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POLICIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE MOST ATTRACTIVE REGIONS OF POLAND

Klaudia Nowicka

Department of Socio-Economic Geography, University of Gdańsk, Bażyńskiego 4, 80–309 Gdańsk, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-2961-4634
e-mail: klaudia.nowicka@ug.edu.pl

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine how local authorities perceive tourism and its role in the economic and social development of the most attractive counties in Poland. In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to analyse the current strategic documents of selected administrative units, using computer-assisted context analysis and text mining. In total, more than 5500 pages were analysed. Selected chapters of the documents concerning the missions and visions of the counties analysed, their strategic and operational objectives, as well as SWOT analyses were subjected to detailed analysis. The study focused only on those objectives and elements of the SWOT analysis directly related to tourism development in the counties. Furthermore, the analysis allowed to determine the extent to which county development strategies are useful tools in long-term socio-economic development planning in relation to the tourism industry.

Key words

tourism development, strategic planning, policies for tourism development.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is currently regarded as one of the fastest growing and most resilient sectors of the economy, generating huge profits for the destination areas. According to World Travel & Tourism Council (2023), in 2022 the Travel & Tourism sector contributed 7,6% to global GDP (an increase of 22% from 2021, which means that tourism slowly restarts after the COVID-19 pandemic) and this trend is expected to continue. For this reason, it is often referred to as the key to development, prosperity and well-being, and regardless of the threats it may pose, it is seen as a kind of guarantee for the socio-economic development of regions (Dogru, Bulut 2018).

Over the last twenty years, the number of tourists (overnight stays) in Poland has increased by 140% (from 14.2 million in 2002 to 34.2 million in 2022). Our country is an attractive destination not only for domestic tourists, but also for foreign tourists, whose number has increased by 85% over the same period (from 3.2 million in 2002 to 5.8 million in 2022). The increase in tourist interest has also resulted in a significant development of accommodation facilities – since 2002, almost 2000 establishments classified by the Statistics Poland as tourist accommodation facilities (with more than 10 beds) have been added, so that if smaller capacity establishments were included, the total number would be much higher (Bank..., 2024). Such a rapid development

of the tourism industry in Poland and its potential economic and social consequences make tourism a subject of planning not only at the national level but also – and perhaps primarily – at the regional and local levels, especially since the intensity of tourist traffic varies spatially and does not affect all regions of the country to the same extent.

In 2023, the Statistics Poland (GUS) published a report on which regions (counties) of Poland have the greatest tourist attractions. Taking into account components of tourist attractions from three groups: culture and national heritage, environment and tourist infrastructure, as well as the deterrent role of environmental pollution and crime, a synthetic indicator of tourist attractions was constructed. On this basis, a ranking of the most attractive counties in terms of tourism was drawn up. As many as 95 counties or cities with county status obtained a Tourist Attractiveness Indicator (TAI) value of at least 20, allowing these territorial units to be classified as

regions of high or very high tourist attractiveness (Zeszyt..., 2023).

Among the top 10 ranked counties or cities with county status are 3 major Polish cities: Warsaw (1) – a clear leader in terms of tourist attractions with a TAI value of 63.5; Kraków (3) and Gdańsk (8), 6 mountainous counties: nowosądecki (2), kłodzki (4), nowotarski (5), bieszczadzki (6), tatrzański (8) and leski (10), and the coastal county – kołobrzeski. As shown in Figure 1, the most touristically attractive areas are mainly located in the northern belt, especially along the Baltic Sea coastline, and in the south of the country – Lower Silesia and the southern part of Małopolska. Warsaw and the surrounding counties are also noticeable (Fig. 1, Tab. 1).

The voivodeships with the most counties having a TAI value above 20 are Małopolskie and Dolnośląskie (with 14 counties each), as well as Pomorskie (13) and Zachodniopomorskie (12) (Table 1, Figure 1).

