

BARBARA OSÓCH

University of Szczecin, Poland

WOJCIECH ZBARASZEWSKI

West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Poland

Evaluation of Tourist Services in the Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa (Poland): a Study Based on Tourism Surveys

Abstract: The article attempts to assess the state and directions of development of tourist services in the area of the Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa (SLP PB) and the directions of their development. The article presents the preliminary results of surveys conducted in 2019 using the PAPI method in the SLP PB area as part of the international REGE project. The survey involved 311 respondents visiting the SLP PB area. The main motivation for the visit (86%) of the respondents in SLP PB is leisure and recreation, and visitors spend time primarily on walking (49%) and cycling (25%). The vast majority of respondents (79%) are aware that the area they are in is protected. At the same time, only 56% of all respondents correctly defined the form of protection of the studied area as a landscape park, which indicates the need for further educational activities. Although the spontaneous associations of the respondents focused on the natural values of this area, the questions about the advantages and disadvantages of the response area concerned primarily tourist infrastructure, services provided or lack thereof. The respondents pointed primarily to service deficits in the area under study in the scope of: guided tours (23%), events (20%) and lack of tourist information points (15%).

Keywords: landscape park; protected areas; Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa; services; tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The dynamic development of protected areas, both in terms of area and their number, has been recorded in recent decades around the world. In Poland, according to World Bank data, the share of protected areas in the country area was 38.1%, and thus was higher than the average in the world (14.5%), as well as than the average in the European Union, which was 23.4% (World Bank Data, 2019). At the same time, protected

areas are an increasingly attractive tourist destination (Eagles, McCool, Haynes, Phillips, 2002; Lordkipanidze, Krozer, Kadiman, Crul, Brezet, 2011; Bushell, Bricker, 2016).

In Poland, among the surface forms of nature protection, great importance is focused on landscape parks. This is due to their large number (122 at the end of 2017), the large area of the country they occupy, 8.3% (GUS, 2018: 104), and also because of the goals and the way they function. The idea of creating and for the functioning of landscape parks is the coexistence of nature and man. In the Polish act on nature protection, a landscape park is defined as “a protected area due to natural, historical and cultural values, as well as landscape values in order to preserve and popularise these values in conditions of sustainable development” (Ustawa o ochronie przyrody, 2004). Thus, landscape parks located near large cities are attractive places for tourists, willingly and abundantly used by the community, not only by locals.

The Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa (SLP PB) has been the subject of numerous studies. In particular, the studies concerned broadly understood natural values of this area (Borowiec, 1963; Jasnowski, Friedrich, 1979; Celiński, 1993; Celiński, Denisiuk, 1993; Tumiłowicz, 1996; Domian, Ziarnek, 2010) and tourism (Lipniacki, 1979; Lipniacki, 1981; Lipniacki, 1993; Mazur, 2009; Domian, Kędra, 2010; *Leksykon Puszcza Bukowa*, 2012; Słowiak, 2017). In the environment of SLP PB, since 2011 a very active social organization has been operating – Kniejołaz Club, which dynamically runs a Facebook page, organizes numerous events, gives opinions on local law acts regarding the area of SLP PB, and has initiated the publication of the “Lexicon of the Beech Forest”. However, in the literature on the subject, the authors did not note publications devoted to social monitoring of SLP PB visitors, including rendered and expected services and the level of acceptance for this area. Thus, this article is at least a fragmentary attempt to fill this gap. The publication is part of an increasingly important issue related to socio-economic monitoring in protected areas (Solbrig, Buer, Stoll-Kleemann, 2013; Rückert-John, 2017; Job, Fließbach-Schendzielorz, Bittlingmaier, Herling, Woltering, 2019).

The aim of the article was to evaluate services in the Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa (SLP PB) in the context of the tourist function of this area. Research question complies with the research goal – How do SLP PB visitors assess the status and scope of rendered services in this area and what are their expectations?

METHODOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

Field surveys using the PAPI method visiting SLP PB were conducted in two rounds – in June and August 2019. The studies were conducted simultaneously in 6 representative places in the SLP PB area by trained interviewers. In the northern part of the area adjacent to Szczecin they were: a car park at Szmaragdowe Lake and an entrance to the park at Bukowe estate; in the central part of the park it was a parking lot next to the tourist trail node at the boulder called “Heart of the Forest”, while in the southern part of the park there were places at Glinna Lake and Binowskie Lake, as well as in the parking lot at the Dendrological Garden in Glinna. These places have been selected in consultation with the management of Landscape Park Complex of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship, which supervises the functioning of, among others, also said Landscape Park.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 34 questions, including 5 metric questions. Only a portion of the research material was used in this article. The research limitations

in the study include the lack of answers to all questions in some questionnaires, which could have resulted in differentiation of the final number in the answers to individual questions. A group with a complete set of answers was examined. Comparison of control results with the results of the whole sample did not show significant deviations. Therefore, the number of responses in each category was assumed to be 100%.

As part of the research, 311 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained. Due to the small research sample, narrowed research period, research locations, the results obtained cannot be treated as representative for all SLP PB visitors.

The analysis of the tourist development of the studied area was carried out on the basis of own field research, materials made available by the Landscape Park Complex of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship and the Atlas of the Tourist and Sightseeing Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa (Atlas, 2014).

The pilot study was part of the international INT107 project implemented in 2019–2021 under the name “Cross-border cooperation between universities and large protected areas in the Pomerania Euroregion”. The project was co-financed by the European Union from the European Regional Development Fund under the Interreg VA Cooperation Program Mecklenburg-Vorpommern / Brandenburg / Poland. There are plans to continue the survey in which opinions obtained from visitors and opinions of residents will be compared.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SZCZECIN LANDSCAPE PARK PUSZCZA BUKOWA

Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa is primarily a range of moraine hills (up to approx. 150 m a.s.l.) covered with beech forest (approx. 74% of the area) cut by gorges and valleys, with numerous lakes and peat bogs. The area is largely covered with dense forest complexes. The Beech Forest and is characterised by high biological diversity (Domian, Kędra, 2010). The uniqueness of this area was so high that in 1971 the State Council for Nature Conservation approved the project to create the Szczecin National Park Puszcza Bukowa (Kmieciak, Woś, 1993). Actions aimed at creating a national park in this area were also undertaken in subsequent years (Jasnowski, Friedrich, 1979). Although the Szczecin Landscape Park of the Puszcza Bukowa was created in 1981, attempts were made to raise this area to a higher level of protection, which was a national park (Celiński, Denisiuk, 1993; Stachak, 1993). As it results from the analyses carried out at that time, the natural values exceeded the majority of Polish national parks, and at the same time the tourist attractiveness was rated below the average for the then functioning national parks (Celiński, 1993). Originally, the SLP PB area was 6.7 thousand ha, and the buffer zone approx. 15.7 thousand ha. After adjusting the borders in 1989, the total area of SLP PB decreased by about 10% and now the park area covers about 9,000 ha, and lagging 11.8 ha (Szczecin Landscape Park Puszcza Bukowa, 2019). Thus, the share of the SLP PB area in the total area of five parks supervised by the Landscape Park Complex of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship was about 10% (GUS, 2017: 277) The SLP PB area extends along the south-eastern districts of Szczecin, covering 3 communes: Szczecin (urban commune), Stare Czarnowo (rural commune) and Gryfino (urban-rural commune).

Among the forms of nature protection, within the boundaries of SLP PB there are 7 nature reserves, 2 ecological sites, 2 nature and landscape complexes and 125 nature monuments, 5 fountains, 11 erratic boulders (Domian, Kędra, 2010; Domian, Ziarnik,

2010). In 2004, part of the SLP PB was included in the European Ecological Network Natura 2000 as a special area of habitat protection of Wzgórza Bukowe PLH 320020. SLP PB also has interesting anthropogenic values, and among the most important are: the Glinna Cemetery (remains of a cemetery from the Middle Bronze Period), Uroczysko Mosty (German sapper training ground from the Second World War), strongholds (Zgniły Grzyb, Siedlin, Wielkie Grodzisko in Kołbacz, Małe Grodzisko in Kołbacz). Particular attention is paid by SLP PB visitors to the Szmaragdowe Lake, which was formed in a chalk marl mine excavation flooded in 1925 by underground waters (Domian, Ziarnek, 2010; *Leksykon Puszcza Bukowa*, 2012)

SLP PB has a protection plan established in 2006, according to which the economic and social objectives are as follows:

1. harmonious development of economic functions: sustainable and ecological agriculture, forestry based on ecological principles, qualified tourism, agrotourism, small processing and services,
2. shaping the functional and spatial layout of the Park area,
3. raising the standard of living of the Park's residents, taking into account the restrictions arising from the need to protect nature and the landscape,
4. increase in the level of ecological awareness of inhabitants (Regulation No. 113, 2006).

