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EFFECTS OF SUPPORTING TOURISM IN PODLASKIE VOIVODSHIP UNDER THE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION PROGRAMME POLAND – BELARUS – UKRAINE 2007-2013

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the paper was to examine, on the example of Podlaskie Voivodship, if the disbursement of funds for the development of tourism in the framework of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013 was justified and whether the funds were expended in an efficient manner and on an adequate scale. The analysis was based on the secondary data of the Ministry of Regional Development, literature covering the research area and official statistical data. The results of research and analysis on tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodship indicated that despite the establishment of ambitious goal of improving and fully utilising the tourist potential of the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland, it is impossible to clearly determine the degree of effectiveness of the programme in this respect due to a number of potentially significant determinants of tourism development in the region. The paper comprises the first in the existing body of literature detailed analysis of the effectiveness of tourism support under the programme, which may be a valuable diagnostic tool in defining the scope of other EU cross-border programmes in the future financial perspectives as far as tourism is concerned.

KEY WORDS: tourism, cross-border cooperation, regional development

Introduction

The Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013 (hereinafter referred to as “the programme”) was approved on 6 November 2008 by the European Commission in accordance with the Regulation (EC) No. 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (OJ L 310 of 9.11.2006). It was one of the instruments for pursuing the objectives of the regulation in the field of cooperation between the European Union and external partner countries through integrated and sustainable regional development.

The socio-economic analysis of the programme emphasised the potential for tourism development in the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian cross-border area, including Podlaskie Voivodship, due to various cultural heritage sites and unique natural environmental conditions (Kiryłuk, 2014, p. 149). For this purpose, Priority 1. *Increasing competitiveness of the border area* included Measure 1.2. *Tourism development* with a budget of EUR 24,985,390.77 for co-financing of cross-border projects in the field of tourism.

However, in the initial phase of implementation of the programme, due to Poland’s accession to the Schengen Area on 21 December 2007, Poland’s eastern border, constituting part of the EU’s external border, gained special importance. On the one hand, Polish citizens were free to travel within the Schengen Area, on the other, Poland was obliged to extend the travel restriction measures on the eastern border (Central Statistical Office, 2016, p. 17). Moreover, the global financial crisis of 2008 had an impact on the socio-economic situation in the regional and local scale. As a result, various integration and disintegration processes that took place between the neighbouring countries and uncertainty related to the crisis of 2008 influenced changes in the tourist traffic on the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland. It is also worth mentioning that in the EU’s 2007-2013 financial perspective all Polish regions covered by the programme co-financed tourism projects within the framework of the respective regional operational programmes.

An overview of literature

The paper comprises the first in the existing body of literature detailed analysis of the effectiveness of tourism support under the programme, based on the example of Podlaskie Voivodship. Therefore, the research was conducted in order to bridge the gap in this regard. The existing scientific studies

concerning tourism or the support for tourism projects under the programmes financed from the budget of the European Union do not constitute a detailed analysis due to their general nature or introductory character. For instance, Kiryluk performed a general assessment of the financial support for tourism from the EU funds in the years 2007–2013 in Poland (Kiryluk, 2014, p. 137-154). Sadowski, in turn, dealt with only theoretical possibility of absorption of EU funds, including the programme, mainly in the context of local government units (Sadowski, 2012, p. 231-242). As for Ozimek et al., it should be indicated that in their study concerning the support for tourism development in Poland in 2007–2013, they used only the example of selected regional operational programmes (Ozimek et al., 2012, p. 127-142). Considering the issue of tourist traffic in Poland, Łaciak in his research completely omitted the impact of the implementation of EU-funded tourism projects (Łaciak, 2009; Łaciak 2013). Kawałko discussed, among others, the practical aspects of financial support for tourism projects within the programme, however he focused primarily on Lubelskie Voivodship (Kawałko, 2015, p. 7-27). Miszczuk, on the other hand, focused on largely theoretical study of inter-dependencies of border regions and the support for cross-border projects within the European Territorial Cooperation programmes in general (Miszczuk, 2013, p. 152-154).

Research methods

The programme was completed in 2016, and the analogous program for 2014-2020, which no longer includes measures dedicated directly to the development of tourism, is still in the initial stage of its implementation. Considering the above, the purpose of this paper was to examine, on the example of Podlaskie Voivodship, if the disbursement of funds for the development of tourism in the framework of the programme was justified and whether the funds were expended in an efficient manner and on an adequate scale, which would translate into an increase in tourist activity in the analysed area.