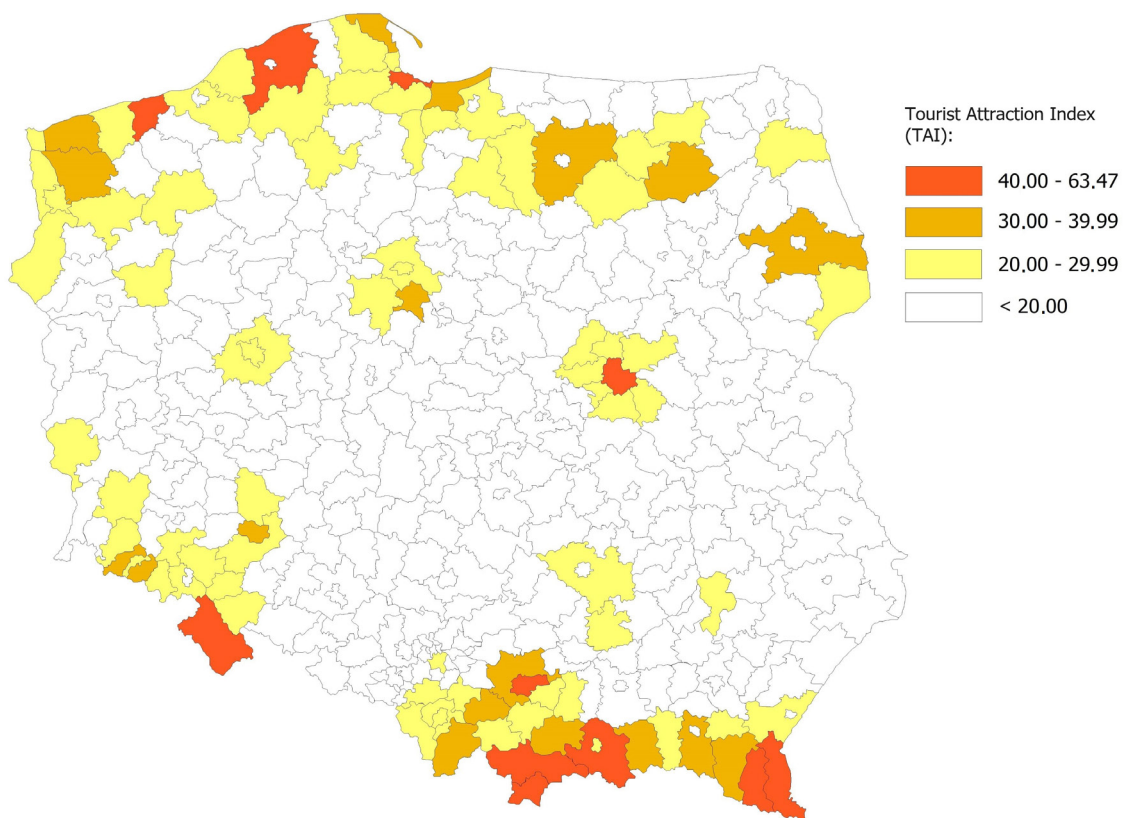


Fig. 1. The value of the Tourist Attraction Index (TAI) for Polish counties.

Source: own elaboration based on Zeszyt..., 2023.

There is no doubt that planned and responsible development of the tourism sector stimulates the economic development of regions; however, the process of tourism industry development should be planned taking into account social, environmental, and spatial issues, as well as considering the participation of local communities (Bosiacki, 2016; Szwacka-Mokrzycka, 2012; Kozak, 2010). A county

is a local government community that is legally responsible for managing a specific spatial-territorial complex and areas of public life, i.e. for implementing development policy. In the Act of 6 December 2006 on the Principles of Development Policy, Article 2 states that development policy refers to a set of interrelated actions undertaken and implemented to ensure the sustainable and balanced development

Tab. 1. Analysis of motifs appearing in the works created during the workshops.

Voivodeship (number of counties)	TAI = [20.00 – 29.99] (67)	TAI = [30.00 – 39.99] (17)	TAI = [40.00 – 63.47] (11)
małopolskie (14)	wielicki [28.1]; myślenicki [27.3]; suski [26.7], Nowy Sącz [24.1]; bocheński [23.9]; oświęcimski [21.7]	gorlicki [32.6]; limanowski [31.3]; wadowicki [30.7], krakowski [30.6]	nowosądecki [57.5]; Kraków [53.7]; nowotarski [51.1]; tatrzański [44.2];
dolnośląskie (14)	Jelenia Góra [25.6]; kamiennogórski [24.9]; ząbkowicki [24.7]; wałbrzyski [24.5]; lwówecki [22.2]; jaworski [21.3]; świdnicki [21.1]; bolesławiecki [21.0]; wrocławski [20.8]; dzierzoniowski [20.6]; trzebnicki [20.0]	karkonoski [35.2]; Wrocław [31.6];	kłodzki [53.3];
pomorskie (13)	Gdynia [27.7]; Sopot [27.1], wejherowski [27.0]; chojnicki [25.3]; kartuski [24.1]; gdański [23.7]; bytowski [22.3]; tczewski [21.7]; malborski [21.6]	nowodworski [36.7]; pucki [34.3];	Gdańsk [42.2]; słupski [40.8]
zachodniopomorskie (12)	ślawieński [29.7]; gryfiński [29.6]; Szczecin [29.0]; policki [28.9]; Świnoujście [26.7]; stargardzki [26.3]; drawski [25.5]; koszaliński [25.3]; gryficki [24.0]	kamieński [37.3]; goleniowski [30.4];	kołobrzesci [41.8]
warmińsko-mazurskie (8)	elbląski [29.4]; mrągowski [26.3]; giżycki [25.6]; ostródzki [24.3]; szczycieński [22.7]; iławski [20.1]	piski [33.7]; olsztyński [32.7]	
mazowieckie (8)	warszawski zachodni [28.7]; piaseczyński [24.6]; pruszkowski [24.6]; legionowski [23.7]; wołomiński [22.2]; nowodworski [21.6]; otwocki [21.4]		Warszawa [63.5]
podkarpackie (7)	jasielski [25.4]; przemyski [24.0]; brzozowski [21.0]	sanocki [37.3]; krośnieński [35.9];	bieszczadzki [43.2]; leski [41.8]
śląskie (6)	cieszyński [28.7]; bielski [23.1]; pszczyński [22.4]; Bielsko-Biała [22.1]; Katowice [22.0]	żywiecki [36.0]	
kujawsko-pomorskie (4)	Toruń [28.3]; inowrocławski [23.9]; toruński [21.8]	aleksandrowski [34.2]	
podlaskie (3)	augustowski [29.2]; hajnowski [21.6]	białostocki [35.6]	
wielkopolskie (2)	poznański [28.8]; Poznań [26.5]		
świętokrzyskie (2)	kielecki [27.7]; buski [21.1]		
lubuskie (2)	żarski [20.8]; strzelecko-drezdenecki [20.6]		

Source: own elaboration based on Zeszyt..., 2023.

of the country, socio-economic, regional and spatial cohesion, increasing the competitiveness of the economy and creating new jobs at national, regional or local level. According to Articles 3 and 4 of the same Act, development policy at local level is implemented by county and municipal self-government on the basis of development strategies. Development strategies are of a general nature and take precedence over other documents of the institution. They are documents that specify strategic development goals, outline directions of action in the form of objectives and operational tasks, indicate financial resources and sources necessary for the implementation of the adopted objectives and tasks (Kłodziński, 2009), and provide information about the perception of the county itself and its resources by identifying opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses within the conducted SWOT analysis. The structure of such a document allows for organizing information and effectively implementing the adopted development plan. According to M. Kłodziński (2009) planning must accompany every authority and is an essential element of adaptation to EU requirements. Well-developed and effectively implemented planning becomes an indispensable element conducive to the rationality of management, especially with public funds.

Analysing the development strategies of counties recognized as the most touristically attractive appears to be an appropriate method to achieve the main goal of this article, which is to determine how tourism is perceived by local authorities, how tourism policy is shaped in the analysed counties, and whether tourism plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the analysed territorial units.

