

MISCELLANEA

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THE ECOTOURISM NETWORK „BETWEEN BUG AND NAREW” AS AN EXAMPLE OF ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN POLAND

Introduction

In the world, in various types of territorial units, there is concern about achieving sustainable socio-economic development. In rural areas rich in natural environment, ecotourism is proposed as a factor of local development understood as a process of positive changes (quantitative growth and qualitative progress), taking into account the needs, preferences and the hierarchy of values typical for a given area.

The ecotourism network „Between Bug and Narew” is located in north-eastern Poland, 100-120 km from Warsaw. It was established in 2010 as a result of the cooperation of gminas located in the watershed of Bug and Narew and Social Ecologic Institute (SEI) in Warsaw, which initiated the project. As a result of the cooperation that lasted one and half a year (from July 2009 to December 2010) as part of the project entitled *Model Ecotourism Network between the Bug and the Narew*, a group of farm tourism entrepreneurs, farmers, artists, craftsmen, social activists and guides was established to promote the services offered for tourists, provided in rural areas of special natural values. The beauty of the land is associated with Bug and Narew rivers that run through this region. This territory has been included in the European Natura 2000 network of protected areas. The attractiveness of Polish Bug river is mostly related to its natural character, as the channel is not regulated and the river meanders, forming numerous oxbow lakes. The surroundings of Bug are distinguished by the diversity of habitats and animal species. The situation of Narew river is identical.

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The ecotourism network created in this way – the first one in Poland – is located within the territory of 13 gminas, mainly rural, in the following poviats: Ostrów Mazowiecka, Sokołów Podlaski, Węgrów and Wyszaków¹. Facilities included in the network are involved, to a various extent, in the activity supporting the use of local resources in order to stimulate the sustainable social and economic development – especially in the development of ecotourism services, the cultivation of regional traditions, the promotion of healthy lifestyle, environmental protection and biodiversity etc. And that makes up the idea of sustainable development.

1. The ecotourism network „Between Bug and Narew”

The tourism sector has had a significant, but not always positive impact on visited areas for decades. Mass tourism started to be accused of the devastation of the environment, destruction of monuments, disappearance of the local culture, exploitation of local communities or misconceived infrastructure investments. In the era of the paradigm of sustainable social and economic development, sustainable tourism or ecotourism started to be pointed as one of improvement measures. The role of ecotourism for sustainable development was noticed and recorded in the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* during the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation in Santiago on 1 October 1999. Article 3 of the Code is entitled: *Tourism, a Factor of Sustainable Development*. Point 5 of Article 3 presents ecotourism as a form of tourism that gives it a special value².

In order to explain the essence and sense of ecotourism, one should start from defining sustainable tourism, which is a broader concept than ecotourism, as D. Zaręba points out. A pioneer and a promoter of ecotourism in Poland, whose book entitled *Ecotourism* was published in 2000 as the second one covering this issue in Poland, and was published for the third time in 2010 – does not agree to them being used interchangeably. Sustainable tourism is a broadly defined concept concerning the development of eco-friendly tourism, which covers all known kinds of tourism that have undergone proper „ecologisation” both in rural areas and towns as well as small tourist centres and large entertainment and leisure centres. Ecotourism is a much narrower concept, as it is a form of travelling, which is closely related to nature and the original culture of the areas

¹ The essence of ecotourism network „Between the Bug and Narew” was presented in detail in the article: J. Omieciuch, *Ecotourism Network between the Bug and Narew – the Example of the Regional Ecotourism Product in Poland*, 9th International Conference: New Perspectives in Tourism Management (TOURMAN2014) Editor in Chief: Prof. Dr. Erdoğan KOÇ Editors: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan ABDİOĞLU Assist. Prof. Dr. Recep KILIÇ, s. 74-83.

² *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. For Responsible Tourism*, UNWTO, United Nations, Santiago, Chile, 27 September - 1 October 1999.

of high natural values³. In Poland, the classification problems were described, among other things, by P. Adamski and Sz. Ciapała⁴.

The concept of ecotourism has not been defined precisely, which is reflected in the multitude of definitions that appear in source literature. A list of ecotourism terms was created e.g. by P. Björk⁵. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) has published a definition of ecotourism on its website twice. The latest version of the definition applies from 2015. According to TIES, ecotourism means „responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”⁶.

D. Zaręba distinguishes three core characteristics of ecotourism, which make it stand out against other forms of travelling. Firstly, it is a form of active and thorough exploration of areas of outstanding natural and cultural values. Secondly, ecotourism guards the harmony of natural ecosystems and the cultural independence of local communities. Thirdly, it provides funds for effective protection of cultural heritage values and brings real economic and social benefits to local people⁷. There is a common agreement as to the fact that the cognitive subject of ecotourism covers both natural and cultural values. Although the research conducted by E. Tyran ten years ago proved that the term „ecotourism” is associated rather with ecology, which is again understood as tourism showing greatest care about environmental protection⁸.

D. Zaręba mentions also the assets of Poland, which make one believe that ecotourism may have a great influence on the development of rural areas. The author mentions also its particular natural and cultural assets⁹. In 2013, 15 out of 16 Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO) operating in Poland, which determined the potential of tourist products in their regions (for the purposes of the update of the *Marketing Strategy of Poland in the Tourism Sector*) provided information on the ecotourism offer within their area. Silesian Voivodeship

³ D. Zaręba, *Ecotourism*, PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 37.

⁴ P. Adamski, Sz. Ciapała, *Wildlife Tourism, Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism – Problems with Classification*, „Folia Touristic” 2016, No. 40.