Therefore, the paper contains a description of the programme objectives, its structure (including the financing plan) and eligible cooperation areas. Moreover, it presents possibilities, the scope and scale of co-financing projects within Measure 1.2. *Tourism development*, with particular emphasis on the region of Podlasie, as well as examines the effects of implementation of the projects in the field of tourism development under the programme in the context of tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodship compared to other Polish voivodships covered by the programme.

In the paper there were used nonreactive research methods consisting of analysing the contents of existing documents. The analysis was based on the secondary data of the Ministry of Regional Development, performing the function of the Joint Managing Authority (mainly in the form of annual reports on the implementation of the programme, including operational and financial reports), literature covering the research area and official statistical data. Despite the generally deductive character of deliberations undertaken in this paper, the analysis of detailed information was performed using inductive inference.

Results of the research

The core objective of the programme was support for cross-border development processes (Lejczyk, Poździk, 2010, p. 198). The aforementioned objective was realised through co-financing of non-commercial projects implemented within the priorities aimed at: increasing competitiveness of the border area, improving the quality of life, networking and people-to-people cooperation (Sadowski, 2012, p. 234). The total indicative budget of the programme amounted to EUR 202.9 mln, including EUR 186.2 mln from the European Union budget. Table 1 below demonstrates the allocation of funds by specific priorities of the programme, taking into account Priority 1 covering Measure 1.2. *Tourism development*.

Table 1. Indicative financing plan of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013 for the whole programming period – priorities by sources of funding [EUR]

Priority	European Union funding	Co-financing	Co-financing rate [%]*	Total funding
1	2	3	4	5=2+3
Priority 1. Increasing competitiveness of the border area	55,860,410.10	5,586,041.01	10	61,446,451.11
Priority 2. Improving the quality of life	65,170,478.45	6,517,047.85	10	71,687,526.30
Priority 3. Networking and people-to-people cooperation	46,550,341.75	4,655,034.18	10	51,205,375.93
Technical Assistance	18,620,136.70	0.00	-	18,620,136.70
Total	186,201,367.00	16,758,123.04	9	202,959,490.04

* Co-financing rate was calculated in accordance with Article 20.1 of the Regulation No. 951/2007 on the basis of the Community contribution to the joint operational programme, minus the amount of technical assistance financed from the Community contribution.

Source: author's own work based on www.pl-by-ua.eu [21-02-2017].

The programme area was inhabited by 20.9 million people, of which 5.1 million in the Polish part, 8.5 million in the Ukrainian part and 7.3 million in the Belarusian part. It consisted of cooperation areas as well as adjacent cooperation areas and included the following administrative units:

- sub-regions in Poland: Białostocko-suwalski (in Podlaskie Voivodship), Krośnieńsko-przemyski (in Podkarpackie Voivodship), Białkopodlaski and Chełmsko-zamojski (in Lubelskie Voivodship), Ostrołęcko-siedlecki (in Mazowieckie Voivodship) and as adjacent cooperation areas: Łomżyński sub-region (in Podlaskie Voivodship), Rzeszowsko-tarnobrzski sub-region (in Podkarpackie Voivodship) and Lubelski sub-region (in Lubelskie Voivodship);
- in Ukraine: Lvivska, Volynska, Zakarpatska Oblasts and as adjacent cooperation areas: Rivnenska, Ternopilaska and Ivano-Frankivaska Oblasts;
- in Belarus: Grodno Oblast, Brest Oblast, seven western districts of Minsk Oblast: Miadel, Vileika, Molodechno, Volozhin, Stolbtsy, Niesvizh, Kletsk and as adjacent cooperation areas: the eastern part of Minsk Oblast and Gomel Oblast (EU, 2008, p. 6).

Thus, the programme area covered the whole territory of Podlaskie Voivodship. None of the voivodships or oblasts had assigned allocations of funds. Moreover, the total value of activities financed in the adjacent cooperation areas could not be higher than 20% of total programme budget (Miszczuk, 2013, p. 152-154).

