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## **TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE COMMUNE OF ZAWOJA AND THEIR USE IN TOURIST TRAFFIC**

*Abstract:* This paper is an attempt to present and assess the tourist attractions in the commune of Zawoja as well as their use in tourist traffic. The commune features a large section of the unique range of Babia Góra but the area in question is also attractive for its cultural assets. This diversity of its attractions allows for a variety of tourism forms in the area in question, yet it is crucial that these will be of benefit to the natural environment and local population.

*Key words:* tourist attractions, tourist traffic, the Zawoja commune, Babia Góra National Park

### **Introduction**

This article is a summary of the field research conducted in the commune of Zawoja in 2000-2001, which constituted the basis for writing my MA thesis entitled *Tourist Attractions in the Commune of Zawoja and their Use in Tourist Traffic*.

The main goal of the thesis was to define the commune's natural and anthropogenic attractions and their spatial diversity, as well as the extent to which these are used in tourist traffic. Additionally, the author aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the volume and quality of tourist facilities? Are they commensurate with the attractions offered by the commune?
2. What is the volume of tourist traffic and what are its seasonal patterns? What type of tourist groups come to visit Zawoja and is reaching the peak of Babia Góra their main (and only) goal?
3. What is the commune's importance as a tourist area on a regional and national scale?
4. What are the prospects of enhancing the tourist appeal of the region in question?

One of the key field methods was running a survey among tourists, the local population and staff of selected institutions based within the commune, Babia Góra National Park, the Commune Office and the Commune Unit for the Promotion of Culture and Tourism.

The main goal was attaining some sense of orientation as to the extent to which the respondents, living or working in the area surveyed, are familiar with that area, what tourist appeal they can see there, whether or not they are interested in developing tourism in the area, and whether they have any ideas concerning the boosting of Zawoja's tourist appeal.

The author used the survey conducted among tourists to obtain some valuable information on the spatial and demographic-social diversity of tourists, reasons for their arrival in Zawoja, as well as their knowledge of the area visited. Owing to this, the author also learnt about the extent to which particular tourists attractions, both natural and anthropogenic, are used by tourist traffic.

The final survey conducted was with students of geography, tourism and hotel management at the University of Łódź in January 2001. The author was interested in learning about the level of knowledge of the area under study among the students surveyed, as well as the perception of Zawoja, with all its attractions, among other mountainous areas.

### **A general profile of the area**

The commune of Zawoja lies in the voivodship of Małopolska (Lesser Poland), within the municipality of Sucha Beskidzka. It borders with six mountainous communes: Koszarawa, Stryżawa, Maków Podhalański, Bystra-Sidzina, Jabłonka and Lipnica Wielka and, by the Range of Babia Góra, with Slovakia. The commune covers an area of 129 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 8 870. Zawoja is a rural commune as it comprises two villages, Zawoja (constituting 95% of its area) and Skawica (5%). Interestingly enough, Zawoja is Poland's largest village in terms of size and one of the country's longest, next to Ochotnica and Zubrzyca (Dolna-Górna).

According to J. Kondracki (1998), the entire area of Zawoja lies within the External Western Carpathians and is considered part of the Western Beskids, the Beskid of Żywiec, to be precise. Its major attraction is its scenic location in the Valley of Skawica River and, as for its surroundings, three mountain ranges – Jałowiec, Babia Góra and Polica.

The commune's social-economic situation is also of interest, the most striking aspect being the fact that the population of Zawoja is steadily growing from one year to the next. This results not only from the positive birth rate (3.27%) but also a positive migration balance: in 1999, 98 persons arrived in Zawoja while 85 left. This is atypical as rural areas are usually characterised by their negative balance. Surveys among locals have shown, however, that most of them, feeling a strong bond with the area, would like to stay there in the years to come, with as many as 93% of respondents, including a large proportion of young people, claiming that they have no intention of moving out of Zawoja.