⁵ P. Björk, *Ecotourism from a Conceptual Perspective, an Extended Definition of a Unique Tourism Form*, „International Journal of Tourism Research” 2000, No. 2, pp. 189-202.

⁶ M. Meyer, *Ecotourism a Brief Description*, in: *Ecotourism Facing Global Challenges. Ideas, Trends, Best Practices*, SIE, FRRB AgriNatura, Warszawa 2015, p. 6.

⁷ D. Zaręba, *Ecotourism*, op. cit., p. 52.

⁸ E. Tyran, *Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism*, „Folia Universitatis Agriculturae Stetinensis” 2007, Oeconomica 256 (48), p. 309.

⁹ More D. Zaręba, *Ecotourism Development in Poland – Best Practice*, (in:) *Ecotourism Facing Global Challenges*, op. cit., p. 12;14.

was an exception, but for five Polish voivodeships: Lublin, Mazovian, Opole, Podlaskie and Pomeranian, ecotourism was a priority product¹⁰. The potential of ecotourism in Poland does not raise any doubts and the results of surveys carried out by the Polish Tourism Organisation among consumers of tourist services confirm the constantly increasing interest in ecotourism and the existence of a demand for this kind of services¹¹.

The ecotourism network „Between Bug and Narew” is a group of business owners, hosts and artists who decided to work together in accordance with the principles of ecotourism. The network was established in 2010 as a result of a project implemented by the Social Ecologic Institute (SEI was founded on 26 April 1990)¹², which invited all persons interested in the development of ecotourism in the area between Bug and Narew to join the project. As a result of the work on the joint undertaking, a group of farm tourism owners, farmers, artists, craftsmen, social activists and guides was established to promote tourist services offered under a common brand. The Polish project entitled *Model Ecotourism Network between Bug and Narew*, coordinated by Tomasz Włoszczowski, was financially supported by Island, Lichtenstein and Norway. It was financed from the funds of the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism as well as Polish state funds from the Fund for Non-Governmental Organisations¹³. During the project implementation, the members participated in working meetings, study trips to other countries and conferences. They underwent training and gained experience on ecotourism.

The following gminas were involved in the project: Brańszczyk, Brok, Długosiodło, Łochów, Małkinia Górna, Nur, Obryte, Ostrów Mazowiecka, Rząśnik, Sadowne, Somianka, Zaręby Kościelne and Zatory. Ostrów Mazowiecka Powiat that belongs to Mazovian Voivodeship includes five gminas, i.e. Brok, Małkinia Górna, Nur, Ostrów Mazowiecka and Zaręby Kościelne. In 2010, there were ten facilities within the above five gminas located by or in the vicinity of river Bug. There have been few changes during the nine years of the network's existence – some facilities ceased to exist and some have joined the network. Currently the network includes nine facilities¹⁴.

¹⁰ D. Zientalska, *Ecotourism in Poland 2016*, Departament Strategii POT, POT, p. 2.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 7.

¹² More about SEI in: *Poland Naturally. Report on the state of ecotourism in Poland as of 2012*, ed. M. Kronenberg, M. Nowakowska, Instytut Spraw Obywatelskich, Łódź p. 31-32.

¹³ *Ecotourism between Bug and Narew. Guide to Municipalities and Facilities*, ed. B. Polak, SIE, Warszawa 2010, p. 13.

¹⁴ *The Rules of „Between Bug and Narew” Ecotourism Cooperation Network*, SIE.

The network has its own logo and website (www.bugnarew.pl), where it advertises itself as follows: „Visiting us, you will meet warm people, with a passion for their work, respect for nature, hosts that want to provide you unforgettable experiences while making you feel at home. Choosing a place from our network, you will not only spend wonderful holidays but also be assured to help environment protection, local culture and communities”¹⁵.

The concept of ecotourism, modelled on a definition developed by Norwegian ecotourism service providers, has been defined for the purposes of the Polish network. „Ecotourism is enriching experiences with nature and culture, organised by responsible business owners, that care about the nature, their guests and the local community that they are part”¹⁶. In *The Rules of „Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism cooperation network*, three world ecotourism principles that must be followed by network were defined:

- 1) an offer based on nature, culture, local uniqueness, promotion, protection and respect for the natural and cultural environment;
- 2) taking care about the environment and local communities, environmental protection and biodiversity, supporting the local economy;
- 3) positive experiences expanding one's knowledge and raising awareness among guests and hosts¹⁷.

The Rules also formulates the goals of the ecotourism network, which include:

1. Mutual support, promotion and development of the ecotourism project implemented by the members of the network;
2. Increasing the income of network members (by increasing the quality of the offered products and services with a focus on environment, ecology and ecotourism criteria; thus the possibility of increasing prices for offered services; ensuring demand for offered products and services; increasing the number of customers and guests, extending the time of their stay, increasing the contribution to the development of the local economy).
3. Promotion of the offer and the activity of the network members, especially among ecotourism and clients who value the principles of ecotourism, ecology and sustainable development.
4. Promotion of the cooperation network, ecotourism and ecotourism projects within the area of the networks' operations and the promotion of the local ecotourism certification system.