The priority which to the greatest extent focused on improving and fully utilising the tourist potential of the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland was Priority 1. *Increasing competitiveness of the border area*. It consisted of three measures: 1.1. *Better conditions for entrepreneurship*, 1.2. *Tourism development* and 1.3. *Improving access to the region*, of which only Measure 1.2. was directly dedicated to projects in the field of tourism. According to the provisions of the programme, the cross-border area had high potential for development of tourism, including agrotourism, due to advantageous natural environmental conditions, low pollution and cultural heritage objects. Therefore, the main goal of Measure 1.2 was to improve and fully utilise the tourist potential of the region. Substantially, the financial support was focused mainly on the development of tourist infrastructure and services.

However, investment and infrastructure activities could be financed only in the cooperation areas (that automatically excluded from this scope of support the adjacent Łomżyński sub-region). Hence, apart from supporting preparation and implementation of investments enhancing tourism and agrotourism infrastructure and services, Measure 1.2 also promoted "soft" activities targeting *inter alia*: regional promotion, tourism and agro-tourism development and the protection of cultural heritage. In particular, through

calls for proposals there could be selected projects in the field of preparation and implementation of investments enhancing tourism and agrotourism infrastructure and services, actions aiming at protection and promotion of cultural heritage, creation of sustainable tourism products (e.g. cross-border thematic routes) respecting protection needs for natural and cultural heritage and actions promoting the programme area as a tourist destination. The expected beneficiaries of Measure 1.2. were, among others, the following entities: regional and local authorities, state institutions, non-governmental organisations, local enterprise agencies, development agencies, educational and training institutions, tourism agencies, chambers of commerce, producers associations as well as relevant Euroregions (Jablonska, Hryniewicka, 2010, p. 87-88).

Within the three calls for proposals, covering *inter alia* Measure 1.2. *Tourism development*, 21 projects of a total value of EUR 27,870,256.34, including EUR 1,983,625.27 of the European Union contribution, were selected for implementation. Only three calls for proposals were conducted under the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013. The first, with a budget of EUR 16,126,091.00, was conducted from 2.11.2009 to 1.3.2010 and included the following measures: 1.1. *Better conditions for entrepreneurship*, 1.2. *Tourism development*, 1.3. *Improving access to the region*, 2.1. *Natural environment protection in the borderland* and 3.1. *Regional and local cross-border cooperation capacity building*. The second call for proposals, with a budget of EUR 88,143,349.25, was conducted from 16.5.2011 to 30.9.2011 and apart from the measures covered by the first call for proposals, it also included Measure 2.2. *Efficient and secure borders*. The third call for proposals, with a budget of EUR 6,654,291.98 covered only Measure 3.2. *Local communities' initiatives* and was conducted from 16.2.2012 to 14.6.2012. The remaining part of the programme budget was allocated to provide financial support to large-scale strategic projects – none of them was directly related to tourism (www.pl-by-ua.eu). It should also be noted that 15 of the approved project proposals were implemented in Polish-Ukrainian partnership, only 3 in Polish-Belarusian partnership and 3 in Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian partnership (Kawałko, 2015, p. 14).

Within the two calls for proposals covering *inter alia* Measure 1.2. *Tourism development*, the applicants submitted 813 grant applications. Measure 1.2. did not have any separate allocation outside the limitations resulting from the specific provisions of calls for proposals and the indicative financing plan of the programme concerning Priority 1. *Increasing competitiveness of the border area*. Financial support for tourism projects in Podlaskie Voivodship proved to be insignificant despite the fact that the calls for proposals conducted under the program attracted great interest of potential beneficiar-

ies, as shown in table 2 below. Only two projects of a total value of EUR 2,206,689.84, including EUR 1,983,625.27 of the European Union contribution, were selected for funding. These were:

Table 2. Grant applications submitted and approved for implementation within the calls for proposals covering Measure 1.2. *Tourism development* of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013 by voivodships [EUR]

Voivodship	Grant applications submitted within the programme		Grant applications approved for implementation within the programme	
	Grant applications [pcs]	European Union contribution [EUR]	Grant applications [pcs]	European Union contribution [EUR]
Podlaskie	31	35,514,884.08	2	1,983,625.27
Mazowieckie	16	8,072,239.22	1	1,330,670.57
Lubelskie	91	98,585,469.65	9	8,866,798.98
Podkarpackie	57	81,709,554.13	9	12,804,295.95
Total	195	223,882,147.08	21	24,985,390.77

Source: author's own work based on www.pl-by-ua.eu [21-02-2017].

