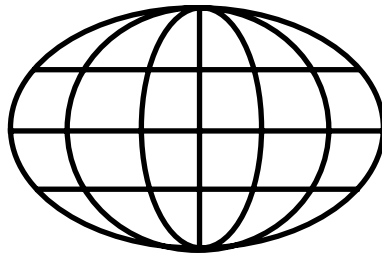


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EQUESTRIAN TOURISM IN POLAND: STATUS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND BARRIERS AFFECTING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article is devoted to contemporary equestrian tourism in Poland: the factors determining its state of affairs, development opportunities, and barriers. Using extensive literature, statistical data, and estimates and opinions expressed by leading experts in the field (gathered through IDI's), the author tries to formulate conclusions and recommendations on the possibilities of equestrian tourism development in Poland and its impact on the local development. Starting by defining the tourism in question, the author analyses sociocultural, economic, legal, and institutional aspects of contemporary equestrian/horse riding tourism. One of the general conclusions is that there is limited knowledge about the equine industry in Poland – a weakness that should be removed as one of the preconditions of any strategic development. Other recommendations refer to the need for improved and standardized training for beginners, changed attitudes towards both horses and equestrianism as a precondition of institutional and legal changes towards the creation of an equestrian-friendly environment, and the improvement of the quality of the tourist offer. Finally, it should be stressed that the international marketing of equestrian tourism in Poland – which consists of quality equestrian services, horse trails, accommodation centers, and auxiliary tourist services – can only be successful when all of its elements are in place.

Keywords: Poland, equestrian tourism, state of affairs, opportunities and barriers, local development.

Equestrian Tourism in Poland

Tourism is one of the most complex socioeconomic phenomena. Because of this diversity, it is also an interest of many scientific fields (Kurek & Mika, 2007; Alejziak, 2000). However, tourism has become progressively more spe-

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The following people shared their knowledge and information for the purpose of this article: Łukasz Abgarowicz and his associates, among them Beata Supeł of the Polish Equestrian Union, Witold Rosa and Andrzej Ruta of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society, and Andrzej Stasiowski of the Polish Horse Breeding Association. All the in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted between February and April 2013.

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cialized over time, from classic forms of recreation and leisure to active, shopping, cosmic, or even virtual forms (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Kozak, 2009a). In general, the tourism industry can be perceived either as a social phenomenon or as a sector of the economy, offering a wide range of services to a wide range of tourists. Over the last decades there has been a considerable increase in the number of supporters of the second approach. According to the common belief, tourism can be an important factor that stimulates development. However, does this thesis apply to every form of this industry?

The purpose of this article is to analyze the opportunities and barriers of a specific type of active tourism—that is, of equestrian tourism—in the local development in Poland. In general, equestrian tourism is considered to be a form of active tourism constituting a part of rural tourism (Kowalczyk, 2010). The observed change in the approach to define rural and urban areas as a result of expanding cities (urban sprawl) and of fluid functional boundaries requires a more flexible perspective. The main thesis of this article states that the greatest activity in horse-riding tourism occurs in the highly urbanized areas and their surroundings. In other words, people practice horse-riding tourism on the largest scale not in the areas with the most extensive wildlife conservation, but in the areas with the greatest number of horse riders and with highly developed infrastructure (stables, horse trails, shops, and services). The industry has also the greatest, but not always measurable impact on the local development of these particular areas (e.g., new jobs and new income possibilities).

Some people from the equestrian environment tend to perceive equestrianism as a set consisting only of seven sports approved by the International Federation for Equestrian Sports. It indicates the exclusion of recreational horse riding, horseback tours, endurance riding, polo, Hucul paths, *pony games*, knightly tournaments, mounted archery, races, TREC (Equestrian Trail Riding Techniques Competition), skijoring, and others. Jasiński, Pilis, and Pięta (2006, quoted by Durydiwka et al., 2010, p. 265) define horse-riding tourism as:

voluntary travelling, a temporary change of living environment and place of residence, staying in different places with others. These activities are performed in a free time, without materialistic motivations; they may aim at acquiring knowledge about a country, a region, or a particular culture [translated based on the Polish original].

This definition applies to almost any tourist activity; however, the requirement referring to the lack of materialistic motivations is unclear. On the other hand, Durydiwka et al. (2010) proposed the differentiation

of horse-riding tourism (as understood by Jasiński, Pilis, and Pięta) from equestrian tourism. According to them, (2006) equestrian tourism constitutes a different type of the industry:

Equestrian tourism is a form of active tourism consisting in recreational horse riding in horse riding centers or in the field. It is practiced outside the place of permanent residence for the purpose of leisure, recreation, and in order to acquire knowledge about history, culture, and nature of a new region, using tourist infrastructure, like accommodation and catering facilities, horse riding centers, horse trails, and stables in the forest. This form of tourism is practiced voluntarily and is not aimed at any economic benefits [translated based on the Polish original]. (Durydiwka et al., 2010, p. 265)

However, neither horse-riding tourism nor equestrian tourism can be practiced without a rider, a horse, or recreational horse riding in horse-riding centers and/or in the field, without using indispensable infrastructure (also constituting various services, which the authors of the definition forgot to mention, such as a purchase of horse food, veterinary products and services, and of other indispensable items). What is also important is that equestrianism can also refer to driving and skijoring. As emphasized by Andrzej Ruta (per IDI), a distinctive feature of horse-riding tourism is a ride to reach a particular destination, during which tourists visit interesting places.