¹⁵ <http://www.bugnarew.pl/pl/start>

¹⁶ *The Rules of „Between Bug and Narew” Ecotourism Cooperation Network ...*, op. cit.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

5. Promotion and protection of the cultural and natural resources of the region, the sustainable development of these areas, local eco farming, local processing, eco tourism offer and biodiversity protection.
6. The development of a cross-sector cooperation (social, public and private partnership) and social integration focused on the idea of sustainable development and ecotourism.
7. Creating local synergies through the cooperation and exchange of experiences and information between network members.
8. Taking care about the local economy and local communities by establishing cooperation and using local services, raw materials and products, especially those manufactured in an eco-friendly manner and reflecting the local culture and tradition.

The network is a voluntary association, but it is not formally registered. The network may associate facilities that are located in five poviats in Mazovia Voivodeship in Poland. These are poviats: Ostrów Mazowiecka, Pułtusk, Sokołów Podlaski, Węgrów and Wyszaków. Network members inform tourists about offers of other facilities that belong to the network. In order to ensure the proper functioning of the network, the members select a person to manage it. There is still some interest in joining the network, but its not very strong. Formal requirements regarding the membership, including the forms of activity, have been described in the *Rules*.

According to the Rules, members of the network are obliged to¹⁸:

- respect and promote the principles of ecotourism in their activity as well as other areas;
- become familiar with the activities of all the network members;
- promote the activity of all network members by: informing their guests about the offer of other network members, exchanging information on the possibility of expanding the offer and acquiring customers, offering services and products of other network members to their guests;
- cooperate with other network members in the creation and implementation of the joint offer;
- perform tasks assigned by the network;
- contribute to the development of the network, increase the quality and environmental protection standards and protect the image of the network;
- participate in network meetings, which are held at least once in two months.

¹⁸ *The Rules of „Between Bug and Narew” Ecotourism Cooperation Network ...*, op. cit.

No such meetings are organised currently. Members of „Between Bug and Narew” network met in a larger circle at the 3rd European Ecotourism Conference. Five network members took part in the conference held between 26 and 29 April 2015 in Jachranka near Warsaw.

The best facilities, meeting high ecology and environmental protection standards, received the Polish Ecotourism Certificate, which was created at the grass roots for the purposes of the network by project participants. Working on it, the Social Ecologic Institute was inspired by Norwegian methodology. It was consulted with L. Lamark, who was responsible for ecotourism certification in Norway. The Institute considered also other systems used in the world, trying to adapt them to the Polish conditions and possibilities. It is the first ecotourism certificate developed in Poland¹⁹.

2. Research methodology

The purpose of the paper is to show the positive influence of „Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network on the sustainable development of Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát in Mazovian Voivodeship in Poland. The influence of this factor was shown through the presentation of activities supporting social and economic development, which were identified by the authors as a result of the analysis of the activity of individual network members.

The article is based on numerous publications of the Social Ecologic Institute (SEI) as well as the information published on the official website of „Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network, i.e. www.bugnarew.pl, and on websites of network members documenting their activities. Information obtained during conversations with owners of facilities that belong to the ecotourism network in Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát was also used. The conversations were held on the occasion of personal participation in many of the events described. Interviews with „Dajana” agrotourism farm owner (Danuta Jabłonka-Grabowska) and „Behind the birch trees” organic farm owner and a staff member of the Social Ecologic Institute (Tomasz Włoszczowski) on the activities of facilities that belong to the network in the recent years seem particularly important for the contents of the paper. Various opinions and information, whose reliability was confirmed, were obtained from information services and social media. Members of the network share their information and photographs, which document the accomplished projects, mainly on Facebook social network. Polish and foreign literature on the importance of ecotourism as a sustainable development

¹⁹ More E. Lenarczyk, S. Priwieziencew, T. Włoszczowski, *Local Ecotourism Certification System*, SIE, Warszawa 2010, pp. 20-25.

factor was also reviewed. Numerous academic works on this topic can be found in foreign literature, whereas Polish literature on the subject is not so extensive.

Numerous academic works on the importance of ecotourism for sustainable development have been published in the world. Sample foreign publications that present ecotourism as a sustainable development factor refer to numerous places, such as Galápagos Islands, Costa Rica, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Kenya, South Africa and the USA²⁰, Romania²¹, Bhutan²². Ecotourism as a sustainable development factor was also mentioned by: F. Eriksson, M. Lidström (2013); T. Kiper (2013); B. Neth (2008); Dewi Patrika A.D. Pradati (2017); C.C Tisdell (1998). However, the Polish literature on the subject is not so extensive. In Poland, ecotourism as a chance for sustainable growth was analysed, among others, by B. Woś²³.

3. “Dajana” agrotourism farm versus sustainable development of Ostrów Mazowiecka Powiat

The activity of „Dajana” agrotourism farm located in Brok by river Bug is distinguished among other members of „Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network not only in the opinion of the authors of the paper. It was noticed and appreciated by the authorities of Ostrów Mazowiecka town. From the hands of the mayor Danuta Jabłonka-Grabowska the owner of „Dajana” was awarded the 2013 Local Community Leader for her activity²⁴. The powiat authorities of Ostrów Mazowiecka decided that the efforts of persons whose work supports the local community and who are distinguished by exceptional commitment should be appreciated. Zofia and Jerzy Kolanowscy, also members of the network, received the same distinction. One can observe that D. Jabłonka-Grabowska initiates numerous activities (some from the recent years will be presented in this paragraph) and her leadership bonds, joins and sustains a naturally fragile

²⁰ M. Honey, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development. Who Owns Paradise?* 2nd Edition, Island Press, Washington-Covelo-London 2008.

²¹ M. Stoian, *Ecotourism – Factor of Sustainable development*, „Quality – Access to Success” Sep 2013, Supplement, Vol. 14, pp.159-172.

