

IVAN PIROZHNIK

Pomeranian University in Słupsk, Poland

Tourist Clusters as a Factor in Activating Cross-Border Spatial Development

Abstract: Tourism is one of the factors of local economic development and cross-border cooperation on EU borders, reducing the risk of economic recession in those areas. The purpose of the article is to reveal trends in the development of cross-border tourism on the Polish-Belarusian border and to verify the following research issues: 1) whether the economic sanctions introduced by EU countries on Russia after 2014 reduced cross-border traffic on the Polish-Belarusian section of the EU border; 2) to what extent the tourist potential of the Polish-Belarusian region corresponds to the demand in the modern European market; 3) how the new visa-free travel mechanisms activate tourist markets; 4) to what extent tourism stimulates the development of new forms of urban growth in the cultural landscapes of the cross-border region. The process of shaping tourism clusters as a form of the spatial organisation of tourism development in cross-border regions was analysed using analytical and synthetic methods. The research area covers the eastern border of Poland on the section of its border with Belarus. The primary research and empirical materials were obtained from the Central Statistical Office of Poland and the Statistical Committee of Belarus on tourism on the eastern border of Poland in the years 2015–2018. An investigation of the subject literature and source documents, as well as field observations and statistical analyses, were carried out. Particular attention was paid to the creation of a visa-free regime region in the special tourist zones of “Brest” and “Grodno” in the border regions of Belarus.

Keywords: cross-border areas; tourism clusters; tourist potential; tourist routes; visa-free travel zone

Received: 2 January 2020

Accepted: 17 April 2020

Suggested citation:

Pirozhnik, I. (2020). Tourist Clusters as a Factor in Activating Cross-Border Spatial Development. *Prace Komisji Geografii Przemysłu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geograficznego*, 34(3), 7–21. doi 10.24917/20801653.343.1

INTRODUCTION

The tourism economy in post-industrial development, including the direct consumption of tourism services and the general consumption of indirect services and those induced by tourism, i.e. the travel and tourism economy, is becoming an active factor in the transformation of the economy of post-socialist countries and a stimulator of regional development in areas with significant tourist potential. The full scope of research in the geography of tourism demonstrates that the importance of tourism in regional

development is mostly proportional to the tourist potential of a region (natural and cultural values, tourist infrastructure and development, investment and human capital, local policy and innovation of tourist products) in conditions of growing market competitiveness (Januszewska, Nawrocka, 2015). Research in European regions (Janczarska-Bergel, 2019) and groups of countries in the global South (Jasiński, 2019) show that the tourism economy is becoming an increasingly dynamic sector influencing regional development. However, in less developed economies it is, in the form of “tourism monoculture”, often perceived negatively (Jasiński, 2018).

The purpose of this article, and the subject of analysis, is to reveal trends in the development of cross-border tourism on the Polish-Belarusian border, to determine its structural features and most characteristic forms. Among the primary research hypotheses analysed, the main attention is focused on the verification of the following: 1) whether the economic sanctions introduced by EU countries for members of the Eurasian Economic Space (Russia) after 2014 reduced cross-border traffic on the Polish-Belarusian section of the EU border; 2) to what extent the tourist potential of the Polish-Belarusian region corresponds to the demand in the modern European market; 3) how the new visa-free travel mechanisms activate tourist markets; 4) to what extent tourism stimulates the development of new forms of urban growth in the cultural landscapes of the cross-border region.

RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

In the research, both analytical and synthetic approaches were used focusing on tourism clusters as a new form of the spatial organisation of tourism development in cross-border regions. The research area covers the eastern borderland of Poland on the section of its national border with Belarus and taking into account administrative units. Primary research and empirical materials were obtained from the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the National Statistical Committee of Belarus on trade in goods and services, as well as visits to the eastern borderland of Poland in 2015–2018. An investigation of the literature on the subject and source documents as well as individual field observations and statistical analyses were carried out. Particular attention was paid to the practice of creating a visa-free travel region in the special tourist zones of “Brest” and “Grodno” and “Augustów Tourist Park” in the borderlands of Belarus.

In a post-industrial society, the development of the tourist services market acts as an active element of the economy of the entire service sector, creating a large employment segment of the workforce (unused by the new technological structures of modern industries) on the one hand. On the other, it remains a component in the social well-being of contemporary people and their satisfaction with life. The combination of these two aspects is of particular importance for Belarus and other post-socialist countries. It is worth noting that there are several barriers to the development of a modern tourist market in Belarus, including political restrictions on economic and cultural cooperation (and also the limited effectiveness of EU mechanisms and policy measures under the Eastern Partnership), the visa regime for most countries with a high level of tourist demand, differences in the mentality and values of potential tourists from developed countries, an insufficient level of development of the tourist and transport infrastructure, information barriers and a low level of presentation of the country's

tourist potential on active tourism markets, and inefficient marketing activities to build the image and brand of the country's tourism (Pirozhnik, 2018).

In Central and Eastern Europe, where the cultural heritage of nations and ethnic, religious and social minorities were for decades treated as secondary, and even "erased" from memory, discourse, and historical and cultural space, in the new reality are the foundation for creating tourist attractions and products (Banaszkiewicz, Graburn, Owianowska, 2017, p. 113). The development and changing travel patterns of the last 30 years in the cross-border tourism segment undoubtedly raise several issues, among which cross-border cooperation requires extensive regional research.