One of the elements enabling the implementation of such defined socio-economic goals of the park is the material base enabling the provision of services for visitors to this area.

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT OF THE SZCZECIN LANDSCAPE PARK PUSZCZA BUKOWA

Tourist development consists of four basic elements (Dziedzic, 2015):

1. accommodation facilities, which are all facilities enabling the visitor to stay overnight outside his permanent residence;
2. gastronomy, which consists of all kinds of gastronomic points located independently as well as in gastronomic points;
3. additional (accompanying) facilities, consisting of devices that were built for tourists, e.g. tourist routes, sports equipment rentals, marinas, observation terraces;
4. paratourist facilities, which are objects and devices designed to support local communities also used by visitors to the area, among others shops, local transport.

According to the provisions of the Protection Plan for SLP PB (Regulation No. 113, 2006), agritourism is the preferred form of tourism, whose development is envisaged in all Park locations and buffer zone, in particular in the following villages: Chlebowo, Wysoka Gryfińska, Żelisławiec, Kartno, Glinna, Stare Czarnowo and Szczecin's neighbourhoods adjacent to the Park. Field studies showed that in the villages located in the Park (Binowo, Kołowo, Gliniec, Dobropole Gryfińskie) the accommodation base is a typical seasonal one (mainly summer houses, campsites) with a relatively low number of beds. All-year-round accommodation is provided only by the Binowo Park Golf Club holiday resort and individual agritourism lodgings. Accommodation in the districts of Szczecin adjacent to the Park like Podjuchy, Płonia, Śmierdnica, and Bukowe-Kleskowo, definitely stands out. The situation with the catering location looks very similar to the accommodation base. The possibilities of using the gastronomic offer in the area of SLP

PB are limited, and the Szmaragd Inn on Szmaragdowe Lake, which has not been operating since 2012, completes this gap.

The studied area has an extensive accompanying base, which consists of a dense network of hiking trails, because on a relatively small area there are 19 marked trails of a total length of about 140 km (Atlas, 2014). In the area of SLP PB there was only one marked bicycle trail, which is called the Bicycle Route "To the Puszcza Bukowa" with a total length of 29.3 km, of which only about 10% of its length is in the Park. Apart from the rudimentary bicycle trail, there are no other trails in the Park dedicated to other forms of qualified tourism, e.g. for horse riding, canoeing. This condition should be assessed negatively, in particular in the light of the provisions of the Protection Plan (Regulation No. 113, 2006), which considers qualified tourism to be the preferred form of tourist park access.

The accompanying base consists of two tourist information points operating in the Park:

1. Szczecin Tourist Information Centre Szmaragdowe-Zdroje located at Szmaragdowe Lake,
2. Nature and Forest Information Point in Glinna.

The complementary information infrastructure of SLP PB are the so-called boulders-turn. These are large granite rocks located at the intersections of routes and key roads. On them, carved are the name of the road, direction and distance to the nearest landmark. At the intersections of key routes and at rest points there are information boards with a map of the Park with marked tourist routes and the place where the board is located. There are educational boards in the area of the Forest. They were located near resting places, parking lots and on junctions of routes. On the border of protected areas, in places where tourist routes and forest roads run, there are boards signs informing about the name of nature reserve.

Rest points are an important element of the infrastructure. Most of them are at the same time access points to the Forest exploration, because they are located next to car parks with accompanying infrastructure, like benches, tables, litter bins, as well as a covered-roof facilities. There are 11 such points in the park. Viewpoints have been arranged in the landscape park (Czajcza Góra, Akademickie Hill, Piaseczna Góra, Skórcza Góra, Bombardier Hill, Czarnowskie Hill and Widok Hill). Marked nature and educational paths that bring visitors to the explored area are an important element. These paths are:

1. the 'Szmaragdowe Zdroje' nature and education trail, approx. 4 km long, which consists of 12 educational stops,
2. educational trail "In search of the Secrets of the Green Land" in the southern part of the Park, 4 km long Dendrological Garden with 13 educational stops,
3. "Secrets of plants" educational trail with 11 stops located within the Dendrological Garden in Glinna.