- 1) ***Improvement of cross-border region attractiveness through the introduction of ethno-cultural resources into the tourist activities (a trip to the ethnic fairytale)*** – the project was implemented by the Suwałki Chamber of Agriculture and Tourism (Poland) with Belarusian partners: the Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno and the Gudevichi State Museum of Literature and Local Lore (project duration: March 2012 – December 2014). The total value of the project amounted to EUR 1,270,306.72, of which the European Union contribution amounted to EUR 1,143,276.05. The project envisioned, among others, the infrastructural reorganisation of two museums, organisation of the Festival of Tales and Legends of the East and creation of 7 mobile ethnographic villages inspired by regional legends and fairy tale motifs as well as publication of an encyclopedic handbook on cultural objects, tourist guide for the cross-border area and tourist maps with marked objects of cultural tourism (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 64-65).
- 2) ***An integrated project of support for tourism sector of the Polish-Belarusian borderland*** was implemented by the Town Commune of Hajnówka (Poland) in partnership with the Municipal Unitary Multisectoral Production Enterprise of Housing Maintenance and Utilities Services “Kamianiec ZhKKh” (Belarus) and the Polesia Agro-Ecology Institute of

National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus (project duration: June 2013 – May 2015). The value of this project totaled EUR 936,383.12, including EUR 840,349.22 of co-financing from the European Union budget. The project mainly consisted in revitalization of urban parks in Hajnówka (preparation of technical documentation and construction of the roofing over the audience area in the amphitheatre) and the Belarusian town of Vysokaye (renovation of the existing elements of small architecture), building of two ecological paths of the total length of 9 km and mapping out of a cycling route of 10 km and a waterway of 15 km. In addition, the project included the organization of workshops and study visits for representatives of tourism industry and local administration from Poland and Belarus (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 62-63).

By involving so scarce financial resources for the development of tourism in the region, one should not expect significant results in terms of increased tourist traffic in Podlasie, unless the projects selected for implementation had exceptionally high potential for tourism development beyond the cross-border scale. Therefore, the analysis of changes in tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodeship (along with three other Polish voivodeships covered by the programme) was carried out. Despite the formal commencement of the programme in 2007, the years 2007 and 2008 were not taken into account in statistical analyses due to the fact that they could not be regarded as meaningful in relation to the verification of the effectiveness of the programme. In December 2007 Poland joined the Schengen Area, what resulted in a significant decrease in the number of tourists from behind the eastern border. Over the period 2007-2008, the number of nights spent by foreign tourists in tourist accommodation establishments in the region of Podlasie declined by 24.5% (from 91 thous. to 68.7 thous.). In particular, there was a significant decrease in the number of nights spent by foreigners coming to Poland from neighbouring countries, such as Belarus – a 65.2% decrease (Statistical Office in Białystok, 2009, p. 7).

The 2008 financial crisis and the crisis-related increase of uncertainty also had a negative impact on the volume of domestic tourist traffic. The decline in the number of trips affected most voivodeships, wherein the largest decline in the volume of domestic tourist traffic was recorded in Podlaskie Voivodeship, i.e. from 1.7 mln trips in 2007 to 0.8 mln trips in 2008 – a 53% decrease (Łaciak, 2009, p. 69-70). Furthermore, the first call for proposals in the field of tourism development under the programme was launched as late as November 2009. Hence, Figure 1 below displays the intensity of domestic tourist traffic in the crucial phase of implementation of the programme, *id est* in 2009-2015.