FINDINGS

Cross-border clusters as a factor in the activation of cultural and economic cooperation

Shaping cross-border tourism clusters in the modern market is mostly dependent on the type of interaction between the tourism sector and the functions of borders in various forms. They are as follows: 1) the border may constitute a barrier to the development of tourism, 2) the border is a tourist destination as a particular type of area itself, and 3) the border is a modifier of the tourist landscape and acts as an active factor in creating individual cross-border regions (Więckowski, 2010a; Stupina, 2014). A special kind of cultural landscape is shaped by active tourist exchange and appropriate development in cross-border areas (Timothy, 2001). Tourist space often contains discontinuities for many years after the border regime has been relaxed or disappears. A complicated situation occurs, for example, on the eastern borderland of Poland which has become the external border of the European Union. Changing the perception of peripheral regions, which had remained closed for a long time while playing a role in defence, is not easy. Borders that open quickly, having had little development before, change their character much faster. On the eastern border, however, which has additionally become the external border of the European Union, this process is slow (Więckowski, 2010a, p. 173).

An example of an emerging tourist cluster on the Belarusian-Polish border, where the border is the purpose of the visit, is the route opened in 2013 in Brest Fortress connected by a new rope bridge to the 'Border Island', open to tourist groups. On the island are 37 historical sites dating from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th. One of the buildings is a 19th-century customs booth where customs control for travellers crossing the border of the Russian Empire was carried out. Other buildings include a caponier, fragments of barracks and casemates, the Terespol fortifications, and defence walls built into the ground. Noteworthy is the project to create an international tourist cluster around "*Via Jagiellonica*", the ancient royal route Kraków – Lublin – Brest – Volkovysk – Grodno – Vilnius, created in cooperation between Poland, Belarus and Lithuania (*Deklaracja...*, 2019). In terms of tourism potential, such a cultural and tourist product deserves to be included in the network of European cultural routes, and, in the future, in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List.

Along with increases in tourist exchange and the development of cross-border integration, tourism space gradually goes through the stages of 1) independent development and coexistence of facilities on both sides of the border; 2) development of tourist relationships of interacting facilities; 3) creating an open tourist space and establishing bilateral tourist relations; 4) development of a single integrated tourist region with

a joint marketing program, standardisation of a tourist product with an active demonstration of regional features of folklore, crafts, common environmental standards and a single system of booking services (Więckowski, 2010b).

Contemporary concepts introduced into the practice of the regional development of tourist areas, present a tourist cluster as a set of geographically related specialised companies (enterprises) and organisations with joint interdependent and mutually complementary synergistic properties which systematically reveal the internal and external interaction of elements of tourism space and how they function in a changing market environment (Skowronek, 2015; Roman, 2017). At the same time, a cluster is defined as a comprehensive technological formation created by companies (enterprises) and their institutional environment (academic, financial, information, marketing companies and agencies), creating an innovative, networked environment within specific geographical boundaries (Kaczmarek, Stasiak, Włodarczyk, 2010, p. 403–404; Aleksandrowa, Stupina, 2014). Based on this approach, the modern interpretation of a tourist cluster in the geography of tourism defines it as a geographically adjacent interactive feature based on public-private partnerships including companies, academic and educational organisations, government agencies and local government bodies that produce and sell tourism services based on exploiting the tourist and recreational potential (Kruzhalin et al., 2014, p. 7). This interpretation somewhat narrows the roles of tourism demand and of innovative approaches in creating a tourism cluster product and magnifies the importance of public-private partnerships and recreational potential, with a limited impact from the self-regulation of markets.

The active creation of tourist clusters on the eastern borderland has a short but rich history. The first tourist cluster in Poland was established in 2005, and by 2016 there were more than 40 (Markiewicz, 2018, pp. 55–57). The main factors behind their creation were a local concentration of specialised tourism enterprises and growing competition on the market. The critical tasks of the clusters were determined by diffusion of knowledge and the introduction of innovative technologies, the cooperation of the business environment with the academic sphere, and the participation of local government in increasing the competitiveness of regions (Firlej, Rożek, 2012; Howaniec, Kurowska-Pysz, 2014, Połomska-Jasienowska, 2016). It is reflected in the structure of tourist clusters initiated in the eastern borderland regions where tourist enterprises (hotels, spa facilities, agritourism farms) dominate. Marketing research of tourism clusters has shown that by joining cluster structures, business communities (90%) plan to use the potential of a broad marketing program and advertise their products on new (often external) markets. A significant proportion (60%) believe that the cluster will improve the working conditions of distribution networks and bring full information about the offer to potential tourists. This development, in turn, will increase sales and access to new consumer segments and develop cooperation with tourism market partners (Dyrda-Maciałek, 2010, pp. 134–152). The fundamental triad of economic expectations and primary cluster goals, i.e. “revenues – marketing – new markets” is supported by 90%, 80% and 70% of all bodies of the cluster agreement, respectively. There are very high expectations of regional government administration related to obtaining additional financing from EU funds, conducting an active marketing policy and advertising on potential markets. Cluster participants mainly associate local government expectations with this active marketing policy (93%), assistance in finding sources of external

financing (83%), mediation in relations between cluster facilities (37%) and assistance in organising staff training (27%) (Dyrda-Maciałek, 2010).

Among the main barriers to achieving high cluster performance, almost 40% of respondents note inappropriate advertising, over one third a lack of financial resources, as well as the seasonality of tourist demand and low level of development of the entire infrastructure. The introduction of new innovative technologies is hampered by a lack of financial resources, lack of support from the local administration, staff turnover and insufficient employee qualifications in innovation. The cluster's threat hierarchy includes the triad: "cluster collapse – internal cluster competition – leakage of business ideas" and is acknowledged by a broad group of participants (96%, 94% and 89%, respectively). Accumulated experience related to the functioning of clusters shows that participants mainly note positive effects in the field of advertising and marketing promotion of a tourist product (91%), increase in tourist flows (73%), better access to external financing sources (50%), and increased regional development (40%) (Borkowska-Niszczota, 2015). A smaller number of cluster members note positive effects in terms of information exchange within the cluster (16%) and the possibility of introducing innovations (12%). Thus, the most important factors stimulating the creation of clusters are most often the connections of cluster participants with the region, the activity of local government in the cluster, the presence of developed tourist traditions in the area, having a local product brand, investment attractiveness of the tourism industry, the possibility of obtaining EU funds and stimulating the cluster by various regional development projects (Markiewicz, 2018, p. 59).