The paths are complemented by the health path around the Szmaragdowe Lake, 2150 m long with 11 outdoor exercise stations made of wood and metal. The path is not educational, but recreational and sports only.

There are no public transport routes through the SLP PB area. Exploration of the area by visitors using public transport usually takes place from the north of the Park, in particular from the Szczecin districts: Podjuchy, Zdroje, Kłęskowo, Płonia and Śmierdnica. There are few small grocery stores in the villages of the Park.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

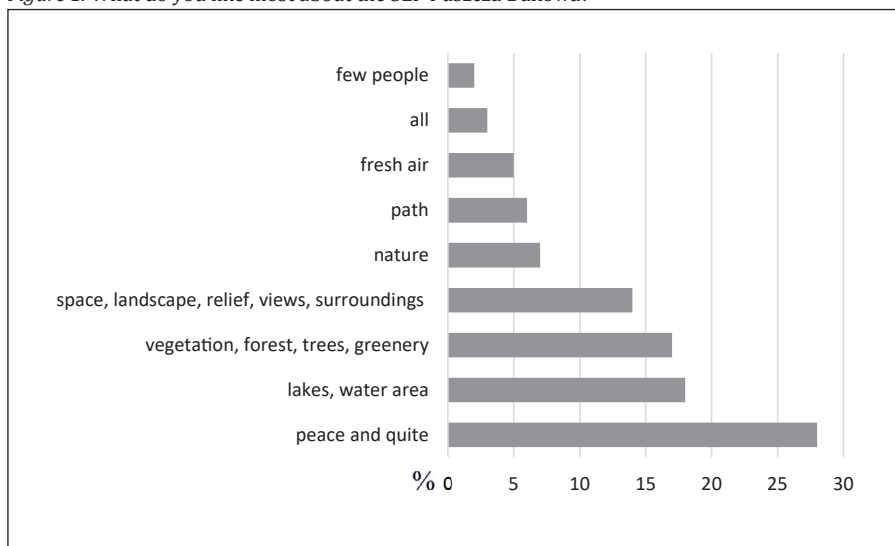
In order to verify the adopted hypothesis in the context of the functions performed by the Park, specific issues were extracted from the acquired material regarding:

1. the current state and expectations of services rendered in the SLP PB area
2. level of acceptance by Park visitors.

As regards the first detailed issue, an attempt to obtain information on the forms of activity and available services that visitors use or would like to use in the area of SLP Puszcza Bukowa was made, as well as about missing elements of development that would improve functioning, increase attractiveness and acceptance to the Park. By examining the preferences and motives of the visit to the Park, it was confirmed that they were mostly leisure and recreation (86%), professional matters (6%), visiting relatives and a healing motif of 3% each. Visitors spent time walking (49%), cycling (25%), water bathing (13%), fishing (3%) and others (9%), which included such activities as running, Nordic-walking, roller skating, photography, resting among the greenery by the lake. The respondents most valued the opportunity to relax in the prevailing peace and quiet (Figure 1).