It should be emphasised that, as prospects of employment in farming look bleak due to the poor quality of the soil, the mountain climate and natural limitations in forestry, an increasing number of Zawoja locals are taking to tourism, which they perceive as the only chance for personal development and improvement of their living conditions. Tourism in this area dates back to the 1600s and 1700s, when numerous groups of researchers penetrated the massif of Babia Góra. Yet it was not until the nineteenth

century that outsiders started to pour in for purely tourism-related reasons. These were mainly individual outings, with mass tourism developing much later (Gimza 1996). The popularisation of tourism in the region of Babia Góra was a task eagerly undertaken by Kazimierz Sosnowski, Hugo Zapałowicz, Władysław Midowicz or Władysław Szafer. It is thanks to them that the first mountain shelter was opened, as well as first recreational facilities, tourist trails and, last but not least, Babia Góra National Park. Early into the twentieth century, Zawoja won the status of a climate village while tourism in the area saw ever-increasing development, which was halted by the outbreak of World War II. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rebirth of local tourism, with a great number of new boarding houses and leisure centres belonging to state-owned enterprises. Later on, local tourism experienced its up and downs, undergoing various modifications and assuming various forms, a trend still present today.

### **Tourist attractions and their assessment**

According to J. Warszyńska, A. Jackowski (1979), tourist attractions (of a region, a location, or a trail) are *a set of elements of the natural environment and non-natural elements, which – jointly or individually – are objects of a tourist's interest.*

The commune under discussion is characterised by a significant wealth of tourist attractions. First and foremost, it features natural attractions, the prime interest being the Babia Góra Range, lying in the southern part of the region, with its unique vegetation and forms of inanimate nature differing markedly from other Beskid ranges due to its alpine character. It is Poland's second highest mountainous massif, after the Tatras. The very peak of Babia Góra (deservedly called the "Queen of the Beskids") is taller than the neighbouring Beskid Mountains by 100-500 metres and the range's relative height is no less than 1,100 metres.

Another asset of the range is the fact that it is the only place in Poland, aside from the Tatras, to feature five floors of vegetation: plateau, lower and upper sub-alpine forests, sub-alpine featuring dwarf mountain pine and alpine with endemic grasses and rock rubble. Professor Władysław Szafer's opinion that it is a "model mountain in Polish Carpathians" is a perfect summary of Babia Góra's uniqueness, its natural diversity and excellently exposed floors.

The importance of the Babia Góra massif was greatly enhanced in 1954, when Babia Góra National Park was established, long awaited by fans of the local beauty. The most attractive section of the range covering 1703 ha was declared under protection. Despite continuous efforts to ensure a major enlargement of the park, the only success came in 1997, when it was extended to 3391 ha. This is worthwhile as the commune under discussion covers as much as 75% of the park. The unique nature of the area as well as its one-of-a-kind research potential have been recognised internationally. In June 1976, the International Council for Coordination of the "Man and Biosphere" programme operating within the framework of Unesco included the park in the global network of Biosphere Reserves, thanks to which Babia Góra became Poland's first mountain to be placed on the list (Parusel 1996).

The other ranges surrounding Zawoja, Polica and Jałowiec, are typical Beskids, with interesting flora of the lower and upper sub-alpine forests, where numerous viewing points in the Jałowiec Range are of particular interest.

The Zawoja commune is mostly known for its natural attractiveness related to the presence of Babia Góra within its boundaries, yet it should be remembered that it also features a number of various anthropogenic attractions. Many hamlets along the main road and on mountain slopes still house old wooden huts and wayside shrines and crosses. These, just like natural attractions, are most prevalent in the southern part: in Zawoja Barańcowa, Markowa and Czatoża. It is here that interesting museum-type facilities are located (the Educational Centre of the Babia Góra National Park, an open-air folk museum in Markowe Rówienki featuring curious examples of well-preserved wooden architecture characteristic of the region, or the Highland Tourism Museum housing a rich collection reflecting the development of local tourism), as well as the first mountain shelter in the Polish Beskids, opened for tourists in 1906, and numerous remnants of Zawoja-style construction – huts, cellars, a belfry and wayside shrines.