Tourism on the Polish-Belarusian borderland and its structural features

The contribution of the tourism sector to the economy of Belarus, calculated according to the methodology of the World Tourism and Travel Council, was estimated in 2017 at USD 2.2 billion (2.0% of total GDP) in the form of income from direct tourism consumption (travel and tourism industry) and USD 3.4 billion (6.2% of GDP) from all direct, indirect and induced consumption of the entire tourism economy (travel and tourism economy). Exports of tourist services (serving foreign tourists in Belarus) amounted to around USD 1.1 billion (3.0% of the total export volume). An analysis of changes in the main parameters of tourism consumption in Belarus over the past five years (2012–2017) shows that despite an increase in tourism revenues from direct use of tourism industry services (122%), the total income of the tourism economy increased slightly (103%) due to a decrease in indirect and induced income (96% in 2017 compared to 2012). The consumption of domestic tourism increased slightly more (153%) than the export of tourist services (131%). However, both are lower than the increase in the importation of tourist services – 159%. Taking into account changes in income of the tourism economy of Belarus in terms of currency, according to the average annual exchange rate of the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus, there is an almost two-fold decrease in income from tourist services in the last five years.

It should be noted that Belarus is slightly ahead of the neighbouring CIS countries (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova) in terms of the contribution of both the travel and tourism industry and the entire travel and tourism economy to GDP while achieving a lower share of influence from tourism in exports and investment in tourism. However, according to the leading indicators, Belarus is behind both the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic,

Hungary) although they are comparable in terms of demographic and economic potential, CEE countries are more involved in general processes of economic globalisation and the EU market (Pirozhnik, 2018).

Based on tourism, in particular, the border is an essential element stimulating regional and local development. Integration processes currently use space on both sides of the border – which is an appropriate step for shaping cross-border regions (Więckowski, 2010a, p. 219). When borders between Belarus and CIS countries opened, some changes were introduced for the implementation of visa-free travel with other countries, including those in the Schengen Area, to increase tourism and tourism revenues in the recent period (from 2016). The emergence of new open tourism spaces, changing functions and shifting tourist development, affects the creation of new cross-border systems.

Table 1. Border traffic of non-Poles (A) and Poles (B) on the external EU border and the Polish-Belarusian border in the years 2014–2018 (in thousands)

Border crossings	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Indicator, % 2018/2014
Poland/EU external border						
Non-Poles (A)	26 831.0	28 660.2	29 711.1	31 504.6	29 812.2	111.1
Poles (B)	6 256.8	6 371.7	5 113.6	4 517.2	4 264.9	68.2
Rate (A:B)	4.3	4.5	5.8	7.0	7.0	162.8
Polish border with Belarus						
Non-Poles (A)	7 817.1	6 953.5	7 091.0	8 269.1	7 949.7	101.7
Poles (B)	1 000.6	863.8	834.2	993.8	1 005.8	100.5
Rate (A:B)	7.8	8.0	8.5	8.3	7.9	101.3

Source: author based on (*Ruch graniczny...*, 2019, p. 73)

Analysis of border traffic, trade in goods and services as well as tourism on the eastern border of Poland within the EU/Schengen area indicates that over the past decade active tourist exchange developed in the Belarusian-Polish border region. In 2018, the number of border crossings amounted to 7.9 million non-Poles and about one million Polish citizens (Table 1). On the section of the Polish-Belarusian border with a length of 418 km (12% of the total Polish border), traffic is recorded at twelve border crossings, including eight road, three rail and one river. The number of arrivals to Poland on the Podlasie-Grodno section of the border exceeded 1.9 million, on the Lublin-Brest section it was slightly smaller (1.1 million). The data presented in Table 1 allow verification of **hypothesis (1)** confirming that after the EU countries introduced economic sanctions against members of the Eurasian Economic Space (Russia) after 2014, the movement of non-Poles across the Polish-Belarusian border in 2015–2016 decreased by 9–11% and the drop in the travel of Polish citizens was slightly bigger (14–16%). By 2018, cross-border traffic on the Polish-Belarusian border reached 101.7% (non-Poles) and 101.5% (Poles) compared to 2014, which was directly influenced by the introduction of a visa-free zone. The frequency of trips, despite the negative impact of economic stagnation in relations between the EU and the countries of the Eurasian Economic Space (Russia), remains high; over 72% of non-Poles and 67% of Polish visitors travel several times a month. Simultaneously, approx. 60% of non-residents (mostly Belarusian citizens) and 75% of Poles live up to 50 km from the border. The primary purpose of

non-Pole trips is shopping (80%), visiting relatives (8%), and tourism (2%). Among Polish tourists, the significance of shopping is lower (72%), while visiting relatives (14%) and tourism (7%) are higher (*Ruch graniczny...*, 2019). Thus, among the particular types of cross-border travel (shopping, family visits, as well as cultural, sports-recreational and educational) purely tourist destinations are only in third place. It is worth noting that the mechanisms for local border traffic (*mały ruch graniczny* – MRG) have not yet been implemented on the Polish-Belarusian border, unlike Russia (suspended in recent years) and Ukraine (Piekutowska, 2016), which will bring favourable results for border regions. In 2017–2018, arrivals of non-Poles relative to the number of outgoing Poles on the Polish-Belarusian border was about 8.0 (7.9–8.3 times more Belarusians and other non-Poles crossed the borders into Poland than Poles to Belarus). It is slightly smaller than between Poland and Ukraine (9.7–9.8) in the same period which are under MRG conditions. On the southern border with the Czech Republic and Slovakia, such a rate does not exceed 1.0–1.2, with Germany – 1.6, with Lithuania – 2.2, and with Russia (after suspending MRG) – 1.8. With such intense traffic in cross-border areas, there are noticeable processes of the transformation of natural and cultural landscapes and the development of tourism infrastructure. This shapes conditions for the creation of clusters in the border regions of Poland and Belarus: on the tourist trail of the Augustów Canal, in the Białowieża Forest region, and the border region cities of Brest and Grodno.