There is no reason to differentiate equestrian tourism from horse-riding tourism. Therefore, I would like to propose the following definition of horse-riding/equestrian tourism in order to make it consistent with the letter and spirit of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), by describing it as all forms of horse-riding activities (on horseback, in a horse-and-cart, or behind a horse) by a person being outside her or his usual place of residence for no longer than 365 days, for the purpose of leisure, business or personal, other than being employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited.¹ This definition is consistent with the general notion of tourism, which is also used by the Central Statistical Office and many researchers. As a result, an activity (e.g., leaving a stable) lasting several hours would be compatible with the concept of same-day tourism.

The complex nature of the phenomenon requires diversified methods of research and multiple sources of information acquisition. Besides the analysis of literature, available statistical data, information collected by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK), the Polish Equestrian Union (PZJ), the Polish Horse Breeding Association (PZHK), and IDI's with

¹ That is, referring to a situation in which an employer resides and operates outside an employee's usual place of residence.

the experts on the issues provided crucial information. The image acquired from the data analysis reflects the actual state of affairs, even if only approximately.

The article consists of three parts. The first part describes the characteristics of equestrian/horse-riding tourism as a sociocultural and economic phenomenon. In the next section, the research focuses on territorial distribution of equestrianism and horse-riding tourism practicing especially in the areas of Poland. The third part constitutes the analysis of the balance of opportunities and barriers in the development of horse-riding tourism in Poland, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

Horse Riding Tourism as a Sociocultural and Economic Phenomenon

Sociocultural Aspect

It is impossible to analyze horse-riding tourism in Poland as separate from centuries-old equestrian tradition, which was emphasized by all interviewed people. For centuries, horses have fulfilled various functions by providing support to the army (military function), by being used as workhorses (economic function), and by constituting an emblem of owners' wealth (social and demonstration functions). Since the gradual decrease of horses' significance in the army and economy, they have been used in other fields, such as sport, tourism, and science (horses enabled exploration of many unknown territories) (Krzemień, 2010). In general, many people perceive equestrianism as a permanent element of culture. In Poland, on account of the underdevelopment of infantry at first, then of artillery and armored troops, the cavalry performed a significant role in military structure, and the Cavalry Training Center in Grudziądz constitutes a role model of training to this day. The post-World War II period brought the elimination of the cavalry and institutional training, which also meant the elimination of uniform and high standards in equestrianism (Pruchniewicz, 2007). The Polish Equestrian Union, which was disbanded in 1946 and reestablished in 1956, to this day organizes training and equestrian races (PZJ, 2013). In the structures of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (Polish: PTTK)—established in 1950 as a result of the Polish Tatra Society (1873) and the Polish Sightseeing Society (1906) merging—a certain movement related to tourist, mountain, lowland, and Western equestrianism came into existence with its own training system. These different types of equestrianism are not fully integrated, as they differ when it comes to forms of equestrian practice. PZJ

focuses on dressage, jumping, Eventing (horse trials), driving, equestrian vaulting, endurance riding, and *reining* (related to Western riding), while PTTK concentrates on various trainings for horse-riding tourism, trips, and horseback tours, which employ various elements of training, riding techniques, regional and cultural studies, and topography. Nevertheless, they share the same equestrian practice basis (IDI's with Rosa and Stasiowski).

In general, equestrianism in modern Poland constitutes a declared object of national pride, and the repeated statements about the Poles being an equestrian nation may be proof of it. It is also reflected in reenactment groups' ability to mobilize hundreds of uniformed cavalymen to reenact various cavalry skirmishes, e.g., the charge at Krojanty. Even though generally in Europe this particular skirmish constitutes an example of frantic bravery inclining soldiers to attack tanks with swords, the Poles to this day recreate this event (in a patriotic-religious convention) as a role model of heroism. The battle of Grunwald reenactment also gathers hundreds of horsemen and thousands of spectators, but in this case, the victory of Poland is unquestionable. On the other hand, it is odd that people forget about the last victorious Polish charge—the battle of Borujsko (today known as Żeńsko), which took place on March 1, 1945 (*Ostatnia szarża*, 2012).

Also worth mentioning is the popularity of horse rides on the trails of the cavalry combat operations. For centuries, people in Poland ascribed higher status to cavalry than to infantry, for example. As a result, cavalry became the element of the gentry tradition, just like the manor house—a preserved symbol of patriotism and tradition. Horses constituted one of the most noticeable elements of life in the manor house. The most highly valued animals, which were worth a proverbial king's ransom, often cost more than a village.

The traditional status ascribed to horses reflects the gentry, intellectual, and rural foundations of the Polish contemporary culture. For example, due to the cultivated myth of greatness, people only remember the victories of the Polish winged cavalry (*husaria*), even though this unit of Balkan origin suffered an equal number of defeats (see Sikora, 2010). Jarymowycz (2012), with all his liking for the Polish winged cavalry, remarked that it had been a heavy armed unit of a feudal type. The fact that no other country decided to imitate the Polish winged cavalry model is also quite revealing. The artifacts, stories, and legends about horses; certain expressions ("black horse"); and the following saying indicating certainty, "A horse is a horse," indicate the significance of these animals in the Polish culture (translated based on the Polish original; Chmielowski, 1745–1746, p. 229). The Polish literature would be impoverished without descriptions of the gentry's life (including horse-riding journeys) in the works of Mikołaj Rey, Jan Kochanowski, Jan Chryzostom Pasek, Adam Mickiewicz, and in the numerous memoirs of the