²² Ch. Rinzin, W.J.V. Vermeulen, P. Glasbergen, *Ecotourism as a Mechanism for Sustainable Development: the Case of Bhutan*, „Environmental Sciences” 2007, Volume 4, Issue 2, pp. 109-125.

²³ B. Woś, *Ecotourism as a Chance of Sustainable Development of Rural Areas*, „Infrastructure and Ecology of Rural Areas” 2009, No. 5, pp. 115-122.

²⁴ D. Brzostek, *Ostrów. New Year's Meeting in the Town Hall*, published 28.01.2014 r. at: www.kurierostrowi.pl (<http://kurierostrowi.pl/188071,Ostrow-Spotkanie-Noworoczne-w-ratuszu.html>).

network of cooperating partners²⁵. During the nine years of the network's existence, D. Jabłonka-Grabowska managed it in 2015.

Apart from the high quality of agrotourism services, D. Jabłonka-Grabowska has accomplished many projects within the ecotourism network. She successfully initiated the *Handicraft, Culture and Folk Art Market in White Forest* from *Wandering Markets* series, organised on her own estate. The organization of the event, supported by two associations: („Rzeka” and „Razem Więcej”) and the ecotourism network „Between Bug and Narew”, required financial outlays that the farm incurred from its own resources. The programme of the first market, which was organised on 24 April 2016, covered performances of folk bands, presentations of regional artists, stalls with traditional food and many other attractions for all visitors. Members of “Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network presenting their products from both Ostrów Mazowiecka Powiat („Goat Village” and „The Stork Nest” agrotourism farm from Prostyń) and Sokołów Podlaski Powiat („Dąbrówka” Organic Farm and „On the Hill” agrotourism farm from Grodzisk and „Agrotourism and Education Farm Ewa Mitowska” from Seroczyn) actively participated in the market.

The second *Handicraft, Culture and Folk Art Market in White Forest* was organised on 11 September 2016, and the third one was organised on 30 April 2017. The third market was for the first time co-organised by „Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development in Ostrów Mazowiecka Powiat”²⁶ and “BROK”, i.e. „Brok Regional Cultural Organisation”. The organisers made sure that every visitor found something interesting for themselves. There were stands with traditional food and products of not only folk art. One could see performances of local folk bands: „Retro Band” and „Bezwianka” from Ostrów Mazowiecka, „Polish Flowers” from Chmielewo and Jasienica as well as a girls’ choir from the Primary School in Dudy²⁷. The fourth market was organised on 29 April 2018 on a larger scale, as there were twenty-six exhibitors.

Markets organised in „Dajana” farm were an inspiration for markets in Nur, organised by „Nur Friends Society”. It is a voluntary, self-governing and permanent non-profit association. The activity of this organisation supporting sustainable development, established in 2016, is not intensive, but prospective.

²⁵ Por. P. Zmysłony, *Partnership and Leadership in the Tourist Region*, Wydawnictwo UE in Poznań, Poznań 2008.

²⁶ The institution supported the event financially.

²⁷ A. Mierzwiński, *Fair „U Dajany” in Brok*, published on 02.05.2017 at <http://www.to.com.pl/wiadomosci/a/kiermasz-u-dajany-w-broku-zdjecia,12039852/>.

The first *Nur Land Christmas Market*, integrating the local community, was held on 17 December 2016. The programme of the event covered numerous attractions, such as handicraft workshops, the performance of a folk band and laureates playing on traditional musical instruments, and the visitors could buy local products (cold meat, cheese, dumplings, cakes, honey, fruit liqueurs and Christmas/Easter decorations) from almost 20 producers. The owner of „Dajana” was satisfied with the organisation of the market:

„Thank you for the invitation and the possibility of participating in this special and unusual event. Congratulations!!! *Christmas Market in Nur* was organised in a masterly fashion. The fact that the project was worth implementing was proven by the crowds of pleased inhabitants of Nur and the surroundings. Many thanks and congratulations to Ms Hania Mazurowska and Ms Dorota Michałowska from the Nur Friends Association. Girls, you are great. I am so happy with the fact that there are still people who love their „Small Fatherlands”, their tradition, folk art and culture. WELL DONE!!!”.

After the first successful event, the organisers continued it by organising the first *Nur Land Easter Market* on 2 April 2017 and the second Christmas Market with an equally rich programme on 17 December 2017. *The Second Nur Land Easter Market* was held on 25 March 2018. The organization of Christmas and Easter fairs was continued in the years 2018-2019. Workshop events were financed by Nur gmina, and one of the fairs was also partially financed by the offices of the Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát. The continuation of the markets is a positive signal for the following years. One can assume that the idea will stay in Nur gmina for longer. The involvement of the local community in this type of activity promotes the sustainable development of the Ostrów Poviát.

The “Dajana” farm cooperates with numerous institutions and offers a room in its facility, where various kinds of meetings can be held. For example, „Rzepa” Association organised a conference entitled *Building a Network of Cooperation between Local Agrotourism and Eco Farms*, which was held on 23 August 2017. The conference programme covered a wide spectrum of issues, which was supposed to make the activity supporting sustainable development more dynamic (Table 1). The conference ended with a discussion, which was accompanied by tasting of products produced in the „Dajana” agrotourism farm – carrot cake, honoured in a culinary competition in Mazovia.