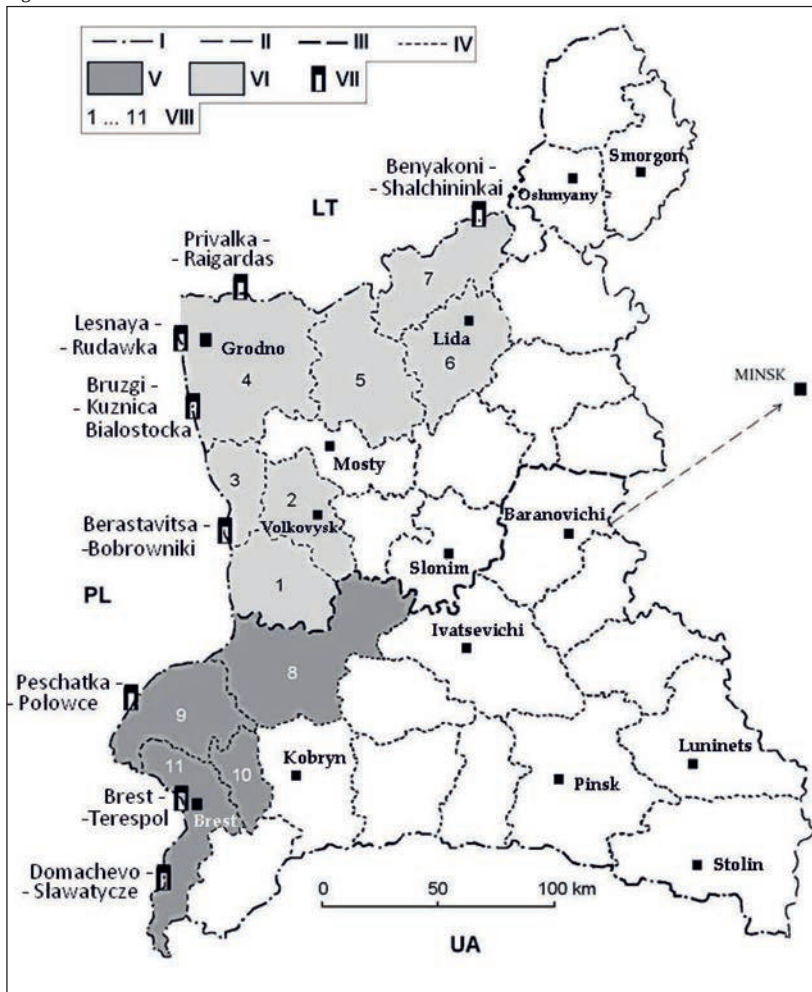
Trends in the formation of a tourist cluster in the Augustów Canal region

The Augustów Canal is a unique, cross-border structure, one of the longest waterways in Poland. It is one of the most impressive monuments of water technology of the 19th century (completed in 1839). At the same time, it is a significant tourist attraction of international importance; it is on the list of monuments of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and since 2007 it has been a Monument of History. The total length of the Augustów Canal is 103.4 km. It has 18 locks, of which 14 are on the Polish side, one in the border zone and three on the Belarusian side. The level difference between the locks ranges from 0.86 meters to 6.5 meters. Belarus reconstructed its part of the Augustów Canal in 2004–2006, expecting that this could bring a substantial income from tourism, and spent about USD 10 million on the renovation according to original designs from the 19th century. On the Belarusian side, the canal runs through the Grodno visa-free zone for Poles and citizens of 73 other countries. For the development of tourism and tourist infrastructure, the “Augustów Canal” Tourist and Recreation Park was created covering 58 000 ha and included the areas adjacent to the Belarusian part of the Augustów Canal and the Nemunas River. The legal basis for the park is Decree no 220 of the President of Belarus of 26 May 2006.

Tourism in the canal zone between Belarus and Poland began to develop dynamically after 2009 when the Augustów Canal lock at Kurzyniec on the Polish-Belarusian border was commissioned. Since then, the Augustów Canal has been a cross-border tourism destination connecting the territories of Poland and Belarus. From 2009 tourists could quickly obtain a tourist visa at the consular point in Augustów and kayak through the Augustów Canal to Belarus. Visa-free travel from Poland to Belarus was opened on 26 October 2016. In 2017, the seasonal (summer) border crossing Rudawka-Lesnaja on the Augustów Canal was opened. It can be crossed as well by bike without a visa. By traversing the cross-border trail of the Augustów Canal in Belarus, it is

enough to have a valid passport and insurance, as well as a confirmation of payment for staying and visiting the Augustów Canal Park, issued by a Belarusian tour operator or travel agency (Białous, 2019). From 10 November 2019, based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus no 200 of 7 August 2019, the procedure is in power according to which citizens of 73 countries, including all EU countries and 11 others in Europe, may visit – for tourist purposes and a period not exceeding 15 days – areas subject to visa-free entry. This list includes the *oblast* capitals of Brest and Grodno and 11 administrative districts (Fig. 1). Other territories of the Brest and Grodno regions that are not part of the visa-free travel zone are also open to tourist stays when a group visits these territories following a route planned by a Belarusian tour operator.