One of the author's objectives while drafting this paper was to assess the area's tourist attractions. The author is fully aware of the difficulty of this task as it is frequently a matter of subjective appraisal and the tourist appeal of a given location is highly relative: for one group of tourists a quiet zone with untouched nature may be attractive while another might find intense-tourism areas more to their liking.

The assessment was performed using J. Warszyńska's method of point classification as well as on the basis of surveys conducted among tourists, local population, the staff of selected institutions and students of the University of Łódź.

The point classification method allows the researcher to assess the level of the tourist attractiveness of the entire area under study but also of its particular sections. The author's policy was to divide the commune of Zawoja into 149 identical squares of 1 km<sup>2</sup>. Next, she defined the criteria and rules of awarding points, modified against the work of J. Warszyńska so as to reflect the unique character of the commune under examination. Criteria employed included: percentage of forested areas, length of river network, difference in relative height, presence of conditions conducive to cycling, pedestrian and skiing tourism, and the presence of educational attractions such as museums, historical folk constructions or other anthropogenic attractions and natural curiosities.

A significant diversity in the feature intensity in the particular squares of the area under study resulted in the values of the respective factor ranging from 0.21 to 0.69 and the method employed confirmed the author's assumption that the most attractive part is the southern section embracing the Babia Góra National Park and its immediate surrounds (Fig.1). The attractiveness factor was highest (0.69) in square 140, an area rich in both natural environmental assets (a large woodland, Babia Góra National Park, a few landscape curiosities) and anthropogenic assets: it is here that the oldest mountain shelter in the Polish Beskids and the unique Highland Tourism Museum are located. A very high level of attractiveness is also a characteristic of the nearby sections situated within the Babia Góra National Park, the most interesting being numerous natural assets, in particular Beskid-unique forms of inanimate nature (the area of Babia Góra peak with

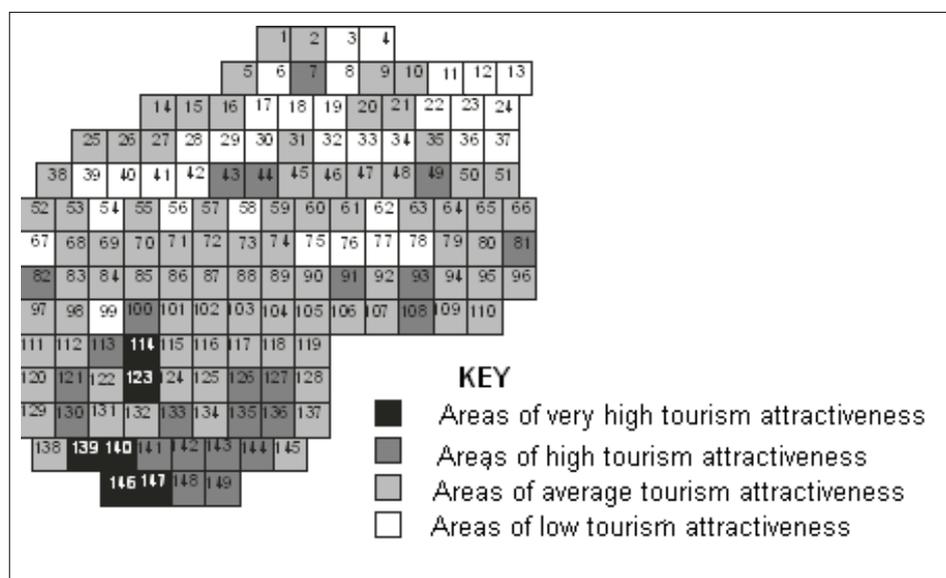


Fig. 1. Tourist attractiveness of the commune Zawoja

Source: Author's own research

its immediate vicinity). Zawoja Markowa and Zawoja Barańcowa are also highly attractive yet, in this case, it is mainly due to non-natural assets, i.e. museums, folk construction structures, as well as the presence of ski lifts. The areas with the lowest tourist attractiveness lie in the northern section of the examined commune (in particular Zawoja Dolna, Skawica Dolna and Skawica Górna). These feature, in the majority of cases, small woodland areas, insignificant differences in relative heights and lack interesting anthropogenic assets.