2. Materials and methods

The research material on which the analysis presented here is based consists of county development strategies. Some of the counties selected for analysis also have separate documents specifically related to tourism development, but these were not included in the analysis to ensure comparability. In addition, general development strategies place tourism in a broader context and indirectly allow conclusions to be drawn about the importance of its role in the development of the units analysed.

Among the 95 counties identified in the GUS report as the most touristically attractive (TAI index above 20.00), 66 have current development strategies – they represent 69.5% of all mentioned counties. The remaining 29 counties do not have a current strategy or it is still under development (Figure 2).

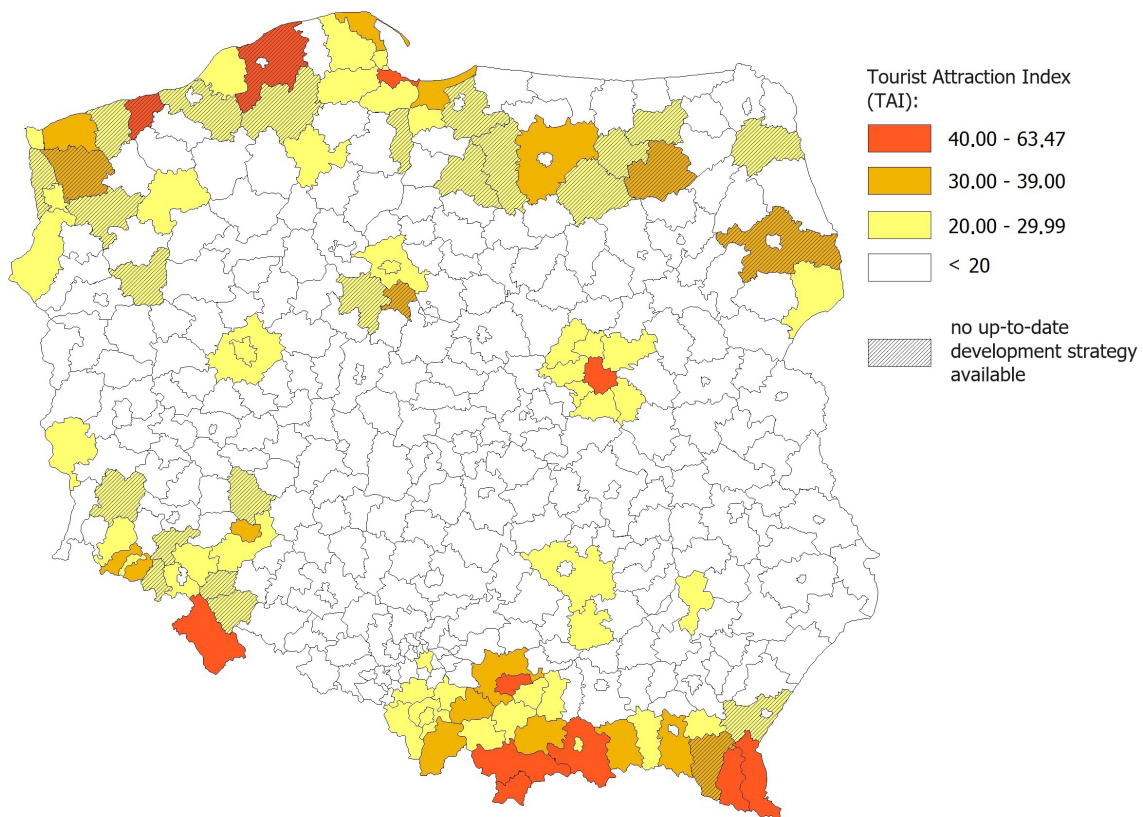


Fig. 2. The availability of strategic documents for selected counties against the backdrop of Poland's administrative division. Source: own elaboration.

Therefore, the analysis covered 66 strategic documents, totalling nearly 5500 pages. The planning period of the analysed documents extends up to 2034 (in the case of piaseczno county), and in other cases, it does not exceed 2030.

The research process was divided into 4 phases. Each stage used different methods and research tools. In the first stage, keywords were identified, which formed the basis for computer-assisted contextual analysis using text mining techniques. All words containing the root «tourist» were selected, allowing the automatic identification and counting of words such as tourist, tourist development, tourism, etc. The advanced search function of Adobe Acrobat Pro was used for this purpose. With regard to the selection of contextually analysed content without the use of computer tools, extracts were selected from documents relating to strategic and operational objectives, four areas of SWOT analysis and statements of vision or mission of the counties studied. This content was included in 64 of the 66 strategies analysed, thus ensuring the comparability of the research results. The second stage involved the actual analysis: computer-assisted analysis of all available material and contextual analysis of selected extracts. In the third stage, a summary table was drawn up for all the units analysed, containing the following successive categories: the type of document analysed, the planning period, the number of operational and strategic objectives related to tourism and their content, the number of words containing the root «tourist», the types of tourism mentioned in the document, as well as all the strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities related in any way to tourism. In the fourth stage, all the data obtained were visualised using cartographic methods.

3. Tourism as a component of the mission and/or vision of county development

The mission of a county self-government has a meaning analogous to the literal understanding of a mission as a mandate or task to be fulfilled. The mission of the self-government succinctly defines the essence of its actions and the basic functions to be fulfilled in order to meet the needs of the inhabitants of the county. The chosen mission makes it possible to define the vision of the county, which is understood as a kind of projection of the state that the local community and its representative self-government authority aspire to. The inclusion of tourism or activities directly related to it in the

mission and/or vision of the county indicates its importance for the planned socio-economic development and the way it is perceived by the local authorities.