Figure 1. The border area of the “Grodno-Brest” visa-free zone



Borders: I – Schengen Area (Polish-Belarusian, Lithuanian-Belarusian), II – Republic of Belarus, III – Belarus Oblasts, IV – administrative districts; Administrative districts of the visa-free zone for tourism: V – Brest Oblast, VI – Grodno Oblast; VII – border crossings open for visa-free traffic; VIII – administrative districts: 1 – Svislach, 2 – Volkovysk, 3 – Vialikaya Berastavica, 4 – Grodno, 5 – Shchuchyn, 6 – Lida, 7 – Verenov, 8 – Pruzhany, 9 – Kamieniec, 10 – Zhabinka, 11 – Brest

In 2016–2019, around 300 000 foreign tourists entered the cities of the visa-free zone. This number included 247 300 tourists visiting Grodno (in 2019 alone it was about 120 000), and 28 800 visiting Brest and Białowieża Forest. This number exceeded visa-free tourism through the airport in Minsk, the capital of the country, which had 244 000 tourists (with the possibility of a visa-free stay in the country for 30 days). The Augustów Canal is also intensively visited on Polish territory. In the 2019 season, a record 10 214 of lockage instances was performed for 34 028 vessels on the 14 locks of the canal (Giełżyn-Sasimowicz, 2019). The activities envisaged in the documents of cooperation between Podlaskie Voivodeship and Grodno *Oblast* provide for an exchange of information regarding economic events and planned investments while expanding cooperation between the *Grodnoinvest* economic zone and business communities from Podlaskie Voivodeship.

An essential element of cooperation is the development of cross-border tourist routes on the Polish-Belarusian border. Besides the water route of the Augustów Canal, it also includes the “August Velo” bicycle route, the “Fortification Trail”, the “Eastern Front of World War I” and the “Tatar Trail”. The cross-border tourist trail the “August Velo”, implemented in 2019, is the first stage in the development of this type on the Polish-Belarusian border. Another investment is planned – the Polish section of the “August Velo” from the border crossing in Rudawka to Mikaszówka, where it will connect with the European “Green Velo” route and the “Białowieża Velo” bicycle route which will be its extension from Grodno to Białowieża. Thus, a completely new cross-border tourist product will have been created combining the Augustów Canal and the Białowieża Forest, the two most recognisable tourist attractions of the Polish-Belarusian cross-border region. From 2 June 2019, it was officially possible to use the “August Velo” tourist trail running in the Augustów Canal zone from the town of Mikaszówka (Poland) to Grodno. It was marked out as part of the project “Supporting entrepreneurship development in tourism through the development of the Grodno region infrastructure”, implemented by the Association of Rural *Gminas* of Podlaskie Voivodeship in cooperation with the Sport and Tourism Department of the Grodno *Oblast* Executive Committee. The initiative was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. This project aims to develop entrepreneurship in tourism by improving the infrastructure of the Belarusian part of the Augustów Canal (*Inauguracja...*, 2019).

Trends in tourism and the projects presented above, namely the reconstruction of the Augustów Canal infrastructure and tourist development on the new tourist routes, demonstrate **hypothesis (2)** that the tourist potential of the cross-border region of Poland and Belarus corresponds to the demand of the modern European market and can propose new attractive products for active, cultural and ecological tourism.

As part of the “Euroregion Niemen” Association, the implementation of the “Cross-border Cooperation Program Poland-Belarus-Ukraine 2014–2020” provides for the implementation of three projects focused on the development of tourist products and infrastructure in the cross-border area of the Augustów Canal zone. They include 1) “Yotvingian Trails” – development of new cross-border products based on the cultural heritage of Yotvingians; 2) “Cross-border tourist brands and products of the Augustów Canal” – promotion of local culture and history on the Polish-Belarusian border, and increasing the region’s competitiveness; 3) the Puszcza Augustowska “International Promotional Forest Area” and the “Augustów Canal” Cross-border Tourist Product to promote and increase tourism in the region, for which over EUR 7.4 million (90% EU funding) was planned (*Sprawozdanie...*, 2017, pp. 5–6).

In 2018, in the Belarusian part of the region, the increase in tourism in the visa-free zone brought investment in tourism, entertainment and leisure of up to \$18 million; it increased 3.3 times compared to 2017. Overall in Grodno and adjacent visa-free regions, 1228 new jobs were created in tourism and gastronomy, seven new accommodation facilities were opened with 213 beds, as well as over 60 restaurants and cafes with 1866 places. The necessary renovations started in the two largest hotels of Grodno: "Grodno" and "Belarus" (Kondratjeva, 2019). All of these trends demonstrate **hypothesis (3)** that new visa waiver mechanisms activate outbound (Germany, Poland, the Baltic States) and inbound (Brest and the Białowieża Forest region, Grodno and the Augustów Canal trail) tourist markets in the cross-border region.