former gentry. The current canon of the memoir literature includes publications that mythologize the manor house and the social relations prevailing in this institution, even though they met with many critical voices in the Enlightenment era or the postwar period (Chłap-Nowakowa, 2007a, p. 262). The contrast of the dreadful city life and the idyllic existence in the country manor house presented in the Polish novel *Ziemia obiecana* (The Promised Land) by Władysław Reymont (1898) reflects the scale of this mythologization. In reality, however, people were leaving the “idyllic” country in order to live in the industrial city, not the other way round. According to Bohdan Jałowicki (1996), values of the post-gentry intelligence of the former Russian partition, which diverged from cultural standards of the western Poland and Galicia, have dominated the pantheon of the Polish national values.

It is also impossible to imagine Polish painting without the motif of horses in various contexts (Chłap-Nowakowa, 2007b, p. 228; Jackiewicz, 1992, p. 58). However, culture does not only consist of symbols, but also of people’s competence and behaviors. In a horse-riding context, it refers to the knowledge about horses and to being accustomed to them. Nevertheless, due to the fact that horses have almost disappeared from the Polish landscape, the majority of people are unaccustomed to these animals. For example, the irresponsible behavior of drivers on the road reflects the lack of knowledge; many of them do not reduce their speed when passing the riders, putting all of the road traffic in danger. Also, rather moderate achievements by our country representatives in competitive equestrianism do not make Poland a world power in this particular field (IDI with Stasiowski). If we also take the small number of riders into account, we should consider whether equestrianism is still a cultivated tradition or maybe just a national myth.

Economic Aspect

There are no exhaustive data providing information about the impact of horses on economy. The majority of stables belong to private owners, except for significant breeding enterprises (e.g., herds of stallions, studs of strategic importance), which are the State Treasury companies; today, there are approximately 20 of them (IDI with Stasiowski). Their owners are often, at the same time, the owners of agricultural holdings, formally making them farmers. Polish law exempts farmers from paying an income tax, as according to the law, farmers are not entrepreneurs and therefore some particular acts do not apply to them. Moreover, there is no obligation for them to maintain accounts; the majority of farmers are insured in the

Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS), which means they incur only 10% of the insurance cost, and their relations with customers are regulated by the Polish Civil Code. As a result, it is impossible to estimate the revenue and assess the impact of their businesses on local development. According to the informal interviews with horse breeders (who have studs and pensions for horses and often own agritourism businesses), as well as on the basis of approximate estimates of farmers' income (Mrozik-Kozak, 2010), the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the average income is much lower in comparison with average wages in the city; therefore, it only constitutes additional income (see Halamska, 2011). In the study conducted before the accession of Poland to EU among agritourism lodging owners, 81% of respondents noticed the increase of income (22.6%) thanks to the agritourism. It is important that agritourism had positive effects only in some of the regions, while to others it brought no change or even a decrease in income (Krzyżanowska, 2005). Researchers were unable to estimate how many of the respondents offered horse-riding services. Practitioners agree that only a stable with between 10 and 20 horses (belonging to an owner or to a pension), equipped with accommodation facilities for guests, can achieve enough income to support the family and employ one or two people (IDI's with Rosa and Ruta). The example of estimated finances of horse-riding centers presented below (a center with five horses) indicates a significant dependence of income on the adopted legal form: in agritourist business, the untaxed annual income would amount to approximately PLN 22,000, while in the private company, there would be a PLN 5,000 loss and, in the Polish limited liability company, there would be a PLN 40,000 loss (IDI with Ruta). Maintaining such a center would be impossible without some significant additional economic activity. People think that equestrian tourism centers improve the economic situation in poor districts (IDI with Ruta). Nevertheless, the available data about the location of these centers neither contradict nor confirm this opinion. "Large equestrian centers, which are, in general, sport, racing, or breeding oriented, usually employ more people (coaches, stablemen, security guards, restaurant personnel), and therefore become significant local employers" (translated based on the Polish original; IDI with Ruta). These centers, however, are usually located near big cities.

The available information about the income from horse breeding and horse racing do not clarify the impact of the industry on local economy. Moreover, it is difficult to analyze the expenses of the major equestrian institutions (PZJ and PTTK) due to their complex structures and the great financial independence of their offices. For example, PTTK constitutes a federation of 300 financially independent units with unknown expendi-

ture incurred on equestrianism.² In 2012, PTTK units (excluding numerous events organized by private equestrian centers) initiated 161 equestrian events and tours, which gathered 2,392 participants (GUS, 2013b, pp. 172–173).³ In 2007, there were 127 lowland tourism trek leaders and 83 mountain tourism trek leaders (PTTK, 2007). According to data provided by the Central Statistical Office, in 2012 there were altogether 122 equestrian tourism trek leaders (2013b, p. 171). Nevertheless, in the experts' opinion, there are several times more of them. On the other hand, PZJ registered approximately 4,000 licensed riders (IDI with Abgarowicz).