Of the 66 counties surveyed, 12 (18.2%) included statements related to tourism in their mission and 24 (36.4%) in their development vision. Of the 9 analysed counties (with a current development strategy) recognised as the most attractive for tourism (TAI index equal to or greater than 40.00), 5 considered tourism important enough for socio-economic development to include it in their vision. In most statements, counties refer to increasing the attractiveness of tourism in the future. It is worth noting that in a few cases direct reference is made to the development of sustainable tourism, taking into account the need to protect cultural and natural heritage (examples: [...] *tourist-friendly, while preserving its natural and cultural wealth* (nowotarski – vision); [...] *sustainable development of its resources based on tourism* (tatrzański – vision); *ensuring stable conditions for the development of tourism and recreation, respecting the principles of sustainable development* (karkonoski – mission); [...] *a county [...] that makes responsible use of its rich environmental resources and provides excellent conditions for tourism* (żarski – mission).

An interesting case is Warsaw, which, despite having the highest TAI index, does not consider tourism as an industry significant enough to mention it in the city's vision or mission. It can be argued that the largest city in the country must face so many challenges – such as those related to transportation, housing, or other social issues – that increasing the city's tourism attractiveness itself is not a key issue in the current city policy, especially since the number of tourists in Warsaw is increasing year by year (210% increase from 2002 to 2022). (Bank..., 2024). Tourism, or rather tourists – treated as city users, are mentioned in the context of spatial functionality and transport accessibility.

4. Tourism as part of strategic and operational purposes of counties

Clearly formulated, achievable and appropriately prioritised development objectives are undoubtedly the basis of socio-economic development planning for territorial units. The contextual analyses carried out identified the number of strategic and operational objectives directly related to the development of the tourism industry. It can be assumed that the more often tourism appears in these provisions, the more

important the development of the tourism function is for the county authorities and residents (provided that they participated in the strategy development process).

Of the 66 counties analysed, 55 (81.8%) have strategic and operational objectives directly related to the development of the tourism function. For the authorities of 27 counties (40.9%), the overall development of tourism is a strategic objective, being the highest in the hierarchy of development objectives. Strategic objectives are usually formulated in very broad terms and, in the case of the counties analysed, can be divided into three main groups concerning:

1. Promotion of tourism (attractions, offerings, product):: nowotarski, Nowy Sącz, bocheński, malborski;
2. Development of tourism as a sector of the local economy: bieszczadzki, gorlicki, sławieński, cieszyński, myślenicki, Poznań, wałbrzyski, hajnowski, nowodworski, otwocki;
3. Utilization of existing tourist attractions (creating tourist offerings/products): nowodworski, karkonoski, wielicki, jasielski, Nowy Sącz, gdański, bielski, pszczyński, lwówecki, Katowice, legionowski (emphasis on infrastructure).

From these main objectives, it can be concluded that the vast majority of the analysed units do not have a fully developed tourism product and see tourism as a catalyst for dynamic economic development. Particularly noteworthy are the strategic objectives of three counties - tatrzański, wołomiński and Sopot - which are the only ones directly aimed at the development of sustainable tourism. In the case of Sopot and the tatrzański county (where Zakopane is located), the move away from mass tourism may be less a visionary approach to planning the tourism function, but rather a reaction to the very high level of tourist traffic and its negative effects.

Operational goals directly related to tourism have been adopted by 44 analysed counties (66.7% of all examined). They constitute below 10% of all operational goals in 26 counties (59.1% of those units that adopted operational goals related to tourism) and do not exceed 20% in 40 counties (90.9%). Only in the case of 4 counties – gdański, wołomiński, żywiecki and cieszyński – operational goals including the development of the tourism industry account for more than 1/5 of all designated goals (Fig. 3).