New opportunities to visit regions of Belarus after the creation of a visa-free regime expand opportunities for travelling under the program called "Getting to know the former Eastern Borderlands of the Republic of Poland for students of Kraków schools", implemented since 2010. The goal of this program is to create opportunities for direct learning about the history, culture, traditions and natural environment of the former Eastern Borderlands by travelling to the areas of Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine. In 2010–2018, 3 400 students took part in the program. The project is interdisciplinary, and it is not only about deepening the knowledge of students and teachers of the cultural and historical heritage of the Eastern Borderlands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; equally important are goals such as shaping historical and literary awareness, developing social and civic competences, and learning toleration. In the visa-free zone there are such places as Brest (fortress from the 19th century), Grodno with the complex of the Old (11th–16th century) and New (18th century) Castles and its Old Town, Lida (14th-century castle), Brzostowica Wielka (16th-century church with the remains of Chodkiewicz), Różana (17th–18th century palace of the Sapieha family), Stare Wasilisзки (birthplace of Czesław Niemen) and others. Undoubtedly, educational trips of this type encourage children and young people to spend their free time actively and to travel consciously. Every year, Kraków City Council provides funds for the program (Stach, 2015).

The first stages of implementation of the tourist development and tourist trail infrastructure program included the actions that were undertaken after the reconstruction of the historical royal route "*Via Jagiellonica*", preparation for the inclusion of the Augustów Canal in the UNESCO cultural heritage list, creation of thematic tourist products, such as "Yotvingian Routes", "Cross-border tourist brands and products of the Augustów Canal", "August Velo" and others. These actions confirm **hypothesis (4)** that the development of cluster connections stimulates new forms of growth in the landscapes of cross-border regions.

A synthetic picture of further development prospects of the cross-border area and the tourist park can be generalised in the SWOT analysis table (Table 2). Examining the table, many strengths (8) and opportunities (6), with numerous weaknesses (10) and threats (8) for the development of the tourist cluster in the Augustów Canal region can be noticed. Efforts to seize its opportunities and eliminate threats should result in actions aimed at increasing the tourist attractiveness of the region in national and European dimensions, creating regional, branded products while maintaining its unique features of ecological biodiversity and using the value of the cultural heritage of the zone of penetration of borderland cultures.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of the conditions for the development of the Augustów Canal tourist cluster on the Polish-Belarusian border

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attractive natural value (in the UNESCO list) and low level of degradation, - in the crossborder dimension, integrating location of the most valuable physiographic units (Nemunas and Biebrza river basins, Augustów Canal, Bug river basin), - cultural potential based on multicultural heritage ("Via Jagiellonica" Royal Route), - border location of cities offering a concentration of cultural and historical sites (Brest, Grodno, Kamieniec, Białystok, Supraśl, Biała Podlaska, Włodawa), - favourable geopolitical location at the interface of Poland, Belarus and Lithuania, and on essential transit routes, with a network of rail and road border crossings, - empty land resources for investment in special zones and areas, - no significant language, religious or cultural barriers, - development of a network of agritourism farms, - friendly attitude towards tourists (hospitality of the local population) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - natural hazards in forests, on moraine plateaus and Polesie lowlands (fires, soil erosion, floods), - poorly developed environmental monitoring network, lack of coordination of crossborder crisis management services, - relatively poorly developed and insufficiently diversified tourist infrastructure, - limited capital inflow, underinvestment and insufficient development of road infrastructure, especially in the border area, - lack of attractive branded crossborder tourist products, - fragmentation, divisions and unwillingness to cooperate with tourism entities, - difficult access to potential tourist products outside the visafree zone, - lack of tourist border crossings, lack of legal regulation of local border traffic, - reduced availability of tourist information (a small number of tourist publications, electronic applications, lack of tourist information points and their improper distribution), - the unsatisfactory condition of monuments and historical cities complexes.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - natural and cultural values unique from a European point of view, - development of the network of nature protection facilities and an environmental monitoring system, - strengthening crossborder social ties as well as a local and regional culture through cooperation between universities and educational centres, - development of crossborder tourist products (regional, local) appropriate for various market segments and groups of tourists, - creating modern forms of environmental protection in tourist areas (geoparks), - extension of the spatial coverage of the visafree travel zone, implementation of the agreement on local border traffic for Belarus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increase in natural and human threats to the environment in conditions of climate change, - transboundary environmental pollution, invasion of alien flora and fauna species, - competition from other regions and tourist areas of Europe and neighbouring countries, - domination of nontourist motives for arrivals, - the outflow of young people and qualified labour to agglomerations, - low social and economic activity in rural areas, - maintaining visa traffic and raising the cost of visas for Belarusian citizens, - the disappearance of regional and local culture due to urbanisation.

Source: based on *Strategia współpracy...* (2014, pp. 73–74), amended by the author

DISCUSSION

Cross-border tourist clusters, along with changes in the function of borders, allow for new instruments for the development of cross-border economic cooperation, attracting investment resources, and increasing the socio-economic level of development of the entire border region (Howaniec, Kurowska-Pysz, 2014). In the border areas of peripheral regions, tourism is considered the most critical area of the economy and is often treated as the only chance for development, while simultaneously being the centre of integration (Więckowski, 2010a). Such intentions can be observed on the Belarusian side, where activities were undertaken to activate foreign inbound tourism. Currently,

the entire country is available in a visa-free regime with a stay of up to 30 days, provided that the arrival is via the international airport in Minsk (with reservation of hotel services, health insurance and a return ticket). However, between the border areas in the two neighbouring countries of Poland and Belarus, there are differences manifested mainly in different levels of tourist development, tourist attractions, demand and levels of tourism. Differences in the level of economic development, and the prices and quality of goods and services, often favour the exchange and occurrence of business tourism (Timothy, 2010; Pirozhnik, 2015). However, the natural and cultural attractiveness of the region alone, without proper development, convenient transport connections and visa-free travel, will not ensure its development. Indeed, the creation of cross-border tourist regions at the edge of the Schengen Area brings many barriers and difficulties (Węckowski, Saarinen, 2019, p. 372). However, the openness of this border is a prerequisite for the development of tourism. It undoubtedly has an impact on facilitating the integration of tourism space and its development.