Horses, Equestrian Centers, and Horse Trails in Poland

The population of horses in Poland consists of the horses intended for slaughter, workhorses in agricultural holdings, breed horses in stables and studs, and those that are kept in stables located usually on the outskirts of towns. The emphasis was put on traditional farming, as among farmers' community, there are also people running pensions, tourist services, horse breeding, trainings, horse-riding tours, etc. It is difficult to acquire information about the number of "townies" who moved to the country, where they offer equestrian services. Interestingly, draft horses, which until recently were used as workforce in the country—before World War II, there were 3.8 million horses (*Hej na koń*, 2013)—in 1979 numbered 1.9 million horses, of which 1.85 million were in individual agricultural holdings. Currently, depending on the estimate, the number of horses amounts to 250,000–310,000 (*Hej na koń*, 2013; GUS, 2013). Apparently, draft horses disappeared almost completely from the landscape of the Polish country during the lifetime of one generation.

Due to the numerous changes, it is difficult to collect comprehensive and comparable data on the number of horses in Poland in each region (reforms of territorial organization in 1975 and 1999 hinder this comparison). However, the obtained data provide a general outline of the changes over time (Table 1).

The data in the Table 1 refer to horses in agricultural holdings (horses used in recreation and tourism constitute their unknown part), and they depict a dramatic decrease in the number of horses between 1998 and 2010. Relatively, the most of horses (counted per 100 ha to obtain more objective

² When it comes to the expenditure of the PTTK General Board (excluding other units), Andrzej Ruta estimates it to an approximate annual amount of PLN 10,000. However, again, it constitutes only the fragment of the whole image (See PTTK, 2007; PZJ, 2010).

³ The data include only those events and tours that were registered beforehand and included in the PTTK calendar of planned (and insured) activities.

Table 1. Horses by region in Poland (as of June, in thous.)

Region (voivodship)	1998 ^a	2000 ^b	2010 ^{bc}	2010 per 100 of agricultural lands ^{bc}
Dolnośląskie	13,1	12,0	11,2	1,2
Kujawsko-pomorskie	15,7	17,1	9,6	0,9
Lubelskie	82,3	82,2	30,0	2,1
Lubuskie	6,6	4,7	6,1	1,3
Łódzkie	35,8	34,4	14,9	1,5
Małopolskie	58,0	56,9	21,3	3,2
Mazowieckie	101,3	102,6	48,1	2,4
Opolskie	6,0	3,8	4,2	0,8
Podkarpackie	65,6	65,7	17,7	2,6
Podlaskie	38,7	37,9	20,2	1,9
Pomorskie	14,2	14,2	14,1	1,7
Śląskie	15,2	10,9	8,7	1,9
Świętokrzyskie	45,8	44,9	11,8	2,1
Warmińsko-mazurskie	26,3	26,5	16,3	1,5
Wielkopolskie	28,1	28,4	21,0	1,2
Zachodniopomorskie	8,2	7,5	8,9	0,9
Polska	560,9	549,7	264,2	1,7

a) in the farms. GUS 2001: 166; b) GUS, 2011: 183; c) according to the agricultural census.

estimation) survived in the areas dominated by small agricultural holdings (Podkarpackie Region, Świętokrzyskie Region, Lubelskie Region, Podlaskie Region) as well as in regions distinguished by fragmented agriculture and by presence of a metropolis (Małopolskie Region, Mazowieckie Region). In 1980, the Central Statistical Office counted in Poland 1,780,000 horses; in 1985, 1,404,000; and in 1990, 941,000 (GUS, 1992, p. 242). There was no such dynamic decline when it came to horses used in sport and tourism. According to Andrzej Stasiowski (IDI), there was a noticeable distinction in distribution of horse types: horses of noble breed prevailed in western and southwestern Poland vs. draft horses (workhorses) in the east, the north-east, and the center—that is, in the parts where a traditional model of agriculture is the most popular.

The data of PZHK (2012) showed that in 2011 there were 99,949 horses of noble breed, 37,127 ponies, and 177,240 draft horses (altogether, 314,316 horses). It is worth mentioning that between 2009 and 2011 the number of draft horses decreased by 46,109 head and the population of horses in general by 48,487 head (PZHK, 2012). Only the population of ponies increased slightly by 3,047 head (PZHK, 2012), which could be a reflection of increasing interest in horse riding among children. According to PZHK (2013), the beginning of an increase in warmblood horse breed-

ing could be observed, as a result of developing equestrianism. The data about some other areas attractive to tourists confirmed this trend (Boczar-Różewicz, Brejta, Ruda, & Brejta, 2005).

Obviously, the data on the number of breed horses did not indicate that all of these horses were used in equestrianism. In 2006, the estimated number of horses used in equestrianism amounted to approximately 100,000 (Łojek, 2006). In December 2012, the specialists estimated the number of horses used for sport and recreation purposes at 60,000, and PZJ provided the approximate number of riders, 120,000 (*Konie wrócą do łask*, 2012), which was fewer than in smaller Finland (Räbinä, 2010, p. 1). According to the latest data, there are approximately 300,000 riders (IDI with Abgarowicz). In comparison, in Germany there are 1 million riders, while in the United Kingdom there are approximately 4.3 million riders (Brejta, 2013). It is estimated that in the horse industry (including breeding, production of forage and equipment, and other services), 38,000 people are employed. In 2006, the number of permanent jobs in the horse industry was 42,000 (Łojek, 2006). Even though in the prewar period Poland was the leader of Europe in the number of horses, nowadays we fall behind other countries: in Sweden there are 28 horses per 1,000 inhabitants; in the United Kingdom, 69 horses; and in Poland, only 1 horse (Brejta, 2013). Horse breeding can be lucrative, and the income of, for example, Janów Podlaski (last year they sold Arab horses for 2.3 million Euros) may be proof of it (Brejta, 2013). Also, they sold 11,500 horses raised for slaughter to Italy for 52 million PLN (Międzyński & Kostrzewski, 2013). This partial information shows the differences in horse breeders' motives as well as the lack of comprehensive data.