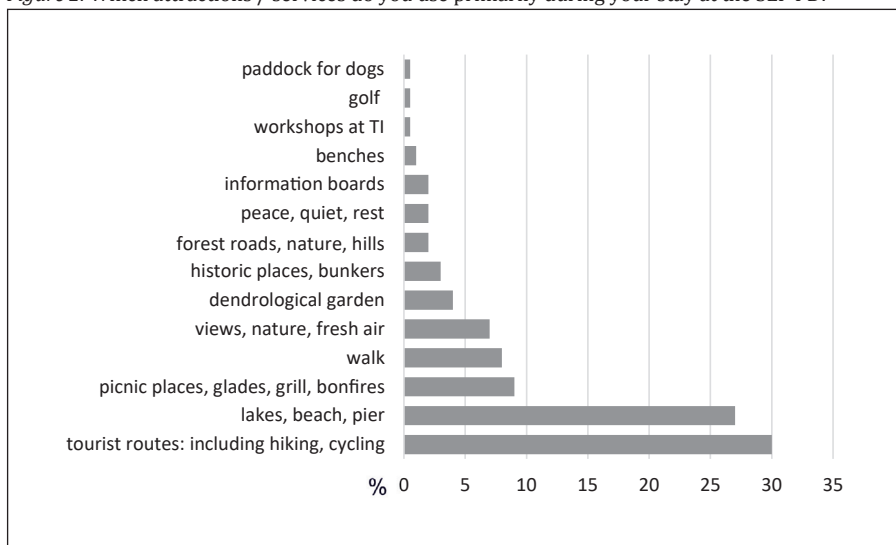
The highest rated elements included: access to water reservoirs, nature (understood as: vegetation, forest, trees and greenery) and a varied landscape that can be admired. The confirmation of the attractiveness of SLP PB were the visitors' indications on attractions and services most frequently used during their stay in the studied area (Figure 2). Visitors most often used hiking and cycling trips on existing tourist routes, swam in nearby lakes (Binowskie, Glinna and Szmaragdowe), also pointed to elements of recreational infrastructure such as piers, picnic and bonfire places. In addition to recreational elements of development, there were also answers regarding the exploration of places whose history dates back to the turn of the 19th and 20th century, World War II, military facilities – German bridges and bunkers.

Figure 1. What do you like most about the SLP Puszcza Bukowa?



Source: own study based on conducted research

Figure 2. Which attractions / services do you use primarily during your stay at the SLP PB?



Source: own study based on conducted research

The respondents had the opportunity to indicate the activity or services they would like to use during their stay in the Park (Figure 3). The highest number of respondents indicated their willingness to use guide services in the most interesting places of SLP Puszcza Bukowa (23%), learning about the history of its creation and the specificity of its functioning. At the same time, the least numerous group of respondents, because only 5%, expressed their willingness, need to provide services in the field of training them in the scope of a volunteer guide. Although this group is relatively small, it seems that measures should be taken to conduct training in guide services. On the one hand, the potential of interested persons would be utilized and at the same time the supply of these services in the area of SLP PB would be ensured.

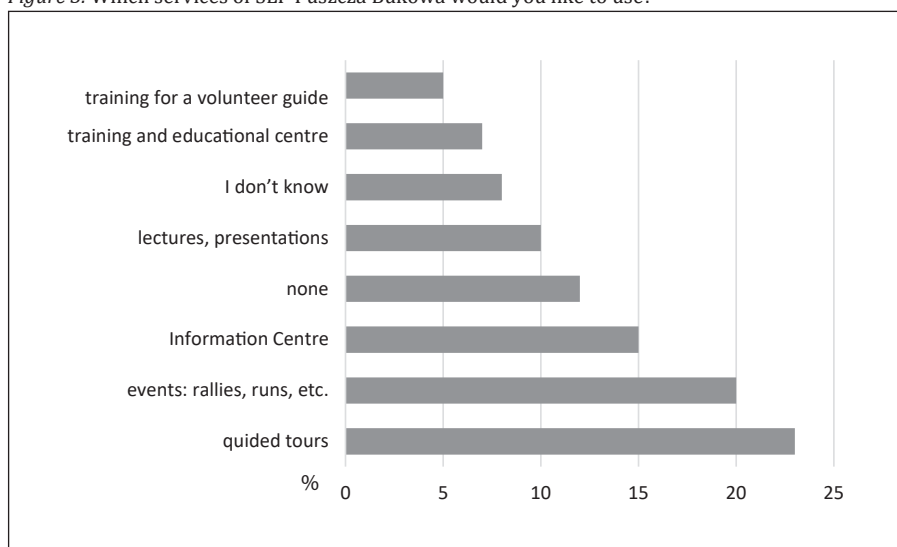
A small group of respondents also expressed willingness to take part in lectures, presentations and workshops at the training and educational centre. Thus confirming the superiority of spending time surrounded by nature over an enclosed space. Visitors would benefit from sports services such as rallies, orienteering (20%), as well as services for obtaining information at the Tourist Information Centre (15%).

Every fifth respondent does not see the need to use any services or has no definite view on this issue.