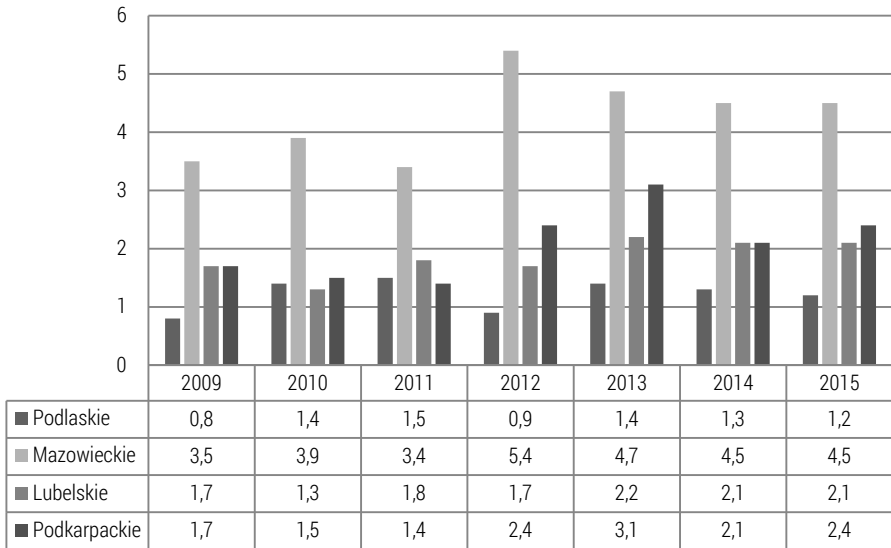


Figure 1. The intensity of domestic tourist traffic by voivodships and number of trips in 2009-2015 [mln]

Source: author's own work based on www.msport.gov.pl [21-02-2017].

Over the period 2009-2011, the volume of domestic tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodeship grew by 47.7% (from 0.8 to 1.5 million trips). Following a significant decrease of 40.0% in 2012, the number of domestic trips in the region dynamically grew in 2013 (Activ Group, 2014, p. 7; Łaciak, 2013, p. 55). However, despite conducting two calls for proposals in the field of tourism development (in 2009-2010 and 2012), in 2015 the intensity of domestic tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodeship, compared to 2013, was reduced from 1.4 to 1.2 million trips, as shown in figure 1.

Analysis of the statistical data from three other Polish voivodships covered by the programme brought mixed results. The comparability of this data is affected by the fact that the financial support for tourism projects under the programme was not the only available to potential applicants. In parallel with the support provided under the programme, in the analysed period all regional authorities co-financed this kind of projects on a much larger scale within the relevant regional operational programmes. The amounts allocated to co-financing of mainly tourism projects by the authorities of Polish regions covered by the programme were as follows: EUR 99,263,261 under the Regional Operational Programme of Podlaskie Voivodeship 2007-2013, Priority Axis III. *Tourism and culture development*; EUR 2,198,356,237 under the Regional Operational Programme of Mazovian Voivodeship 2007-2013, Priority Axis VI. *The use of natural and cultural resources for development of tour-*

ism and recreation; EUR 43,613,398 under the Regional Operational Programme of Podkarpackie Voivodship 2007-2013, Priority Axis VI. *Tourism and culture*, and EUR 117,481,977 under the Regional Operational Programme of Lubelskie Voivodship 2007-2013, Priority Axis VII. *Culture, tourism and interregional cooperation* (www.funduszeuropejskie.2007-2013.gov.pl).

It is very likely that the available statistical data is correlated to a greater extent with the granting of support under these regional programmes. However, due to limitations resulting from the subject matter of this paper, this issue was not the subject of in-depth analysis. It should also be noted that, taking into account the period 2009-2015 as a whole, in each of the analysed regions there was a significant increase in the intensity of domestic tourist traffic (see figure 1).

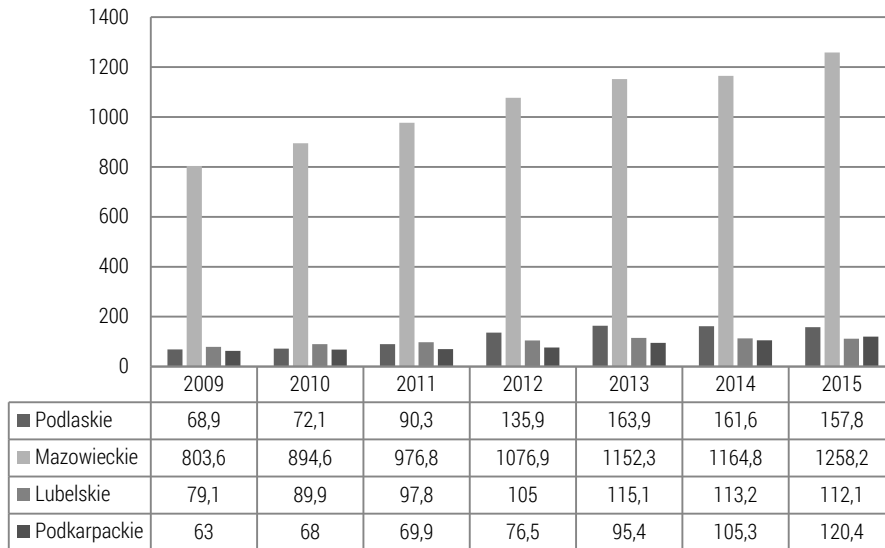


Figure 2. Foreign tourists in tourist accommodation establishments by voivodship in 2009-2015 [thous.]