Table 1. Conference subject and the speakers

Presentation title	Speaker	Institution
Examples of innovative initiatives for rural areas in Europe	Elżbieta Lenarczyk-Prwiezienczew	Social Ecologic Institute
Different possibilities of selling eco products	Jadwiga Farat	„Farat” eco farm in Rososza
Networking principles	Tomasz Włoszczowski	Social Ecologic Institute
The principles and requirements of joining eco farming and funding possibilities	Urszula Nadratowska	Agricultural Advisory Centre in Ostrów Mazowiecka
Veterinary requirements concerning the sale, production and marketing of animal food products (direct sales, peripheral local limited activity, agricultural retail)	Piotr Orzeł	Poviat Veterinarian in Ostrów Mazowiecka
Sanitary and hygiene requirements concerning the production and marketing of non-animal food products	Tomasz Liwartowski	Director of the Poviat Sanitary Epidemiological Station in Ostrów Mazowiecka
Financial and tax requirements related to the above-mentioned activity	Małgorzata Jackiewicz, Małgorzata Zwierzyńska	Tax Office in Ostrów Mazowiecka
Creating and running an agrotourism farm	Danuta Jablonka	„Dajana” agrotourism farm

Source: own work based on: *Programme of the Conference entitled „Building a Network of Cooperation between Local Agrotourism and eco Farms”*, „Rzeka” Association.

Meetings integrating local community groups are often held at „Dajana” farm. On 2 October 2016, members of the literary section of the University of the Third Age in Ostrów Mazowiecka were staying at the facility. The purpose of the meeting was to present the local history of Brok and to save it from oblivion. It was accompanied by music and poetry and a multimedia presentation about Brok. The guests included representatives of native Brok families as well as the members of „Jarzębina” folk group from Brok. In November 2016, the members of „Razem Węcej” association from Ostrów Mazowiecka organised a Christmas workshop for children. Pupils from the primary school in Dudy made Christmas decorations.

The participants of a children’s day camp organised by the City House of Culture in Ostrów Mazowiecka visited the facility on 7 July 2017. The children had an opportunity to see and feed domestic animals, ride on a pony and use the playground. They participated in workshops, making wooden and paper animal figurines. The weather was perfect for outdoor games and plays. There was a bonfire and a roast sausage, and „Dajana's Carrot Cake” for the dessert. In November 2017, „Dajana” farm was visited by a worker of the Poviat Agricultural Advisory Centre in Ostrów Mazowiecka, who organised a culinary workshop.

The central theme of the meeting was focused on „Culinary traditions in family and tourist diet” or, more precisely, an apple pie, which is one of the most popular cakes that appear in Polish homes and occur in numerous varieties.

The owner of the farm took part in many conferences to share her knowledge and experience related to the running of an agrotourism farm. For example, a presentation entitled *Ecological Nutrition in Agritourism* was held on 29 December 2016 at the Poviát Office, as part of a conference on *The Principles of Healthy Nutrition – Eco, Traditional, Local Food*, organised by „Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development in Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát”.

Individual activities of business entities in a given area do not have such a creative power as joint efforts. Together they can achieve more for sustainable development, but there must be a leader who guides the activities and integrates network members. Having analysed the activity of the facility, one can observe that „Dajana” agrotourism farm is such a leader. The following opinion, expressed by „Nur Friend Society”, proves that Danuta Jabłonka's initiatives are appreciated in the environment where she works for sustainable development: „*The Third Handicraft, Culture and Folk Art Market in White Forest* came to an end. It was a great evening, which gathered numerous visitors. We had an opportunity to listen to music groups from Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát, buy products made by folk artists and taste regional dishes. We would like to thank the organisers of the market for the invitation and warm welcome. The fact that our poviát has activists who cultivate the most beautiful traditions of the region is very inspiring. You can serve us as a model to follow. Thank you!”.

Ending the analysis, it is worth mentioning the honouring of the owner Dajana for her activities. In October 2019, the owner of Dajana received a diploma of recognition from the Marshal of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship for 10 years of work for the promotion and development of tourism in Mazovia.

4. Other facilities of „Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network versus sustainable development of Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát

The main initiator of activities in the ecotourism network seems to be Dajana’s agrotourism in Brok as presented above. Apart from the discussed “Dajana” agrotourism farm, there is one more facility that operates in Brok, and one that no longer cooperates with the network (“One the Bug” agrotourism farm). “Riverside Guest House” in Brok is not much related to the discussed ecotourism network, but there is a link to the website of the ecotourism network in “Recommended www” tab on their website. The occasional participation in the

activities of the network results from the fact that the character of the facility is much different from the activity of the other network members. “Riverside Guest House operates on a large scale. Its activity is appreciated by Brok commune, as the owners received the “Enterprenership Laurel” in 2015.