To enable the adaptation of services in the future and possible renovation of tourist and recreation infrastructure elements, the respondents were asked about the missing elements of development or services in SPK Puszcza Bukowa (Figure 4).

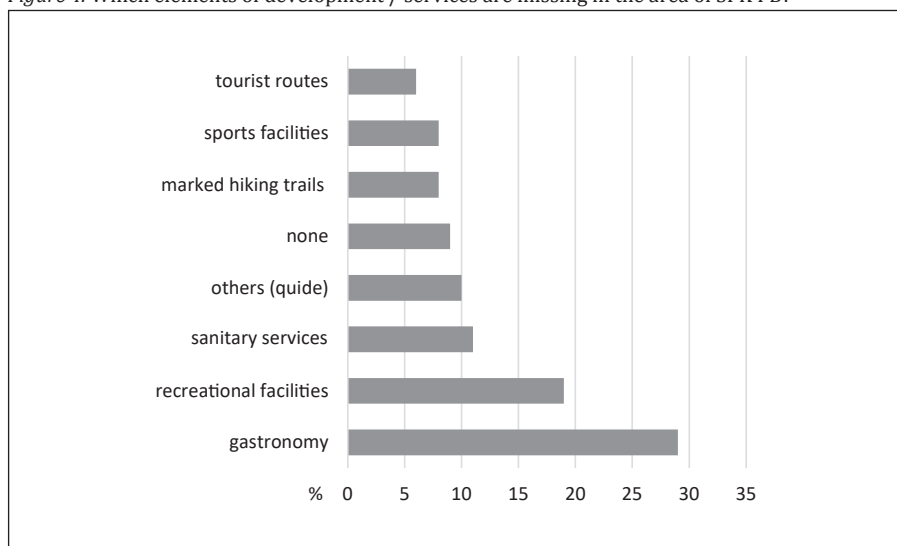
The increasing desire to relax after working hours, imposes the need to adapt recreation to the needs of tourists. The unique proximity of SLP Puszcza Bukowa to urban areas, as well as the diverse range of natural elements, promotes its more frequent exploration. The evaluation was made according to research locations, but consistent responses enabled their generalisation. The lack of catering services (e.g. cafes, tea rooms) was emphasized most strongly. Tourists pointed to deficiencies or neglect of small recreational infrastructure (roofed sheds, benches, picnic tables), lack of guide

Figure 3. Which services of SLP Puszcza Bukowa would you like to use?



Source: own study based on conducted research

Figure 4. Which elements of development / services are missing in the area of SPK PB?



Source: own study based on conducted research

services. Lack of infrastructure or cleaning services was indicated (too few rubbish bins, sanitary facilities and parking spaces). However, it is difficult to work out an unequivocal stand on this infrastructure. Representatives of the Landscape Park Complex indicate attempts to refrain from placing trash bins in the Park. In their opinion, animals often try to get to the waste left behind, spreading them around. In addition, the need to ensure the emptying of bins generates costs that, if they were liquidated, could be allocated to nature conservation purposes or to the improvement of other tourist

infrastructure. It seems that the pursuit for educating Park visitors that they take the rubbish back with them instead of leaving them in the Park, is a perfectly legitimate quest.

The respondents also pointed to the lack of proper marking of tourist walking or cycling routes, also the lack of information boards, followed by communication services (neglected or lack of access roads, transport services) and the lack of stable forest and wood management, manifesting itself – in the opinion of respondents – in excessive deforestation. The indications regarding the lack of guide services are confirmed by the earlier signalled (Figure 9) willingness of tourists to use this form of service.

According to the interviewees, public transport is underdeveloped. This may be confirmed by the fact that 59% of them reach the Park by car, 20% by bicycle, 13% on foot (mainly residents of the closest neighbourhoods), and only 7% commute by public transport.

The second specific problem considered during the study was the issue of acceptance of the protected area among the public. The heritage is not only the culture left by the ancestors, but also nature. It is a shared responsibility to pass them on to future generations. Areas that protect indigenous nature in Poland often face the problem of lack of social acceptance in the immediate environment (Matuszewska, 2003; Hibszer, 2013). In the case of SLP Puszcza Bukowa, there is also no unanimous consent regarding restrictions resulting from living in/near the research area. However, it should be emphasized that 77% of respondents do not see restrictions resulting from living in the vicinity of the Park. A significant proportion of respondents, almost 20%, could not answer, and only 4% of respondents pointed to existing restrictions in their daily lives due to the proximity of the park. In the respondents' opinion, the restrictions resulted mainly from communication difficulties (heavy traffic jams, noise).