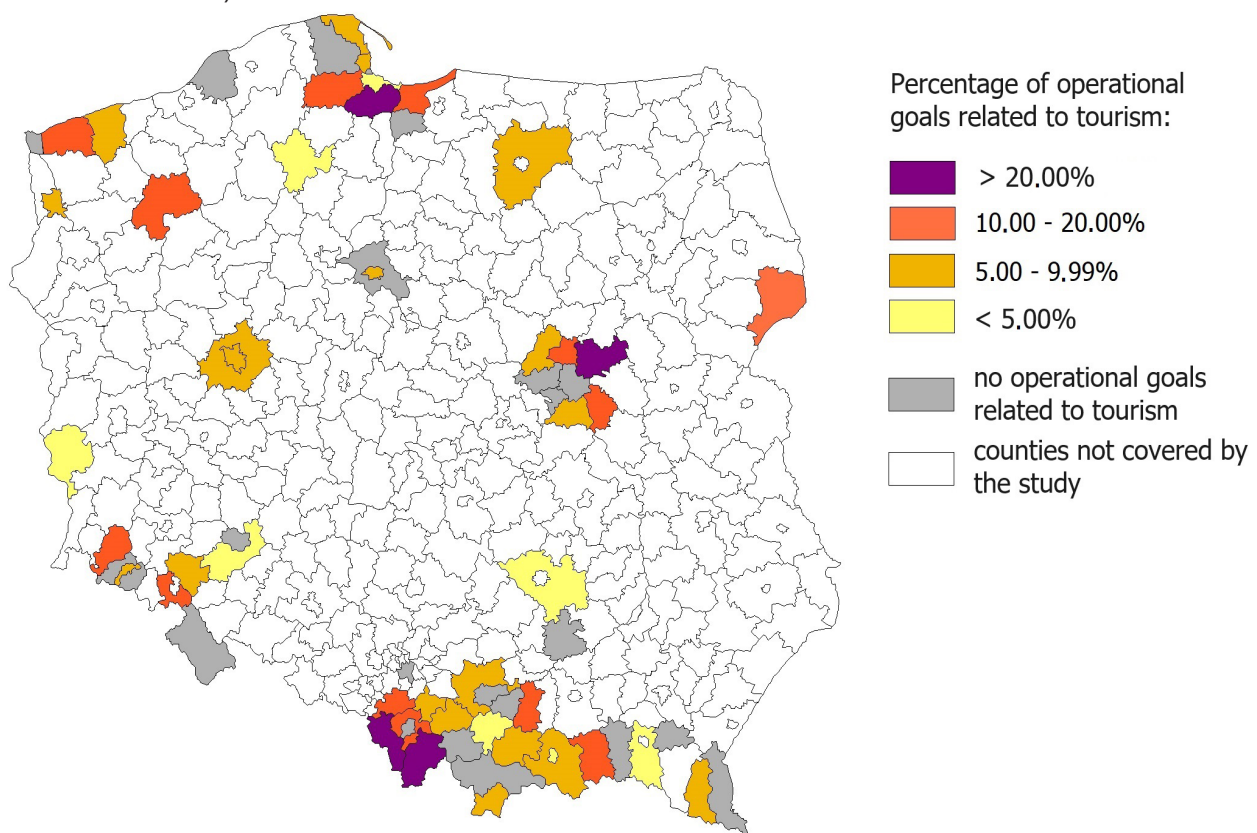


Fig. 3. The percentage of operational goals related to tourism in the strategic documents of the analysed counties.

Source: own elaboration.

Similarly to the strategic goals, authorities mainly focused on the effective utilization of tourist attractions to build the tourist product of counties (25 counties; 56.8%) or to strengthen their existing potential (10 counties; 22.7%) (Table 2). However, the vast majority of them do not mention which specific attractions would be utilized or what constitutes their tourist potential.

Another important issue, chosen as an operational objective by 13 counties (29.5%), was the development and modernisation of tourist infrastructure, including car parks, access roads, small recreational facilities, catering and hotel facilities, but above all the development of the cycle path network. The construction of infrastructure enabling the development of cycle tourism was

Tab. 2. Classification of operational goals related to tourism adopted by the analysed counties.

Operational goals	Counties
utilizing attractions/potential to create tourist offerings/products	nowosądecki, żywiecki, pucki, gorlicki, krakowski, Szczecin, poznański, cieszyński, Toruń, Gdynia, kielecki, Jelenia Góra, drawski, chojnicki, piaseczyński, wałbrzyski, kartuski, Nowy Sącz, gdański, pszczyński, wołomiński, oświęcimski, hajnowski, hajnowski, nowodworski (pomorskie)
strengthening/improving existing tourist potential/attractiveness	Gdańsk, nowodworski (mazowieckie), gorlicki, myślenicki, Poznań, Jelenia Góra, bielski, wołomiński, wrocławski, żarski
development/modernization of tourist infrastructure	Gdańsk, nowodworski (mazowieckie), olsztyński, wałbrzyski, infrastruktura, Nowy Sącz, legionowski, pszczyński, lwówecki, wołomiński, oświęcimski, wrocławski, żarski
increase in the significance of the tourism sector in the local economy	leski, krośnieński, limanowski, wadowicki, drawski, gryficki, legionowski, otwocki, świdnicki
tourism promotion	pucki, myślenicki, chojnicki, wałbrzyski, kartuski, bocheński, bielski, lwówecki, nowodworski (pomorskie)
human resources development	cieszyński, Toruń
multi-stakeholder cooperation to create a comprehensive tourist offer	kartuski, gdański, hajnowski
development of sustainable tourism	tatrzański, leski, kamieński, żywiecki, cieszyński, bocheński, gdański, pszczyński, lwówecki

Source: M. Koperska-Kośmicka.

mentioned in the development strategies of most of the counties analysed, including those that did not adopt any objectives (strategic and/or operational) directly related to the development of tourism.

Operational goals related to increasing the significance of the tourism sector in the local economy and the associated tourism promotion were adopted by 18 counties (40.9%). Other actions aimed at the broad development of the tourism industry also include training personnel to serve the tourist traffic (mentioned by 2 counties) and engaging in cooperation with the environment (neighbouring regions, private entities), mentioned by 3 counties.

In the context of sustainable tourism development, which has been recognized by the European Union as a development priority, it is important to pay particular attention to those operational goals that directly relate to it. They are as follows: striving for a more even distribution of tourist traffic, including all the municipalities of the county (tatrzański); improving the ecological awareness of tourists and residents (leski); economic growth

based on sustainable tourism relying on endogenous resources and common tourist products (kamieński); improving the state of the natural environment and adapting it to ongoing climate changes in the context of existing tourism potentials (żywiecki); developing and implementing a comprehensive regional tourism development concept (cieszyński); diversification of tourism functions in bocheński county (bocheński); improving the quality of the natural environment, including reducing low emissions to maintain tourism attractiveness and residential areas (gdański); tourism development supported by local businesses with respect for local traditions (pszczyński); and protection and promotion of cultural and natural resources (lwówecki). Incorporating the idea of sustainable development into strategic planning demonstrates awareness of the challenges and threats posed by the development of the tourism industry. Conscious planning will allow, to some extent, the mitigation of the negative effects of tourism development in reception areas.

The last issue related to the analysis of strategic and operational goals set by the local authorities of the counties studied is the way in which they are formulated. While the level of generality of strategic goals can and should be significant, operational goals should be treated differently. Although additional and more detailed action directions have been developed for most of them (e.g., development of unused facilities including the Stawiarski Palace Outbuilding in Jedlicze, the building complex at the former border crossing in Barwinek – krośnieński or construction of bike paths around the Klimkówka Reservoir – gorlicki), the vast majority are formulated in an extremely general and enigmatic manner, without mentioning specific locations and methods for achieving the chosen goals, such as utilization of the tourist potential of the county (kielecki); development of tourism and recreational functions (drawski); tourism development (gryficki), or multi-directional tourism development (świdnicki). Such formulations are common in the analysed documents.

5. Forms of tourism mentioned in the development strategies of the examined counties

Among the 66 analysed counties, 92.4% mention at least one form of tourism in their strategic documents. Among the most frequently mentioned are: cycling tourism (43 mentions), cultural tourism (39), and agritourism (38).