Table 2. Goals and activities of AgriNatura Foundation

The goals of the Foundation include activities for:	The Foundation pursues its goals, among other things, through:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sustainable development of rural areas. 2. The protection and enlargement of genetic resources and agricultural biodiversity. 3. The development of eco and biodynamic agricultural production methods. 4. The development of local processing and traditional products that come from eco and biodynamic farming as well as agrobiodiversity. 5. The increase of knowledge and awareness of the society with regard to ecology, environmental protection, eco and biodynamic farming and agrobiodiversity. 6. Environmental protection, ecology, animals and natural heritage in rural areas. 7. The protection of the cultural heritage of rural areas. 8. The protection and promotion of health among the inhabitants of the village. 9. Social and economic activation and business activity diversification in rural areas. 10. The development and implementation of environmentally-friendly, innovative technologies in rural areas. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The introduction, popularisation and protection of agricultural biodiversity at farms and in rural areas. 2. The creation and implementation of own programmes and establishments focused on broadly defined concepts of eco-development, including the Centre for Agricultural Biodiversity and Sustainable Development of Rural Areas. 3. The promotion and organisation of various forms of activity, including education, to increase the awareness of the society in the area covered by the Foundation's goals. 4. Building social acceptance and lobbying, advocacy, monitoring the law and policies related to the goals of the Foundation. 5. The organisation and participation in markets, exhibitions, trade shows ad competitions related to the goals of the Foundation. 6. The organisation of conferences, seminars, training courses and workshops related to the goals of the Foundation. 7. Awarding grants, prizes, subsidies to natural and legal persons whose activity contributes to the pursuit of the statutory goals of the Foundation. 8. Publishing, information, education and research activity related to the goals of the Foundation. 9. The development of projects, expert opinions, forecasts and programmes concerning issues that comply with the goals of the Foundation. 10. Acting for science within the scope covered by the goals of the Foundation.

Source: own work based on: *Statute of AgriNatura Agricultural Biodiversity Foundation*
<http://nowa.agrinatura.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/agrinatura2012.pdf>.

There is another facility that belongs to the ecotourism network in Zaręby Kościelne commune, that is, “Behind the Birch Trees” organic farm, which has had the certificate of eco farming since 2012. In the 6-hectare farm in Świerże-Panki greengrocer's, there is a home orchard and an orchard with fruit trees of more than 2 hectares, planted in 2010. It contains ca. 30 different old varieties of apple

trees, pear trees, plum trees and cherry trees²⁸. The farm in this small village includes also the seat of Agricultural Biodiversity Foundation AgriNatura (ABF AgriNatura), which has existed since 2007. It operates under the *Statute of AgriNatura Agricultural Biodiversity Foundation*. The *Statute* includes, among others, goals and activities in the area of sustainable development. (Table 2)

The foundation implemented numerous projects related to the goals set in the *Statute*, which went far beyond the powiat, but involved also members of “Between Bug and Narew” network. They included the following projects: *Eco-development as an Opportunity for Young People in Rural Areas; Traditional and Local Product; Promotion, Brand, Distribution – an Example of Good Practices; Seniors for the Future; European-Food-Kids; Our Common European Culture: a Good, Clean and Fair Food; Seniors for the European Future*. In addition, the Foundation began implementing a pilot project of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSE model) in 2012. The CSA system involves the strengthening of the cooperation between the recipient (a consumer) and the product supplier (a farmer)²⁹.

Foundation AgriNatura was a partner of an international project aimed at the strengthening of regional and local development. The project was implemented by 5 organisations based in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and Poland. It was funded from the European Erasmus+ programme. The title of the project: *SIGNAL – Social Innovation for the Quality of Life in the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas* describes the purpose of the partnership: learning innovative activities and best practices that meet the needs of the inhabitants of the village and, at the same time, comply with the strategy of sustainable development. Such initiatives include, among other things, CSA, solidarity farming, local processing from local products and crops, direct sales, school gardens and arable lands for inhabitants of cities or eco farming. The first meeting of the partnership was held between 24 and 26 April 2017 in Germany in Warburg. Another meeting as part of the project was organised in Scheemda, a Dutch city, on 25-27 September 2017 and the third in April 2018³⁰.

AgriNatura Foundation, together with ACCOR-Orbis group, has implemented a project entitled *Pur Project – We Plant New Orchards with Old Varieties* since 2015. In order to be able to take part in the project, in which 50-70 young trees of old varieties of apple, pear, plum, sour and sweet cherry were distributed

²⁸ <http://agrinatura.pl/o-nas-misja-fundacji/>.

²⁹ Information obtained from “AgriNatura Foundation”.

³⁰ Information obtained from “AgriNatura Foundation” <http://agrinatura.pl/sygnal-czyli-budujemy-nowa-jakosc-partnerstwa-mieszkancow-obszarow-wiejskich/>.

free of charge, one had to own a plot of land of 0.25-0.3 ha. High-stem trees without an eco farming certificate had to be planted in autumn 2016 after the consultation with a pomologist, who specified soil and land conditions. The first apple harvest from these planted trees was collected in 2019³¹.

Table 3. Detailed goals of “Rzepa” Association

1	economic activation of the region towards the development of rural areas, in particular places of the production, distribution and sales of eco products,
2	undertaking activities for the protection and promotion of healthy, eco food among the inhabitants of the region
3	acting for the development of the infrastructure required for the proper functioning of healthy nutrition in the village
4	acting for rural areas and their sustainable development
5	protecting natural resources located in the country, especially in Ostrów Powiat.
6	popularising and promoting eco, traditional, local and regional products
7	lobbying for sustainable development
8	supporting pro-ecological public initiatives
9	creating a platform for information and experience exchange within an eco movement
10	running and supporting various forms of education (formal and informal), activity and activation of children, young people and adults, including seniors
11	integration of the local community, building the feeling of regional attachment and activation of social initiatives and joint efforts.
12	cooperating and building a network of cooperation with other associations.
13	promoting and organising voluntary service for young people, adults and seniors
14	supporting the development of local communities
15	supporting the protection and promotion of health
16	supporting the development of eco-friendly sports and tourism
17	supporting disabled people

Source: *Statute of “Rzepa” Association.*

11 workshops on the establishment, planting and cultivating of young orchards were conducted as part of the project. 73 new orchards were created out of 6.5 thousand planted fruit trees, including 67 ones created at farms and single ones created at: the parish, Special School Complex in Kwidzyn, Ethnographic Museum, Podkarpacie Agricultural Advisory Centre in Boguchwała, a community cooperative and at the Herbal Botanic Garden. The fruit orchards are located in the following Polish regions: 19 in Mazovia, 12 in Lodz Voivodeship, 9 in Podkarpackie Voivodeship, 21 in Żuławy, 2 in Podlasie, 1 in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship, 8 in Lower Silesia and 1 in Masuria. 17 old varieties of apple trees, 7 old varieties of plum trees, 5 old varieties of pear trees and 9 old varieties of sweet and sour of cherries trees were planted in new orchards.