Having calculated the attractiveness index for individual squares, the author also counted the average value of the index for the entire commune of Zawoja by dividing the total of all index values by 149 (i.e. the number of squares). This came to 0.41, which, under the point award system employed by J. Warszńska, means that the area under study has a high tourist attractiveness.

It is highly positive that all the staff, 97% of local inhabitants and 90% of the tourists surveyed have responded that the commune of Zawoja is attractive for tourists. According to the respondents, this area has some unique features, which make it different from other mountainous regions. They most often quoted the length of Zawoja as well and its size and location around three mountain ranges, Babia Góra in particular.

As for the natural assets, first and foremost, respondents cited the mountains. In many cases this was just the Babia Góra Range, with few seeing the attractiveness of other ranges surrounding Zawoja. They also frequently cited Babia Góra National Park and the flora of the area under study (Fig. 2).

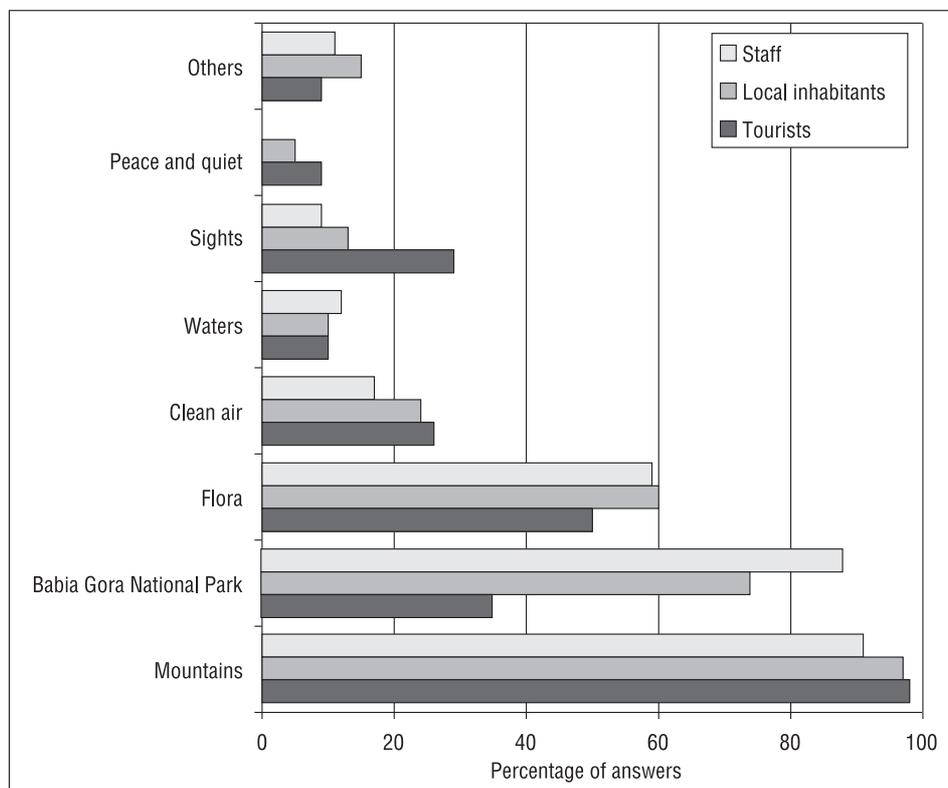


Fig. 2. Natural attractions in the commune of Zawoja according to respondents

Source: Author's own research

As for the area's anthropogenic merit, the staff and local inhabitants surveyed most treasured the open-air folk museum at Markowe Rówienki, numerous wayside shrines located in many hamlets of the area, as well as the wooden church in the centre. It is surprising that other, well-known museums (the Babia Góra National Park Natural Museum or the Highland Tourism Museum at Markowe Szczawiny) were cited less frequently (Fig.3).

The students surveyed considered the mountains to be the commune's major asset, as did the other respondents (70%). A much smaller percentage of respondents cited Babia Góra National Park (35%), flora richness (20%) and historic sites (21%). Surprisingly, as many as 13% of the students saw no attractive features in the commune of Zawoja.