The content analysis of the documents revealed that over three-quarters of the analyzed counties explicitly mention active and qualified tourism (34) or their various forms – cycling (43), water sports (kayaking, windsurfing, sailing, kitesurfing, diving – a total of 24 mentions), hiking (29), horseback riding (15), mountain tourism (8), winter sports (cross-country and downhill skiing – 5), and hunting tourism (2). This fact may indicate a change in the paradigm of tourism development in our country and a departure from traditional leisure tourism (Rotariu, 2006; Giampiccoli, Mtapuri, 2014), which until recently was the basis for the development of the tourism function in many destinations. And although agritourism, classified as a form of leisure tourism, is the third most commonly mentioned form of tourism in the analysed documents, in Polish realities, it usually means activities based solely on renting accommodations to tourists, rather than their active participation in the life of the farm.

Nowadays, urban tourism and cultural tourism, which are directly linked, have become the most popular form of tourism (Ashworth, Page, 2011). The same trend is evident in the strategic planning of

the analysed counties. Cultural tourism is mentioned both directly (38 references) and indirectly through forms based on the cultural heritage of the regions – religious tourism (9), historical tourism (6), culinary tourism (5), industrial tourism (2), and wine tourism (2). Considering the relatively short tourist season in our country, this is a very favourable trend because anthropogenic values can be explored by tourists even outside the summer season.

Poland is one of the most dynamically developing countries in terms of medical tourism. It has a well-developed medical infrastructure, qualified medical staff and competitive prices for medical services. In 2021, approximately 320,000 foreign patients will use medical services in Poland. This number is expected to grow steadily, with an annual growth rate of approximately 15% (Szyman, 2023). The counties surveyed are also planning to develop medical tourism itself (mentioned 5 times) and other forms of health-related tourism, such as: spa tourism (10), health tourism (8), rehabilitation tourism (1) and spa tourism (1).

The next group of forms of tourism mentioned in the analysed strategic documents is business tourism (mentioned 11 times), congress tourism (4) and conference tourism (4). These forms of tourism are traditionally developed in large cities (Nawrocka, 2013), which is also confirmed by the current analysis. Among the forms of tourism relating to specific user groups, it is noteworthy that counties are planning to adapt their tourist offerings to the needs of people with disabilities (9 references) and older adults (7). Considering the general trend of population aging in Europe, the shift towards the silver economy indicates a good understanding by county authorities of the trends prevailing in the global tourism market.

Creating a tourist product requires identifying its core (Stec, 2015), and the more unique it is, the greater the chance that a given tourist destination will succeed, standing out among many similar ones. The analysed strategic documents contain entries indicating that local authorities are aware of how important it is to create unique tourist products. In tourism planning, there is a visible shift towards new forms of tourism, such as industrial tourism, archaeological tourism, climatic tourism, astronomical tourism, nomadic tourism, or geotourism, which can form the basis for building a unique and branded tourist product.

Taking into account new forms of tourism arising from changing lifestyles, new patterns of leisure activities, and the advancing process of aging society, the counties are creating suitable conditions for the development of the tourism industry, whose offerings will meet the current and future expectations of tourists.

6. Strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the context of the development of the tourism function of the counties

As mentioned earlier, the SWOT analysis is a component of nearly every analysed development strategy. It is a widely used heuristic technique employed for organizing and analysing data. The term SWOT is an acronym for the English words strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which define the four components of this type of analysis. It is commonly used as a strategic planning tool that allows leveraging available information to develop an action strategy based on opportunities and strengths. Simultaneously, it enables the elimination or mitigation of the impact of identified weaknesses and threats on planned actions (Matusiak, 2011).

When defining the opportunities, threats, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their counties, local authorities often referred to issues indirectly and directly related to the development of the tourism industry. Out of 66 counties with current development strategies, only seven did not conduct a SWOT analysis or potential analysis (Gdańsk, leski, Sopot, suski, piaseczyński, Nowy Sącz, Katowice, malborski), so 59 strategic documents were included in this part of the study.

The vast majority of analyzed documents mention at least one strength of the county related to tourism - 41 counties out of 59 that conducted a SWOT analysis (69.5%). The most strengths were identified by counties: wałbrzyski (15), oświęcimski (9), nowosądecki (8), gorlicki (8) i wielicki (8).

Among the entries referring to strengths, natural values are most commonly mentioned. Such landscape elements were listed in the SWOT analysis by 36 counties (61%), referring to both individual objects and the presence of protected areas and the quality of the natural environment, e.g., spa and healing qualities of waters and local microclimate (kamieński); natural values possible to use for tourism and active recreation purposes (Iwówcecki); a higher percentage of protected areas in the county than in the voivodeship (nowodworski); natural and landscape values of the county, NATURA 2000 protected areas with rich avian fauna ('Lower Skawa Valley,' 'Lower Soła Valley,' 'Ponds in Brzeszcze,' and 'Lower Soła Valley'), rich flora and fauna (especially in opposition to heavily urbanized areas) - contributing to its recreational, scientific, and cognitive attractiveness (oświęcimski); clean natural environment (wałbrzyski). Unfortunately, in most cases, these entries are very general (e.g., natural resources and their diversity (wałbrzyski) or natural and landscape values (karkonoski)), making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the level

of recognition of the county's resources based on them.

A similar problem concerns anthropogenic values, which were mentioned by 17 units (28.8%) – e.g., a rich resource of monuments, generating tourist traffic (nowosądecki) or a large number of historical sites, often of supraregional significance (poznański). Well-written entries include, for example, a high value of cultural heritage and the importance of cultural and sports activities (Slavs and Vikings Festival in Wolin, country music festival in Sułomin, Międzyzdroje Stars Festival, Dziwnów sports festival, organ concerts in Kamień Pomorski, Golczewski Triathlon) (kamieński) or rich cultural heritage: 24 registered monuments, 426 objects in the municipal registers of monuments. Historically valuable objects of both larger scale / more recognisable, such as the Wieliczka Salt Mine, the Niepołomice Castle, the Żeleński Palace in Grodkowice (Kłaj), and smaller but also valuable ones, e.g., the so-called isolatorium – chapel in Grodkowice, St. Valentine's bell – chapel in Targowisko, and a number of other minor, interesting monuments scattered throughout the LGD area, e.g., shrines, churches) (wielicki).