Source: author's own work based on www.stat.gov.pl [21-02-2017].

At the same time it is worth noting that the analysis of the number of foreign tourists staying at tourist accommodation establishments in Podlaskie Voivodship in 2009-2015 showed that from 2009 on (68.9 thousand people) occurred a clear upward trend to reach a value of 163.9 thousand people in 2013 (figure 2). Despite such a clear increase in the number of foreign tourists staying at collective accommodation establishments, Podlaskie Voivodship in 2013, as well as other regions covered by the programme

(apart from Mazowieckie Voivodship), still did not belong to the regions frequently visited by foreign tourists (Janczak, Patelak, 2014, p. 4). Following a decrease of 1.4% in 2014, the number of foreign tourists accommodated in collective accommodation establishments in the region continued to fall in 2015, reaching 157.8 thousand foreign tourists. Importantly, the decrease in 2015 mainly related to the foreigners coming to Poland from neighbouring countries such as Belarus – a decrease of 3.9 thousand people, *id est* 5.0% less than in 2014 (Statistical Office in Białystok, 2016, p. 7). An analogous trend could be observed in the case of Lubelskie Voivodeship. However, in Mazowieckie and Podkarpackie voivodeships occurred a clear upward trend (see figure 2). For instance, in Podkarpackie Voivodship the recorded number of foreign tourists in tourist accommodation establishments nearly doubled over the period 2009-2015.

Conclusions

Pursuant to the specific provisions of the programme's socio-economic analysis, the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland with its relatively unspoilt natural conditions and rich cultural heritage had favourable conditions for the development of tourism of different types, including eco- and agrotourism, spa and wellness, pilgrimages (EU, 2008, p. 12). The implementation of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Poland – Belarus – Ukraine 2007-2013 was supposed to make a significant contribution to the tourism potential of the area. This was reflected in the structure of the programme, both through establishing Measure 1.2. *Tourism development* and supporting of cross-border projects within the measure with the total amount of funding provided by the European Commission amounting to EUR 24,985,390.77.

However, the results of research and analysis on tourist traffic in Podlaskie Voivodship indicated that despite the establishment of ambitious goal of improving and fully utilising the tourist potential of the Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian borderland, it is impossible to clearly determine the degree of effectiveness of the programme in this respect due to a number of potentially significant determinants of tourism development in the region. It should also be noted that despite various changes in the socio-economic situation in the regional and global scale (*e.g.* Poland's accession to the Schengen Area or the 2008 financial crisis), over the period 2009-2015 in each of the Polish voivodeships covered by the programme, including Podlaskie Voivodship, there was recorded an increase in the intensity of domestic and foreign tourist traffic. Nevertheless, this might be largely the result of the improvement of tourist

facilities and expanding the tourist offer in the region based on substantial funds from other programs co-financed from the European Union budget under cohesion policy, including the Regional Operational Programme for Podlaskie Voivodship 2007-2013 (Ozimek et al., 2012, p. 134-136).

Analysing in detail the scope and level of support provided to projects realised under the programme it should be stated that it was insignificant with regard to the needs signalled by the applicants. It was possible to slightly increase the overall scale of projects through reducing the maximum level of co-financing from 90% to, for instance, 75% of eligible costs and approve to implementation a greater number of project proposals, but it would not change this situation diametrically. Moreover, a substantial part of the activities undertaken within the projects was implemented by the foreign partner organizations. According to the provisions of the programme, expansion and upgrading of infrastructure for tourism, especially in terms of quality standards, was a prerequisite for exploitation of the potential for tourism in the cross-border area (EU, 2008, p. 11). The projects selected for implementation in Podlaskie Voivodship essentially detached from this assumption. Summing up, due to a number of potentially significant determinants of tourism development, including socio-economic relations, it is impossible to clearly determine to what extent the programme proved to be an effective instrument of tourism support in Podlaskie Voivodship.

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