One of the aims of this paper was also to define the stature of the commune in question among other locations in the region of Żywiec and the best-known mountain locations. The questions were addressed to students and tourist staying in Zawoja. The tourists surveyed easily perceived Zawoja to be the most attractive area

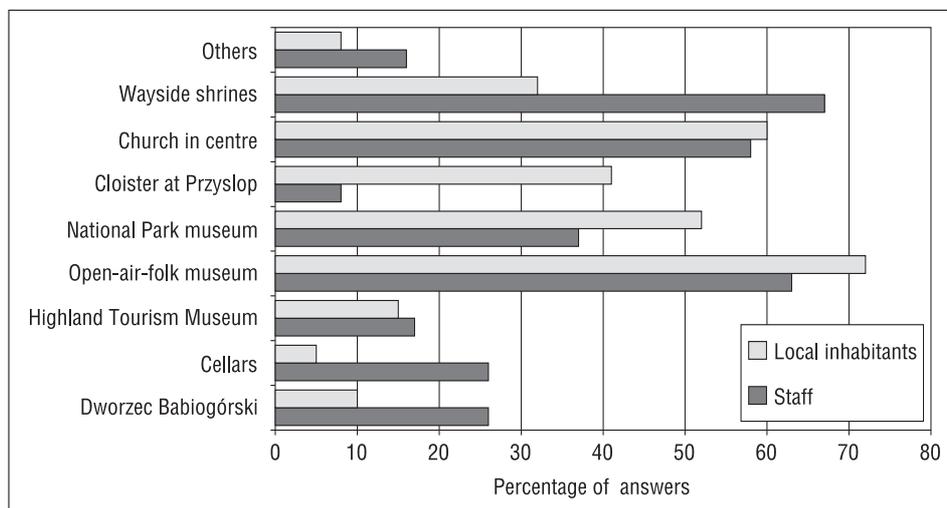


Fig. 3. Anthropogenic attractions in the commune of Zawoja according to respondents

Source: Author's own research

in the region of Żywiec. In the case of the students, the results were more varied and three out of the five named locations (Zawoja, Korbielów, and Żywiec) was awarded a similar number of points, with Zawoja coming second.

The stature of Zawoja among Poland's most interesting mountainous locations has been defined differently by the tourists and students from the University of Łódź. Many more of the tourists surveyed saw the tourist attractiveness of Zawoja, which came second, with Krynica but after Zakopane. They often stated that the area examined by the author remains a quiet, peaceful place, where they can really rest, not bothered by the crowds and bustle of big cities, a reason for a large proportion of respondents returning to Zawoja on a regular basis. It should be added that this assessment was influenced by the fact that a clear majority of the tourists came from the two most immediate voivodships, Małopolska and the Silesian Voivodship, thus the proximity of Zawoja must be the deciding factor encouraging them to visit this area so often apart from their attachment, or love of the region. The students surveyed had a markedly different opinion seeing the commune of Zawoja as the least attractive tourism-wise, with only few appreciative of the area's assets.

## Tourist traffic

The tourist attractiveness of a given location is also measured by the tourist traffic present in the area. According to S. Ostrowski (1975), this is a *social phenomenon, which consists in physical and temporal movement of people from the place of residence to another place featuring appropriate assets and tourist infrastructure.*

In the commune of Zawoja, no annual summary of tourist traffic volume is conducted. According to estimates from the Community Centre for Promotion, Culture and Tourism, in recent years, the area under examination has been visited by 200-300,000 people per year, yet these might be highly inaccurate data.

The data the author obtained from two accommodation-offering units, a youth hostel in Zawoja Wilczna and the "Jawor" boarding house, as well as Babia Góra National Park, enabled her to come to some conclusions concerning the volume, seasonal use and geographical range of tourist traffic.

The data obtained from Babia Góra National Park enabled her to conclude that the number of tourists visiting this, one of the smallest national park in the Carpathian mountains, is consistently growing each year, yet it is easy to see that in the last two years (1999 and 2000) this growth has been insignificant, below 800 people (Fig. 4).