As this article aims to focus on equestrian tourism, the location and availability of horse-riding centers will be treated as the approximate indication of tourist and sport horse population distribution. It can be assumed, that with few exceptions, all or almost all of the centers that organize trainings in horse arenas also offer rides in the field. According to this point, regardless of organizational connections, they have many common features. From the perspective of the possibility of using equestrian tourism for local development, displacing horse-riding centers (and, as a result, the related services) constitutes the most essential issue. Tourism understood in a broader sense than leisure or active tourism flourishes most effectively in big urban centers, in their vicinity, and at popular tourist destinations (at the seaside, in lake regions, and at mountain resorts), with developed infrastructure and services (Kozak, 2009a; Kozak, 2011, pp. 47–48).

The regions of Poland significantly differ when it comes to the concentration of equestrian centers. The biggest concentration can be observed in the areas located in the vicinity of major urban centers—that is, near Warsaw,

Kraków, the Silesian Conurbation, Tricity, Poznań, and Łódź (see also Kurek & Mika, 2007). On the other hand, few equestrian centers are located in northern Mazowieckie Region, Podlaskie Region, northern Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region, or in the vast area between Lubuskie Region and Zachodniopomorskie Region, which abound with natural resources but are not urbanized.

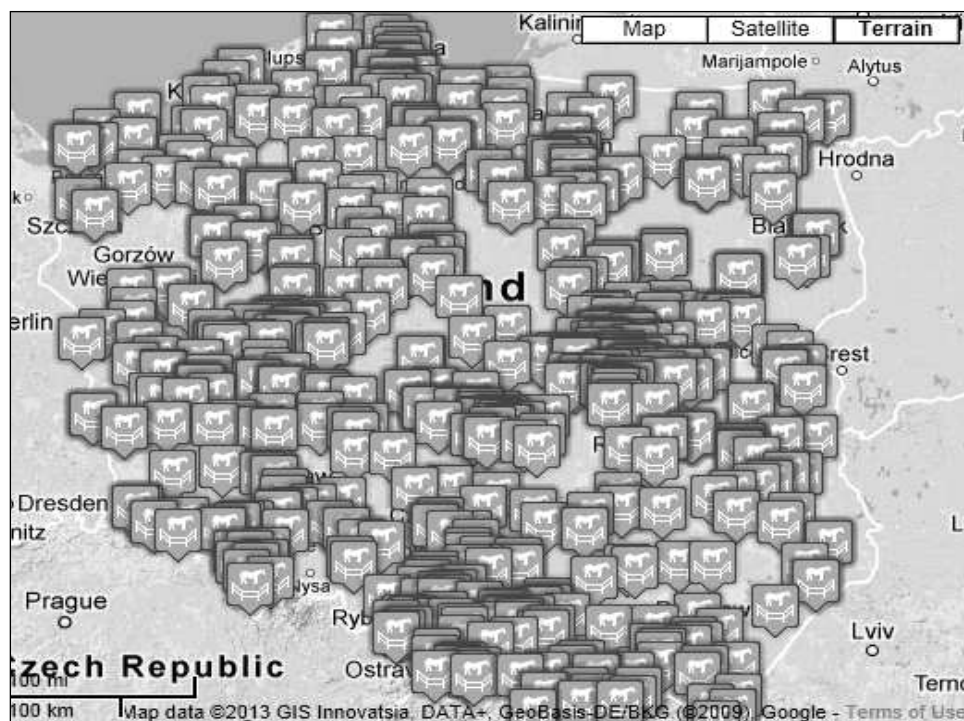


Fig. 1. Distribution of horse-riding centers in Poland, 2012.

Source: <http://www.galopuje.pl/jazda-konna-osrodki.html>, accessed 16. 02. 2013 and downloaded with the consent of the company Hoblo, the owner of the portal galopuje.pl

Experts agree that when it comes to riders, they are usually people living in bigger cities (not only in metropolises), with university education, and with higher-than-average income. In the group of children and teenage riders, there are more girls, while among adults, there are more men (according to the observed tendency, women may outnumber men in the future), aged between 20 and 50 years (IDI's with Ruta, Rosa, Stasiowski, and Supeł).

Andrzej Ruta (IDI) provided a conservative measure of the PTTK active riders, practicing recreational-tourist equestrianism in lowland areas: the most of the active riders are in Mazowieckie Region (250), the Ku-

jawsko-Pomorskie Region (150), Podlaskie Region (50), the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Region (50), Łódzkie Region (30), Pomorskie Region (30), and other regions (approximately 30), which altogether amounts to 450 people. If we also take under consideration the people who practice tourist equestrianism and are not equestrian club members, the number is several times bigger. What is more important than the approximate estimation mentioned above is territorial diversification of equestrianism conditioned by the level of urbanization. PZJ observes similar diversification, having 602 registered equestrian clubs (of which 327 are licensed clubs), which are located mainly in the vicinity of cities (IDI with Abgarowicz). Also, the number of clubs and riders increases most dynamically in suburban, especially submetropolitan, areas (IDI with Stasiowski). Figure 2 depicts that the majority of equestrian centers operate within a radius of 20–25 kilometers from a big city. In more remote areas, there are scarcely any horse-riding centers; the existing ones are used by local urban centers in the region.