The attractiveness of the existing tourism offer/brand of the county is another strong point mentioned by 17 counties (28.8%), and it is also linked to the existing tourism infrastructure (mentioned by 16 counties; 27.1%), with particular emphasis on accommodation facilities, separately listed as a strong point by 8 counties (13.6%). Another element indirectly related to infrastructure is the presence of tourist trails, recognized as a strength by 8 counties (13.6%) – mainly mentioning cycling and hiking trails.

Among the other strengths mentioned in the documents analysed, the following elements stand out: growing demand for tourism services (5 mentions); extensive cooperation and networking (6); location and proximity to other regions (7) – noteworthy formulations include: proximity to the capital (nowodworski – mazowieckie); development of cross-border traffic, proximity to touristically attractive regions (gorlicki); location of the region at the state border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia (cieszyński). Recognizing the potential in the broad environment and the awareness that effective tourism development requires thinking beyond one's own backyard is a very positive trend in planning. Additionally, hospitality and friendliness of the local population also appeared in the category of strengths.

The second element of the SWOT analysis is weaknesses – 38 analyzed counties mention at least one weakness related to tourism. The analysed counties identified a total of 116 weaknesses related

to tourism, which is almost one-third less than the number of strengths, which totaled 159.

Among the 59 counties that applied this method, 23 (39%) indicated that a weakness was the lack, insufficient level of development, or unsatisfactory technical condition of tourism infrastructure, with particular emphasis on deficiencies in cycling and accommodation infrastructure.

Furthermore, 20 counties point to the lack of branded tourist products, the low quality or insufficient diversification of the existing tourist offer, and under-utilization of existing potential. However, regarding the tourist potential, only two counties precisely indicated which tourist resources are meant – nowosądecki (Lake Rożnowskie) and żywiecki (Lake Żywieckie).

Two other issues, mentioned 9 times by the local authorities of the surveyed units as weaknesses, are the lack of (a coherent) tourist information system and inadequate promotion. Insufficient cooperation between institutions and bodies active in the tourism sector was also mentioned by 5 counties, the lack of development of agrotourism by another 3, and the poor quality of the environment, a shortage of staff serving tourists and the lack of an effective system for collecting data on tourist traffic or existing offers by 2 each.

As a separate category of weaknesses directly related to the phenomena observed in contemporary tourism, those can be classified as those directly or indirectly related to the phenomenon of tourism hypertrophy, with which many destinations of very high tourist attractiveness are currently struggling, such as Venice, Florence, Barcelona, Berlin, and others (Novy, 2011; Yazdi, Khanalizadeh, 2017; Muller-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018; Novy, Colomb, 2019), and the first signs of which are already visible in our country, for example in Krakow (Banaszkiewicz et al., 2017; Zmysłony, Kowalczyk-Anioł, 2019).

Weaknesses related to tourism hypertrophy were mentioned in 6 strategic documents, for example, inconveniences for residents related to tourist traffic for residents (e.g., the airport in Nowy Targ) (nowotarski); concentration of tourist traffic in the Old Town area, lack of distribution of this traffic to other attractions located in other parts of the city (Toruń).

Another serious problem identified by the local authorities as a weakness is the seasonality of tourism, which affects most regions of our country and has consequences such as the destabilisation of the labour market or the periodic destruction of tourist resources. The problem of an excessively short tourist season is mentioned by 10 counties, for

example, «the local labour market, which is highly dependent on tourist traffic and its seasonality; a small number of year-round tourist products, which affectsthe seasonality of tourist traffic» (bieszczadzki); «short tourist season due to climate and weather conditions, weakness of the offer to extend the tourist season, including insufficient availability of alternative attractions and tourist infrastructure in case of bad weather» (pucki); «short tourist season» (gryficki) or «lack of a coordinated tourist promotion policy aimed at tourists, based on the offer of most municipalities and encouraging longer stays in the county» (oświęcimski). Interestingly, the seasonality of tourist traffic is not only observed in counties that base their tourist offer on natural attractions.

The third element of the SWOT analysis is the so-called opportunities. In this case, 34 counties (57.6%) considered issues related to the broadly understood development of the tourism function as a development opportunity – a total of 112 opportunities were identified. The leading issue here is the shift in the paradigm of tourism development towards active and sustainable tourism, as well as the interest in a healthy lifestyle (22 indications). Also significant in the context of development opportunities is the growing interest in domestic tourism – demand for regionalism and authentic folk culture, which was noted by the authorities of the following counties: tatrzański, żywiecki, wadowicki, cieszyński, wielicki, chojnicki, lwówecki, gryficki, buski, żarski, and toruński.

18 counties considered their existing image or tourism potential as an opportunity for development. Other issues mentioned in the opportunities category include: the development of organic farms and agritourism (9 indications); global development of the tourism industry (8); active cooperation between local governments and local entrepreneurs, NGOs, and residents (7); the expansion and/or modernisation of infrastructure (10) with a focus on the construction of cycling paths and routes (4); the possibility of obtaining external financing for tourism-related investments (4); effective investment and tourism promotion (3); and the development and increasing popularity of IT technologies in tourism (GPS, mobile phone applications, interactive and multimedia guides, new presentation formats) (2). However, some of the statements regarding opportunities are formulated in a way that brings to mind the municipality's resources rather than phenomena or processes that would enable the development of the tourism industry. An example could be the statement tourist attractions in neighbouring counties (brzozowski) or agritourism (gryficki). Another problem identified during the analysis of this part of the strategic

documents is the copying and repetition of clichéd general phrases, such as «increase in domestic tourism.»