The research confirms the thesis that clusters as a form of spatial concentration, with network connections between enterprises and institutions, are a way of activating economic development, implementing technological innovations, expanding market connections and transforming the development of cross-border regions (Dyba, Stryjakiewicz, 2019). In their development, clusters go through certain stages of evolution, and the research shows a cross-border tourist cluster at an initial stage of development. Its path to growth and maturity stages will be visible as soon as tourist services and tourism itself develop. Undoubtedly, this requires further research into the types and volume of demand for regional tourist products and the use of modern marketing methods for their promotion on European markets.

In the context of the transformation of the economy, clusters often operate on the principles of public-private partnership. State administration and regional self-governments play an essential role at the initial stage of creating a tourist cluster, shaping its ideas and organising its participants, and ensuring a strategic alliance between various segments of the tourism industry. As the development of local government in the Republic of Belarus is low, state institutions and regional administration should stimulate the growth of cluster initiatives there, by creating a platform for dialogue between various cluster participants and creating a favourable business environment (through a system of preferential taxes and loans, developing additional training and retraining of the local workforce to improve their skills). The geographical and cultural proximity in a visa-free regime shape the potential requirements for a flow of knowledge and new tourist service technologies, and these increase the competitive value of the entire cross-border region. In our opinion, research on the relationship between enterprises and the degree of formalisation of cooperation between stakeholders in a framework of public-private partnership is a task for further investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis confirms that with changes to visa systems, the development of cross-border regions of the Schengen Area remains an important future research area (Więckowski, Saarinen, 2019, p. 375). In a multidisciplinary approach to the study of new functions of modern borders (Kolosov, 2017), issues of tourism development in cross-border areas and networked market connections remain a centre of interest for the geography

of tourism. Timothy (2018, p. 167) draws attention to the current relevance of tourism research in cross-border areas because geography reveals the spatial organisation of tourist destinations and their development; demand and market absorption; ecological sensitivity and socio-cultural values of tourism; and together these create the possibility of a comprehensive assessment of the significance of tourism.

In brief, taking advantage of the opportunities of cross-border cooperation created by visa-free travel zones in the border areas of Belarus, it is necessary to take measures to expand tourism programs aimed at encouraging tourists to make longer stays. It will stimulate, to a greater extent, the economic development of the entire cross-border region. The region's tourist attractiveness across Europe will increase after finalising joint activities when the Augustów Canal is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, raising the level of tourist services to pan-European standards, simplifying the registration procedure for foreigners during their stay in facilities in Belarus, and implementing joint cultural and educational exchange programs. The current task for local government authorities and the tourism industry is to define integrated branded tourist products that take into account both parts of the borderland, such as health, cultural, water, cycling and hiking tourism, and developing a shared annual calendar of tourist and cultural events. In order to expose the region more widely in tourist information systems, it is necessary to accelerate the development of an integrated system for promoting the area on domestic and foreign markets (fairs). Other necessary undertakings include the joint promotion of tourist attractions and products of the Augustów Tourist Park region, addressed to foreign tourists and the communities of the border areas of Belarus, Poland and Lithuania, as well as expanding the network of tourist information points in the region, with particular emphasis on the needs of cross-border tourism and visa-free travel from EU countries. The trends presented and the views on issues of cooperation of the transnational cluster on the edge of the Schengen Area are an element of a search for new ways of implementing the Eastern Partnership policy program.

References

- Aleksandrova, A., Stupina, O. (2014). Turistskoe regionovedenie: Vliyanie regionalnoy integratsii na mirovoy turistskiy rynek. Moskva: Knorus.
- Banaszkiewicz, M., Graburn N., Owsianowska, S. (2017). Tourism in (Post)socialist Eastern Europe. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 15(2), 109–121. doi: 10.1080/14766825.2016.1260089
- Białous, A. (2019). Dobre wieści dla turystów. Retrieved from <http://www.pch24.pl/dobre-wiesci-dla-turystow-bialoruski-premier-zapowiedzial-rozszerzenie-strefy-bezwizowej,70014,i.html#ixzz66JoekxoJ>
- Borkowska-Niszczota, M. (2015). Wpływ klastrów turystycznych na rozwój i konkurencyjność regionów. *Ekonomiczne Problemy Turystyki*, 2(30), 145–164. doi: 10.7163/GPol.0154
- Dyba, W., Stryjakiewicz, T. (2019). Źródła wiedzy w różnych fazach cyklu życia klastra: przykłady z branży meblarskiej we Włoszech i w Polsce. *Prace Komisji Geografii Przemysłu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geograficznego*, 33(4), 26–41. doi: 10.24917/20801653.334.2
- Dyrda-Maciałek, S. (2010). Badanie marketingowych uwarunkowań funkcjonowania klastrów turystycznych. Zabrze: Politechnika Śląska, 131–154. Retrieved from http://delibra.bg.polsl.pl/Content/1159/R-4687_JG.pdf
- Deklaracja „Via Jagiellonica – wspólna odpowiedzialność” (2019). Uchwała XX Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków Polskich w Lublinie. Retrieved from <http://zachod-wschod.pl/nowa-oferta-turystyczno-kulturowa-fundacji-via-jagiellonica-2-2-3-2-2-2-2/>