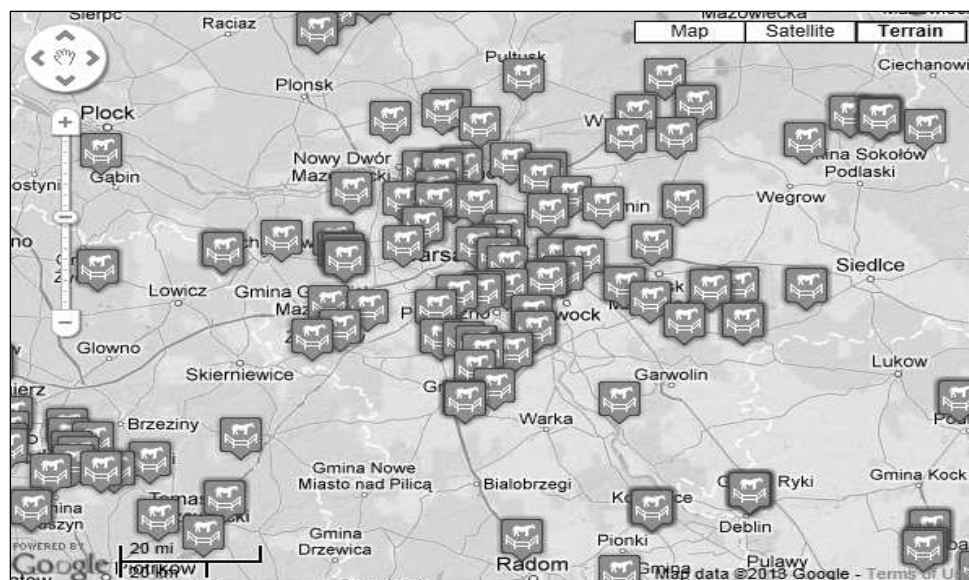


Fig. 2. Horse-riding centres around Warsaw, 2012.

Source: <http://www.galopuje.pl/jazda-konna-osrodki.html>, accessed 16. 02. 2013, downloaded with the consent of the company Hoblo, the owner of the portal galopuje.pl

In order to confirm this thesis, we should analyze the situation in regions with diversified and attractive morainial lakes and seaside landscapes. Even though such areas are interesting also when it comes to the cultural

aspect, they are underpopulated. On the basis of the data presented on Figure 3, we can compare the concentration and spatial distribution observed in western Pomerania with other regions.

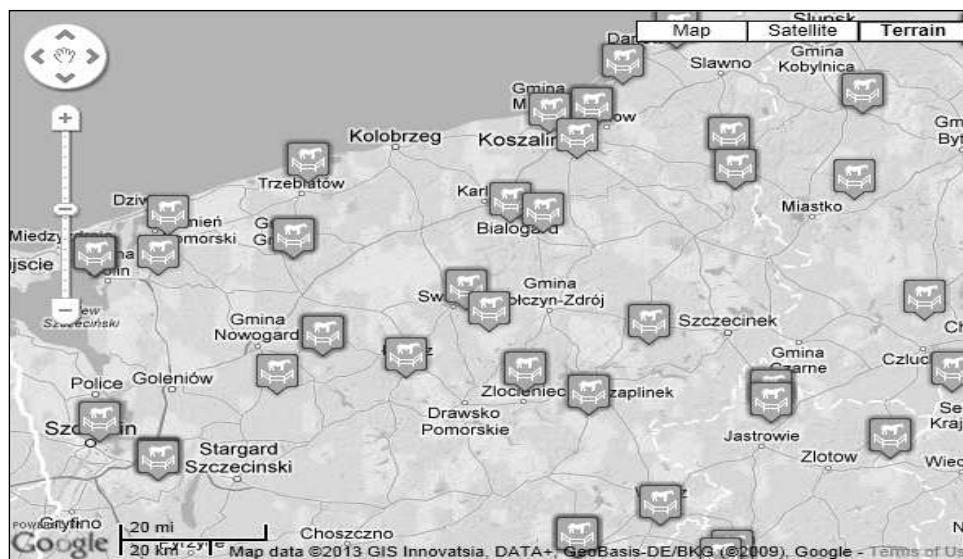


Fig. 3. Horse-riding centres in western Pomerania, 2012.

Source: <http://www.galopuje.pl/jazda-konna-osrodki.html>, accessed 16. 02. 2013, downloaded with the consent of the company Hoblo, the owner of the portal galopuje.pl

The data allow several conclusions to be drawn. First, a low population density indicates a low demand for services, which as a result, are scattered around subregional cities (e.g., Koszalin) and local cities. Second, there is not even a high demand for equestrian services in a city as big as Szczecin. Third, attractive topography for practicing equestrian tourism is not sufficient to make the industry flourish. Because of better-equipped riding halls and a higher demand for services, the equestrian season lasts longer in regions with biggest urban centers.