A massive temporal concentration of tourist traffic can be clearly seen in the park. In 1996, 80% of the total annual number of tourists visited the park in the period of 1 May-31 October (Stasiak 1997). A larger concentration was the case only in seaside national parks (Słowiński and Woliński) and in Ojców National Park. The temporal concentration in the area has even grown over recent years and, in 2000, amounted to as much as 92%.

In order to define seasonal use, a respective index has been calculated using the following formula:

$$W_1 = \frac{x_i}{\bar{x}} \cdot 100$$

where:

$W_1$  – seasonal use index

$x_i$  – number of tourists in a given month

$\bar{x}$  – average annual value

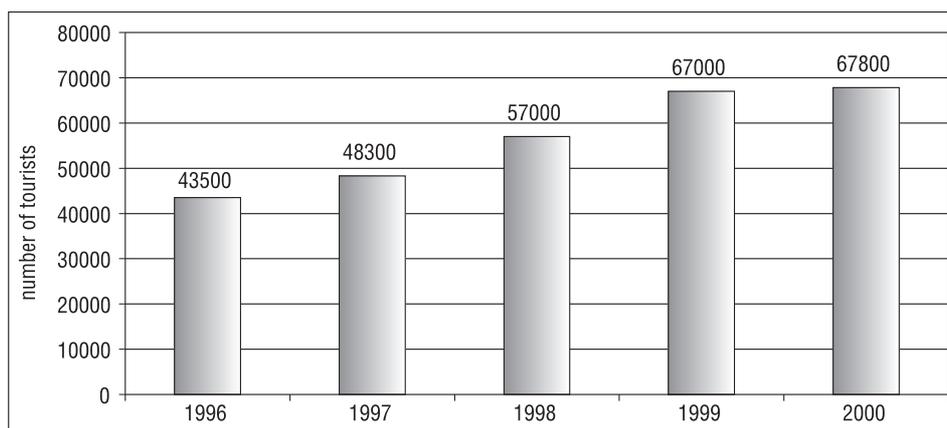


Fig. 4. Number of tourists visiting Babia Góra National Park in the period of 1996 - 2000

Source: Author's own research

This index, for all months from May to October, reached the value of over 100 with August (316) and May (206) being clear drivers. The index for the other six months was very low; less than 30.

The seasonal use index for accommodation providers under examination is similar, with the highest figures being for the period between May and October, thanks to numerous school trips and the summer season. In the case of these providers, February also stands out, a time of winter holidays, with tourism in the national park stagnating yet not in the entire Zawoja commune (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. Seasonal use index for Babia Góra National Park, PTSM shelter and „Jawor” boarding house in 2000

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
BgPN	8	16	13	20	206	146	173	316	148	119	28	7
JAWOR	81	142	61	10	103	129	148	138	101	114	85	88
PTSM	27	166	35	83	166	113	165	190	56	102	38	59

*Source:* Author's own study based on data obtained from Babia Góra National Park and two accommodation-offering units

It should be added that, in recent years, tourist traffic volume has been growing significantly over long weekends, which is becoming a regularity across Polish tourist locations.

One of the most interesting insights originating from surveys conducted with the tourists was their assertion that the area in question has its long-standing fans, who keep returning out of longing, habit, or to discover something new. There is not a year in which they do not visit their beloved mountains even for a single day. There are also those who come to Zawoja several times a year, with “record-holders” having visited the location over 100 times. As for the tourists surveyed, a mere 38% represented those visiting Zawoja for the first time (Fig. 5).

Talks with locals and tourists have proved that the majority of those visiting the area in question reside in the voivodship of Małopolska (Lesser Poland) and Silesia. This trend has remained the same over many years and stays the same during the year – residents of those voivodships visit Zawoja in great numbers not just during long weekends and festive days but also winter and summer holidays. However, each year sees more people from other voivodships – notably Mazovia, as well as those of Łódź and the Podkarpackie (Sub-Carpathian) Province (Fig. 6).