The level of acceptance was measured by hypothetical voting on the continued existence of LP. Despite the above mentioned burdens related to the existence of the Park, almost all respondents (as much as 99%) would vote for this area remaining a protected one.

The attitude and its possible change was another attempt to measure visitor acceptance for the protected area. To the question: "Has your attitude towards SLP Puszcza Bukowa changed since its establishment in 1981 or since your arrival in the region?" positive votes were obtained. Approximately 70% of respondents did not change their attitude and remained constantly positive. A significant change in the positive attitude occurred in about 25% of the respondents, of whom 15% were in the Park for the first time.

SUMMARY

The analysis allowed for positive verification of the hypothesis and answer to research questions and conclusions. SLP Puszcza Bukowa thanks to the potential of tourist values, topography, forest cover, architectural monuments, numerous walking paths and proximity to Szczecin, it is a very attractive area for various forms of tourism and recreation. Visitors clearly show a need for active leisure activities (walking, cycling, guided tours, rallies, running). This fits in perfectly with the modern healthy lifestyle trend and is consistent with the existing provisions of the Park Protection Plan. Actions should be taken to conduct courses and training for people interested in providing guide services

in the area of SLP PB. This is due to the interest shown in this form of recreation and the expectations of respondents, on the other hand, without undue burden on the natural environment, it strengthens the market for services in this area. Because the majority of respondents point to peace and quiet as the primary asset of SLP PB, the current restrictions on the functioning of the Park should be maintained aimed at reducing noise, traffic and excessive pressure, including tourism, on the natural environment. Action should be taken to strengthen the availability of catering services, e.g. in the form of cosy cafes, tea rooms in places that do not conflict with nature protection.

It is necessary to strengthen park infrastructure with infrastructure favouring qualified tourism, in particular with bicycle paths. This action will contribute to limiting car traffic, as some visitors will come by bicycle from nearby Szczecin and will continue cycling in the Park. Limiting car traffic will reduce the nuisance related to noise and high traffic for some respondents, which will further increase the degree of acceptance for this area. It is worth considering supplementing the services provided in the Park buffer zone with the services of bike rental and service.

Natural and historical values constitute an undeniable, significant element of the tourist potential of the SLP Puszcza Bukowa. Based on these qualities, a material base should be developed, which emphasizes the priority of nature protection over other activities in this area, which, together with services, can be a factor dynamising the economic and cultural development of the region.

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Barbara Osóch, PhD, a geographer and assistant professor in the Institute of Spatial Management and Socio-Economic Geography of the University of Szczecin, Poland. Extensive interests in the field of social geography, sociology, water tourism have been presented in numerous publications. The main area of her academic interest is the development of geographical space for the needs of water tourism, recreational sailing and the social structure of participants of various forms of tourist activity.

ORCID: 0000-0002-8364-7904

Address:

Uniwersytet Szczeciński
Instytut Gospodarki Przestrzennej i Geografii Społeczno-Ekonomicznej
ul. Mickiewicza 18, 70-383 Szczecin, Polska
e-mail: barbara.osoch@usz.edu.pl

Wojciech Zbaraszewski, PhD, an economist and assistant professor in the Department of System Analysis and Marketing at the West Pomeranian University of Technology, Szczecin, Poland. Author of several dozen articles on the functioning of protected areas, environmental economics, sustainable development issues, as well as regional development. The originator and manager of several international projects related to the

operation and tourism of protected areas, as well as projects related to renewable energy issues. Experienced in the field of organisation management, including non-profit organisations.

ORCID: 0000-0002-1373-1895

Address:

Zachodniopomorski Uniwersytet Technologiczny w Szczecinie
Wydział Ekonomiczny
Katedra Analizy Systemowej i Marketingu
ul. K. Janickiego 31, 71-270 Szczecin, Poland
e-mail: wzbaraszewski@zut.edu.pl