Areas of valuable natural resources hardly ever constitute the areas of increased tourism, including horse-riding tourism (Meyer, 2011). What is important is that protected areas, especially those under more strict protection, not necessarily encourage tourism. Their main function is the protection of natural values (Kozak, 2009b; Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2013; Ptaszycka-Jackowska & Baranowska-Janota, 1998), which in Poland is usually connected with lack of access to protected areas or with heavy access restrictions. In comparison to strict reserves, where public access is not per-

mitted, access restrictions in national parks are more complex. In order to access most of them, riders have to obtain individual approval from the park authorities (usually in return for considerable payment). Against this background, the Bieszczady National Park appears to be a positive exception, with its outlined horse trails and Hucul pony breeding. It protects nature and at the same time preserves the local culture.

The problems of riders' access to forested and protected areas as well as of exercising the right to access privately owned lands should be discussed. These issues may shortly generate many problems in Poland, just as they did in Sweden (Elgåker, Pinzke, Nilsson, & Lindholm, 2012). Problems with outlining trails, paths, or tracks in forests are well known (Pawlikowska-Piechotka, 2013); however, they occur less frequently than in the past. Yet, Andrzej Ruta (IDI) pointed out that the state forests in recent years have "successfully" managed to hinder riding on forest tracks (except for public tracks and those marked as trails). Current regulations impede horse rides and even make the organization of orienteering events or TREC impossible. On the other hand, the former ministry of transport, construction, and maritime economy was against introducing roadsides referring to equestrianism and updating the suitable laws of the Highway Code (IDI with Ruta). As of July 2011, cars towing trailers, horse trailers, and boat trailers with a maximum authorized mass exceeding 3.5 tons will be charged the ViaToll road tax. All in all, the Polish law does not seem to take into account the specificity of equestrian tourism.

Does the very act of outlining horse trails trigger the development of equestrianism? As there is no comprehensive list (and description) of horse trails,⁴ it is necessary to refer to the only significant and available publication that provides a review of the most important (and, at the same time, the most beautiful) horse trails in Poland (Józefczyk, 2010). Even though this review is limited only to trails acknowledged as attractive, it is interesting and useful. In 2010, there were 62,538 km of tourist trails, including 2,958 km of horse trails (GUS, 2012). In 2012, the number increased to 3,557.8 km (GUS, 2013b, p. 170).

The book presents 47 horse trails (with some unofficial sections) of different lengths and difficulty, running through different regions with various infrastructure elements. According to some opinions, in order to encourage the development of equestrianism, strategic horse trails should be outlined to connect individual regions and incorporate Poland into the European horse trail system. Is this really absolutely essential? Not necessarily. Most people practice horse riding near their place of residence. A rider with an

⁴ In Poland in 2012, there were 3,557.8 horse trails marked only by PTTK; there were no such trails in half of the Polish regions (GUS, 2013b, p. 170).

average level of training can cover between 20 and 30 km per day. Covering longer distances for such a rider is possible; however, it would require high skills or participation in a horseback tour lasting for a few days (with the necessity of taking leave of absence). There is also another limitation: A horseback tour lasting for a few days would require accommodation centers located at regular distances (every 20–40 km). It should not be a problem in the areas located in the vicinity of big cities; however, the situation is different when it comes to remote regions. Some picturesque, but peripheral horse trails become overgrown due to the lack of users. There are not many people willing to participate in “survival” horseback tours and sleep rough or in makeshift tents.

Let us analyze a few of the presented trails. The longest and most controversial among horse lovers is the Łódzkie Horse Trail, consisting of two circular routes, one big and one small. In 2010, it was 1,500 km long, and in 2012, its length increased to 2,100 km. The author of the book mentioned 36 horse-riding centers located on this trail. Theoretically, covering as much distance as possible for seasoned riders and horses, there is one center per 41 km of the trail. However, the problem is that most of the centers are located in the vicinity of Łódź, and some long sections of the trail (e.g., a 70 km-long Radomsko-Przedbórz-Sulejów section, or similarly long Tomaszów Mazowiecki-Rawa-Skierniewice section) are devoid of equestrian centers. On the website of the Łódzkie Horse Trail management, there is an address list of 774 hotels, spa centers, camping sites, tent sites, health resorts, conference centers, pensions, hostels, and agritourism centers, without any information as to whether they provide accommodation for riders.

The second trail leads from the border with Germany to Gdańsk. In fact, it constitutes a system of connected horse trails branching off to Szczecin, Wolin, Trzebiatów, Biały Bór, Stilo, and other towns. Horse route plans of the Choczewo and Wejherowo Forestry Commissions illustrate uneven distribution of stables. On the trail leading along the shore from Stilo to Jastrzębia Góra and then to the south to Reda (altogether approximately 100 km), there are five places where horses can be put to pasture and only two overnight lodgings (located midway and at the end of the route).

One of the most interesting routes is the Poleskie Horse Trail, leading from Chełm to Włodawa (294 km). From among six stables that could provide overnight stays, three are located on the outskirts of Chełm, two of them north of the city and one near Włodawa. There are also some other places on the trail, offering only short rest stops and the possibility of tying up a horse. Popular tourist areas facilitate the use of horse trails. For example, equestrian centers on the route of the Transsudetian Horse Trail (360 km) and the PTTK Horse Trail in Kamienna Góra area (80 km) are

located at relatively even distances. Also, there are many stables in the area of Bieszczady Mountains. The Transbeskidzki Horse Trail (approximately 400 km between Bieszczady Mountains and Brenna near Szczyrk) is more demanding; however, it is possible to plan overnight stays in fourteen stables located on the route. Population density and the development level of various tourism functions in the region are therefore factors of crucial significance. For example, in recent years, equestrian tourism has developed dynamically in the Beskid Niski area (Boczar-Rózewicz et al., 2005).