³¹ Information obtained from “AgriNatura Foundation”. <http://agrinatura.pl/pur-project-sadzimynowe-sady-dawnych-odmian/>.

The project was continued in 2018 and 2019 as “Kosztela”. The last initiative promoted by the Foundation is the project “Go Agri BIO” of the Social Ecological Institute. The project aims to help in the transition to the certification process farms focused on the cultivation of organic vegetables³².

In Nienalty-Szymany located within Zaręby Kościelne commune, “Rzepa” Association has been established. It participates in activities organised in Ostrów Mazowiecka Poviát and initiates activities provided for in its statute. Detailed goals of the association established in 2015 are presented on Table 3. *The Statute* includes, among others, goals and activities in the area of sustainable development.

There are several facilities that belong to the ecotourism network in Małkinia Górna. Two facilities, which participated in the development of the network from the very beginning, are no longer members of it. Goat Education Farm, a facility run for 16 years (9 years in Glina) discontinued its operations at the end of 2016. The owners no longer accept organised groups, but they invite family and friend groups to visit the farm, meet goats and taste goat products. A daughter of the owner continues the family tradition and organises classes for children in Głusków, which is located outside Ostrów Poviát (chatkamarzen.pl)³³. The long-lasting activity of Mr and Mrs Kolanowscy was very diverse. There were educational classes for children (from 2.5 to 4.5 hours) presenting environmental issues, folk traditions and customs, nature and work at the farm. For 4 years, on every Saturday of July and August, markets entitled *Delicacies and Curiosities Made of Glina* were organised. Eco farmers, craftsmen and folk artists could offer their products there. Members of the ecotourism network often participated in the markets³⁴.

The Private Ethnographic Museum of Andrzej Kongiel left the ecotourism network a long time ago. The museum had extensive collections of tools, farming equipment and folk art products. The owner of the museum conducted sculpture, painting and drawing classes for children and youth³⁵.

Two agrotourism farms: “Goat Village” and “The Stork Nest” in Prostyń cooperated with the ecotourism network from the very beginning. They still identify themselves with the network. The owners of both farms actively

³² Information obtained from “AgriNatura Foundation”.

³³ Ibidem, p. 39-40; www.agroedukacja.pl.

³⁴ More Z. Kolanowska, *Fairs. Treats and Curiosities from Glina*, Project Brochure: Operating Programme Human Capital Priority IX Action 9.5 Grassroots Operating Initiatives in rural areas, Goat Breeding Farm in Glina Agroutourism Farm, Glina 2011; Dylewski M., *Along with the Holidays, Fairs in Glina Began*, published on 13.07.2011 at www.to.com.pl (<http://www.to.com.pl/wiadomosci/ostrow-mazowiecka/art/6373548,wraz-z-wakacjami-rozpoznaly-sie-kiermasze-w-glinie-zdjecia-wideo,id,t.html>).

³⁵ *Ecotourism between Bug and Narew...*, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

participate in markets organised in Brok, and they also participated in Glina. They receive awards etc. for their food products. Both owners act within the Prostynia Land Lovers Association. The authors of a guide on the ecotourism network wrote about M. Deniszewska (the owner of “Goat Village”): “Her contribution to the activation of the local community and the development of the local culture is invaluable. She organises local fairs and holidays in “Goat Village in Prosyń”.³⁶

Two facilities in Małkinia Górna joined the network some time later. These are agrotourism farms. “The Lovely Corner” from Przewóz and “Orliczówka” from Błędnica. These facilities are not very active as far as integration activities within the network are concerned, but the owner of “The Lovely Corner” is the chairman of “Małkiński Krąg” association. The association, covering Małkinia Górna commune, pursues the goals provided for in the statute by being active in various areas, and thus supports the local community, its activation and improvement of broadly defined quality of life. The association, together with other institutions, organises numerous art handicraft workshops, cooking and sports classes, competitions and trips. Numerous meetings are organised in “The Lovely Corner” farm (*May-Day Picnic, Baked Potato Holiday*), in which took part not only members of the association, but also other persons. The purposes of the association’s activities included the integration of the society, social and civil education as well as the presentation of traditions, culture and national heritage³⁷. In 2016, the association from Małkinia received 29 thousand zloty for the implementation of three projects entitled *Environment above all, On Culture and Civilisation* and *Healthy Body – Healthy Soul*³⁸.

“Hotel Service 17” in Ostrów Mazowiecka is the last analysed facility of the ecotourism network. The facility (garner) was built in 1942 by the Germans for the purposes of a battle of Stalingrad. It was refurbished and restored by the current owners with attention to details concerning its history – belt conveyors and two industrial lifts on which original German plates are still present today have been preserved. The facility does not get involved in the current activities of the ecotourism network. However, there is a link to the website of the network, i.e. bugnarew.pl, in the “Partners” tab on the website of the facility³⁹.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 41.