The last element of the SWOT analysis, which is the subject of contextual analysis of the content of the selected development strategies, is threats. Almost half of the analysed counties (47.5%) perceive threats related to the development of tourism. The four most frequently mentioned issues are: the sensitivity of the tourism sector to political (e.g., war in Ukraine) and economic changes (COVID-19 pandemic) – 10 indications; competition from neighbouring regions in terms of tourist attractiveness – 11 indications; lack/insufficient cooperation between local governments and local

entrepreneurs, NGOs, and residents – 6 indications; and various manifestations of tourism hypertrophy – 8 indications, with a particular emphasis on environmental degradation – 4 indications.

Among the analyzed entries, it is noteworthy that a relatively large number of counties perceive competition from neighbouring regions in terms of tourist attractiveness as a threat and do not seem to recognise the benefits associated with cooperation and the creation of a tourism product with a wider impact. Meanwhile, the issue of tourism hypertrophy is also addressed in other parts of the strategy, pointing to various negative consequences of overly intense tourist traffic. A summary of the other issues identified is presented in Table 3.

Tab. 3. Signs of tourism hypertrophy identified in the strategic documents of the selected counties

Identified signs of tourism hypertrophy	County
„[...] problem of insufficient parking spaces (especially in the centre of Pszczyna and near Lake Goczałkowickie) and the 'takeover' of tourist-attractive areas by tourists at the expense of residents”	pszczyński
“strong urbanization and recreational-tourist pressure, especially in protected and valuable landscape areas, may pose a certain threat to the county”	chojnicki
„the residents recognize the need for the city to promote a healthy lifestyle, develop sports events primarily for residents, not for tourists”	Świnoujście
„[...] uncontrolled, 'wild' developments in tourist-attractive areas”	wejherowski
„The residents of Sopot identify [...] excessive tourist traffic (noise and pollution) as the most significant environmental threats. [...] The increasing attractiveness of the city leads to an excessive concentration of tourist traffic in its central and coastal areas, resulting in a decline in the quality of life for residents of these areas and posing a threat to the degradation of natural resources.”	Sopot
„The mass tourism traffic in the area causes a series of phenomena that need to be considered in the context of environmental threats. These include waste, municipal sewage, beach trampling, motor vehicle traffic, infrastructure construction, as well as motorized, sailing, and underwater tourism. Tourism traffic and the construction of tourist-recreational infrastructure pose significant threats to natural coastal ecosystems, accelerating erosion processes and causing devastation in the natural landscape. Potential side effects, such as higher water and air pollution, noise, and landscape degradation, can translate into tangible economic losses for the area.”	pucki
„It is also necessary to consider the threat to coastal communities posed by the development of tourism based on external investors, labour, services and products. The consequences of this phenomenon will be a deepening of social and economic stratification, an increase in property market prices and a relatively high cost of living for residents. It is therefore necessary to involve local resources, workers and businesses in the tourism sector in order to counteract these negative phenomena. The coastal strip is the main area of concentration of tourist traffic in the Kamieński County Partnership. In this area there is a very strong anthropogenic pressure on the waters of the Baltic Sea, the coastal strip, the Szczecin Lagoon and directly adjacent areas.”	kamieński
„The challenge for the near future is to monitor and assess the impact of tourist traffic on the functioning of the city in terms of economic, environmental, and social aspects. The result of these efforts, besides understanding the magnitude of gains and losses resulting from the presence of tourists, should also be the identification of areas with unfavorable balances and those where there is a risk of conflicts between the needs of guests and residents.”	Gdańsk
„The negative consequences of mass tourism, especially in touristically attractive areas.”	Kraków
„uncontrolled influx of tourists - harm to the environment and local communities”	nowotarski
„anthropopressure in touristically attractive areas: excessive and uncontrolled development, budget tourism”	sławieński

Source: M. Koperska-Kośmicka.

The contextual analysis of all four elements of the SWOT strategic planning tool indicates that tourism and related phenomena and processes are mainly perceived in a positive context. Although possible negative consequences are recognized, there is a lack of specific provisions regarding real counteraction to tourism hypertrophy.

7. Summary

Tourism, as a significant direction of development for numerous counties in Poland, is considered a strategic or operational goal by almost 67% of the surveyed counties. Furthermore, tourism and related phenomena and processes are taken into account in the SWOT analysis, representing both strengths and weaknesses, as well as threats or opportunities for the regions.

For a strategic document to be effective, it must be properly constructed—setting out clearly formulated, specific, and achievable goals. In the case of the analysed development strategies of the counties recognised as the most attractive for tourism development, it can be noted that some of the analysed documents do not meet this requirement. There is a considerable degree of generality in the formulation of the operational goals. Only in a few cases do they refer to specific objects or areas, with clearly defined tasks, the completion of which can be clearly assessed after the timeframe indicated in the document. When formulating objectives, both strategic and operational, municipalities use very general language. This detaches the document from the specifics of the given administrative unit and, at the same time, allows each completed undertaking to be counted towards a given strategic

or operational goal, which makes it impossible to properly evaluate the implementation of planned activities.

Furthermore, tourism development is perceived mainly in terms of infrastructure development, neglecting the human factor, whereas the provision of tourism services requires adequate human capital. In order for tourism development to contribute to the improvement of the level and quality of life of the inhabitants, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development, it should involve the local community, which should, however, have certain defined skills. Only a few counties mention raising the skills or awareness of their inhabitants as an operational objective.

The criticism of overly general formulations also applies to the SWOT analysis. It is also worrying that neighbouring regions are perceived as dangerous competition. By closing themselves off to cooperation, counties fail to see the positive aspects of cooperation in developing tourism on a wider scale.

Among the positive trends revealed by the analysis of strategic documents is a shift towards active tourism, especially cycling and hiking, and a move away from mass tourism. Recognizing the negative consequences of uncontrolled tourism development also reflects a growing awareness of the processes associated with the tourism industry and is a first step towards prevention. However, the lack of real solutions proposed in the strategic documents to eliminate or at least mitigate the effects of excessive tourist traffic is noteworthy.

In conclusion, the analysed county development strategies do not fully fulfil their role as tools for planning tourism development in the selected administrative units.

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