Two conclusions can be drawn from the review presented above. First, in areas distant from bigger cities (and from significant tourist centers), there is a deficiency of equestrian centers, which makes horse trails using difficult. Therefore, the process of outlining horse trails should be accompanied by creating network of stables, possibly located at even distances.

Opportunities and Barriers

People often assume that in Poland equestrianism and horse-riding tourism provide an opportunity of development for local economies. On one hand, they clearly overestimate the impact of equestrian tradition and of natural resources, which constitute one of the myths about the Polish tourism (see Kozak, 2009a), and underestimate the impact of recession on the other hand. Not the availability of natural resources but the level of supply and demand is the major factor influencing the development of equestrianism. Observation of the economy only confirms this thesis: The demand for various services and products is the highest in centers producing the highest income. Poland is brimming with, so far, unexploited areas, where foreigners could also use the equestrian tourism services. In order to use the potential, especially of borderland, it is necessary to provide good quality services in every center, not only in those located in cities. The examples of other countries depict that rider-friendly laws, trails with comprehensive tourist offers (overnight lodgings, catering, etc.), and successful promotion among “townies” may benefit local development. It is worth emphasizing that Poland has a genetically diversified and highly valued population of horses (IDI with Ruta). Nevertheless, this diversification does not guarantee the development of equestrianism—it is the appropriate breeding that is more crucial.

If the pace of the development increases, substantial financial outlays will be necessary. Nevertheless, the financial means should be accompanied by the change in social awareness and strategic thinking. Without this shift, nature and horse trails will not be enough to attract tourists.

What is also crucial is the quality of the Polish training system. Even though PTTK and PZJ differ when it comes to training methods and aims, they should cooperate to review and adjust their systems at some points. The estimated number of riders in Poland reflects the quantitative limitation of the training. When it comes to their quality, based on the number of equestrian centers, distribution of riders in comparison with other countries, and on limited sport achievements, Poland seems to lag behind the world standard (IDI's with Abgarowicz and Ruta). Moreover, in the free-market reality, not only professionals can offer training (IDI's with Abgarowicz and Stasiowski). What particularly draws attention is the lack of professional education of future equestrian personnel: Only one university offers hippological studies as of 2012 (in Lublin, Poland), and most horse-breeding technical colleges provide only theoretical knowledge. The notable exceptions are a technical college in Surpaśl, equipped with a sports hall and cooperating with overseas partners, and a project implemented by PZJ in selected schools, which aims to expand practical knowledge of students. There are no professional schools for farriers (IDI with Ruta). Deregulation conducted in 2013 also involved physical recreation instructors (including horse-riding instructors), which led to intensified attempts at improving training methods to achieve better results. Systemic changes in education and training are essential and should not only concern the Society for the Promotion of Sport and Physical Activity (TKKF) or cooperating university schools of physical education.

However, unclear laws, which seem to be hostile to equestrianism, hinder the implementation of these changes. In addition to the issues mentioned above, there is another legal obstacle that should be highlighted: An organizer of equestrian tourism has to provide a guarantee or an insurance policy shielding people participating in an event from the organizer's bankruptcy and submit it to the Marshall's Office.

The real condition of equestrianism when it comes to culture, both in qualitative and quantitative aspects, brings the myth of the Polish cavalryman into question. Behind the myth, there is a limited knowledge when it comes to equestrianism and horses, as well as low culture of attitudes and behaviors toward horses and riders.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the recent years, the number of horses in Poland has dramatically dropped. There is a hope that with increasing wealth in the society, this tendency will change. In order to use equestrianism in local or regional development, it has to become more popular. What is the major obstacle to the

attempt to increase the role of equestrian tourism in local or regional development? The level of wealth undoubtedly constitutes the major problem: Practicing equestrianism is quite expensive, which limits the number of the interested people. However, waiting until the society becomes more affluent would be tantamount to wasting opportunities.

Is it possible to improve the situation? Yes, through implementing an integrated strategy for equestrian tourism development, based on comprehensive problem solving in various areas (information, legal, cultural, organization of trainings, coordination of developmental activities, and – finally – supralocal marketing). The precise analysis and diagnosis of horses and riders, the size and quality of the equestrian basis, the distribution of equestrian services and other connected services, and information systems for equestrian/horse-riding tourism should constitute the first step of this strategy.

It is also essential to reflect on future legal solutions concerning equestrianism. In order to implement institutional and legal changes, it is necessary to improve the cultural attitudes toward horses and equestrianism; instead of preserving myths and out-of-date beliefs, people's knowledge about horses and riders should be improved. Their positive emotions toward equestrianism, if not overused, may constitute a good point of departure for this change.

What is also important is the improvement of training. A great number of professionals could successfully fulfill the training objectives and also in the field of rehabilitation. However, what should be priority is the propagation of good quality training norms for the standard types of equestrianism (not by the means of legal requirement). Additionally, more consideration should be put to the issue of quality of stables and accommodation offers. The equestrian offer of Poland can achieve favorable outcome abroad if it surpasses other countries promoting their services (e.g., Slovakia, Romania, or Sweden). Dynamically developing mountain equestrian tourism exemplifies that success is attainable (Krzemień, 2009). However, only marketing of the completed system (consisting of quality equestrian services, horse trails, accommodation centers, and auxiliary tourist services) can bring satisfying results.

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