- Firlej, K., Rożek, A. (2012). Korzyści z klasteringu transgranicznego, jako innowacyjnej formy rozwoju usług turystycznych na obszarach przygranicznych Polski Południowo-Wschodniej. *Zeszyty Naukowe, Ekonomia, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie*, 891, 31–50.
- Giełazyn-Sasimowicz, A. (2019). Rekordowy sezon na Kanale Augustowskim, Retrieved from <http://bialystok.wody.gov.pl/aktualnosci/684-rekordowy-sezon-na-kanale-augustowskim>.
- Howaniec, H., Kurowska-Pysz, J. (2014). *Klaster jako instrument rozwoju polsko-słowackiej współpracy transgranicznej*. Dąbrowa Górnicza: Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu.
- Janczarska-Bergel, K. (2019). Turystyka jako jeden z czynników rozwoju regionalnego departamentu Vaucluse w południowo-wschodniej Francji. *Prace Komisji Geografii Przemysłu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geograficznego*, 33(1), 178–187.
- Jasiński, M. (2018). Nasylenie gospodarki turystyką a poziom rozwoju społeczno-ekonomicznego w małych rozwijających się państwach wyspiarskich. *Prace Komisji Geografii Przemysłu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geograficznego*, 32(2), 311–324.
- Jasiński, M. (2019). Turystyka i pomoc rozwojowa a poziom rozwoju społeczno-ekonomicznego w państwach Południa o niekorzystnym położeniu geograficznym oraz najslabiej rozwiniętych. *Prace Komisji Geografii Przemysłu Polskiego Towarzystwa Geograficznego*, 33(3), 127–147.
- Inauguracja szlaku August Velo (2019). Retrieved from http://www.suwalki.info/informacje-24403-Inauguracja_szlaku_August_Velo_.html
- Kaczmarek, J., Stasiak, A., Włodarczyk, B. (2010). Produkt turystyczny. Pomysł, organizacja, zarządzanie. Warszawa: PWE.
- Kolosov, V.A. (2017). Phantom borders as a phenomenon in political geography. *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta. Ser. 5. Geografia*, 5.
- Kondratjeva, T. (2019). Grodno vstretil stotysjachnogo turista. Retrieved from <https://www.sb.by/articles/grodno-vstretil-100-tysyachnogo-turista.html>
- Kruzhalin V.I., Mironenko N.S., Zigern-Korn N.V., Shabalina N.V. (2014). Geografia turystyki: podręcznik. Moskwa: Federalna Agencja Turystyki.
- Markiewicz, M. (2018). Uwarunkowania rozwoju klastrów turystycznych w Polsce. *Współczesna Gospodarka*, 9(1), s. 51–65. doi: 10.26881/wg.2018.1.05. Retrieved from www.wspolczesnagospodarka.pl
- Piekutowska, A. (2016). Mały ruch graniczny – konsekwencje dla regionów przygranicznych. *Politeja*, 2(41), s. 99–114. doi: 10.12797/Politeja.13.2016.41.06
- Pirozhnik, I. (2015). Tourist migration in the cross-border region as a factor of enhancing economic cooperation (exemplified by Belarusian-Polish borderland). *Security Problems of the Russian Society*, 2.
- Pirozhnik, I. (2018). Strukturalne i terytorialne dysproporcje sektora turystycznego Białorusi. *Acta Geographica Silesiana*, 12(3), 17–35.
- Połomska-Jasienowska, A. (2016). Transgraniczne klastry jako forma współdziałania gospodarczego na pograniczu. *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach*, 255, 176–185.
- Roman, M. (2017). Wpływ klastrów turystycznych na innowacyjność gospodarki turystycznej. *Studia i Prace WNEiZ, Uniwersytet Szczeciński*, 48(3), 45–59. doi: 10.18276/sip.2017.48/3-04
- Ruch graniczny oraz wydatki cudzoziemców w Polsce i Polaków za granicą w 2018 r. (2019). Warszawa-Rzeszów: Urząd Statystyczny w Rzeszowie.
- Sprawozdanie z działalności w roku 2016. Stowarzyszenie „Euroregion Niemen” (2017) Suwałki.
- Skowronek, E. (2015). Klaster jako forma współpracy w turystyce. *Europa Regionum*, 24, 129–140.
- Stach, E. (2015). Poznawanie dziedzictwa kulturowego Kresów Wschodnich jako cel wycieczek szkolnych krakowskich gimnazjalistów. *Turystyka Kulturowa*, 9, 25–37. Retrieved from <http://turystykakulturowa.org/ojs/index.php/tk/article/view/646/594>
- Strategia współpracy transgranicznej województwa lubelskiego, obwodu lwowskiego, obwodu wołyńskiego i obwodu brzeskiego na lata 2014–2020 (2014). Lublin: Urząd Marszałkowski.
- Stupina, O. (2010). Turizm i gosudarstwennye granicy. *Pskovskiy regionologicheskij zhurnal*, 10, 100–106.
- Timothy, D. (2001). *Tourism and political boundaries*. London: Routledge.

- Timothy, D.J. (2018). Geography: The substance of tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 20(1), 166–169. doi: 10.1080/14616688.2017.1402948
- Więckowski, M. (2010a). Turystyka na obszarach przygranicznych Polski. *Prace Geograficzne IGPZ PAN*, 224–226.
- Więckowski, M. (2010b). Tourism development in the borderlands of Poland. *Geographia Polonica*, 83(2), 67–81.
- Więckowski, M., Saarinen, J. (2019). Tourism transitions, changes, and the creation of new spaces and places in Central-Eastern Europe. *Geographia Polonica*, 92(4), 369–377.

Ivan Pirozhnik, prof. PhD., ScD, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Tourism of the Pomeranian University in Słupsk. A graduate of geography at the Belarusian State University in Minsk (Belarus). Research interests: socio-economic geography, economics and regional development policy, political geography and geopolitics, the geography of tourism.

ORCID: 0000-0003-1667-8644

Address:

Pomeranian Academy in Słupsk
Institute of Socio-economic Geography and Tourism
ul. Partyzantów, 27, 76–200 Słupsk, Polska
e-mail: ivan.pirozhnik@apsl.edu.pl