³⁷ *Substantive Report on the Activity of “Małkiński Krąg” Association in 2014; Substantive Report on the Activity of “Małkiński Krąg” Association in 2015.*

³⁸ *Substantive Report on the Activity of “Małkiński Krąg” Association in 2016.*

³⁹ <http://www.uslugihotelowe17.pl/o-nas/partnerzy>.

Moreover, the operations of the facility are in line with the principles of sustainable development, preserving the local historical heritage and thus the local identity. Since 14 December 2013, the hotel building houses the “Museum of Borderlands and Ostrów Land”, which collects exhibits and souvenirs related to the history of military units quartering on territories that are today covered by Ostrów Poviát and presenting the history of Ostrów Land from the Middle Ages until now⁴⁰. The activity of the museum has been appreciated, as it was awarded the third prize in *The Most Interesting Exhibition*⁴¹ category in the 10th competition entitled *The Museum Event of Mazovia – Willow* from the marshal of the voivodeship.

The multitude and diversity of activities supporting sustainable development of “Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network members is a good predictor of further sustainable development in the Ostrów Poviát.

Conclusion

The offer of “Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network is based on nature, culture and local uniqueness. The group promotes, protects and respects the natural and cultural environment as well as local communities, which is reflected in sustainable development. It supports the local economy through the services that it provides. The purpose of the article was not to present the basic service activity, because it is obvious that their activity is conducive to sustainable development. This paper contains identified other activities.

The identified activity of the network members undoubtedly stimulate the social, cultural and economic aspects of local development. The analysis of the influence of the ecotourism network on sustainable development was limited to Ostrów Poviát, in which there are currently the largest number of facilities that belong to the network, namely 9 (Pułtusk Poviát has 1 facility; Wyszków Poviát – 7, Sokołów Poviát – 4, Węgrów Poviát – 1). Thus the identification of such influence in Ostrów Poviát seems to be the most reasonable.

The conducted analysis proved that facilities which belong to the ecotourism network contribute to the social and economic sustainable development of Ostrów Poviát, and even go beyond its borders (AgriNatura). “Dajana” seems to fulfil the role of a leader, who is going to continue its activity within the network.

⁴⁰ M. Bubrzycki, *A Museum Was Opened in Ostrów!*, published on 16.12.2013 at: www.to.com.pl/wiadomosci/ostrow-mazowiecka/art/6530194,otwarto-muzeum-w-ostrowi,id,t.html.

⁴¹ *The Museum of the Borderlands and Ostrów Land Has Been Awarded*, published on 04.10.2016 at www.ostrowmaz24.pl <https://www.ostrowmaz24.pl/art/15134/muzeum-kresow-i-ziemi-ostrowskiej-wyroznione>.

The remaining members of the network are involved in activities integrating the network to a greater or lesser extent (e.g. “Goat Village” or “The Stork Nest”). Some members of the network take their own actions (e.g. “The Lovely Corner”, “Hotel Service 17”), but this activity also serves the local sustainable development, and even stimulates the development of other local government units in Poland. The activity of the owner of “Dajana” encourages other institutions (“Nur Friends Association”) to engage in activities stimulating sustainable development. The joint work on the 18-month project implemented in the years 2009-2010 brought positive results. Persons who participated in working meetings, workshops, study trips to other countries actively support sustainable development without waiting for someone else to do it.

Now the Authors are going to diagnose the activity of other facilities that belong to “Between Bug and Narew” ecotourism network as a factor that stimulates sustainable development at the local level in other poviats. First in Wyszaków and Sokołów poviats.

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**SIEĆ EKOTURYSTYCZNA „MIĘDZY BUGIEM A NARWIĄ” JAKO PRZYKŁAD
DZIAŁALNOŚCI WSPIERAJĄCEJ
ZRÓWNOWAŻONY ROZWÓJ OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH**

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie korzystnego wpływu polskiej sieci ekoturystycznej „Między Bugiem a Narwią” na pobudzenie zrównoważonego rozwoju obszarów wiejskich w Polsce. W pracy przedstawiono niektóre, wybrane działania na rzecz rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego, które autorzy zidentyfikowali, analizując działalność poszczególnych członków sieci zlokalizowanych w powiecie ostrowskim na Mazowszu. W artykule przedstawiono interesujące przedsięwzięcia, wpisujące się w koncepcję zrównoważonego rozwoju zarówno lidera sieci, jak i tych członków, którzy wydają się w mniejszym stopniu identyfikować z siecią, jednak są członkami sieci, więc działają w jej ramach. W pracy zaprezentowano inne instytucje, które – zainspirowane formami aktywności członków sieci – włączyły się w działania na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju badanego obszaru. Jednocześnie działania prorozwojowe członków sieci mogą wychodzić poza teren powiatu ostrowskiego, które też częściowo zidentyfikowano.

**THE ECOTOURISM NETWORK „BETWEEN BUG AND NAREW” AS AN EXAMPLE
OF ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
OF RURAL AREAS IN POLAND**

Summary

The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate the impact of the ecotourism network „Between Bug and Narew” on the sustainable development of the Ostrow poviats in Mazovia. This influence was demonstrated by presenting the implemented activities for socio-economic development, which the author identified by analyzing the activities of network members. The chapter presents projects that fit into the concept of sustainable development of both the network leader and those who seem to be less identified with the network, but operate within its framework. The institution will also be presented, which, inspired by the forms of activity of the network members, joined the activities for the sustainable development of the poviats. At the same time, pro-development activities of network members may go beyond the poviats' area, as was also written about.