuable objects to keep for the present and future generations, both the inhabitants and tourists. Similarly, it can improve the living conditions of local people, which is one of the most important aspects of sustainable development at the local scale, including sustainable tourism (Risteski et al. 2012). At the same time, the proposed bicycle route and educational trail in the natural-landscape complex will contribute to increased social awareness and education. The planned activities will have a positive effect on attractiveness for tourists, as well as the proposed revitalization of the palace and park complex. However, it is based on the concept of development of tourism facilities and services and will not adversely affect the natural resources. It will preserve the cultural heritage and contribute to proper management and planning of this area (Risteski

et al. 2012; Padín et al. 2013). Hence, the local authority policy should aim at both maintenance of the natural character of rural areas together with nature conservation, and on the other hand, at availability for tourist activity (Lozano-Oyola et al. 2012; Sikorska-Wolak 2009). This proposed solution of tourism development at the commune level should not be treated as a solution for all social and economic problems at the local scale, but only as a factor exerting positive influence on the future potential of the area (Kosmaczewska 2008; Baum 2011; Coria and Calfucura 2012).

Overall, in the case of rural communes, the proper tourism development, with the creation of nature conservation areas and objects, together with a proposal of their tourism and recreation development, can positively affect the tourist potential of the area. It can also improve the tourist and associated values and result in possible improvement of the quality of life of the local society in the future.

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