The average tourist visiting the area of Babia Góra is young, aged between 21-30, a student pursuing an active lifestyle and leisure. Most frequently, they come for brief (one-four days) visits to trek in the mountains. This profile is somewhat changed in the summer season, when longer stays, package holidays or youth camps, dominate.

One of the major goals of this paper was to examine the extent to which particular assets are used by tourist traffic. Tourists visit Zawoja mostly to walk along mountain



trails. For the majority, the main, and often only, goal is to reach the top of Babia Góra. Seventy-six percent of those surveyed have trekked across the Babia Góra Range, 95% of these reached its highest peak. The other mountain ranges surrounding Zawoja are far less popular. The Jałowiec Range was visited by just 15% of respondents and that of Polica by 16%.

A meagre proportion of visitors to the area in question visit its museum facilities. The greatest number, 41%, have been to the Babia Góra National Park Educational Centre, slightly fewer (38%) have visited the open-air folk museum at Markowe Rówienki, and the lowest number have seen the Highland Tourism Museum at Markowe Szczawiny – 34%. The last number comes as a surprise, given the fact that the facility is located close to the PTTK shelter.

With the University of Łódź students, the range of Babia Góra is obviously most popular, along with Babia Góra peak, reached by as many as 96% of those staying in Zawoja. Also in this case, the mountain ranges surrounding Zawoja remain much less penetrated. As for the museum facilities, the Highland Tourism Museum at Markowe Szczawiny has been most popular (54%), in contrast to the tourists. It should be added that a mere 32% of respondents have actually visited Zawoja (Fig. 7).

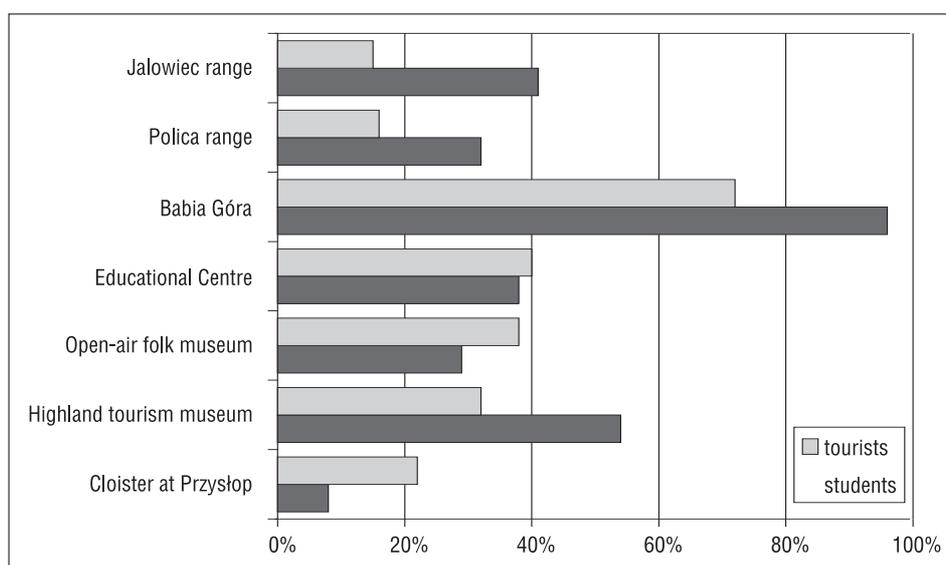


Fig. 7. The areas penetrated by tourists and students in the commune of Zawoja

Source: Author's own research

## Conclusions

The commune of Zawoja is an area attractive to tourists and lies in the Polish Beskids. This has always been mainly due to its location at the foot of Babia Góra (since the beginning of tourism till today). The uniqueness of the area's natural assets, on a global scale, ensures that the number of habitual fans and new lovers of the Babia Góra region grows every year. However, it should be understood that the constant increase in tourist traffic in Babia Góra National Park causes a deterioration of its nature and Zawoja features far more tourist attractions worth exploring.

In view of tourists' demands growing from year to year, as well as constant competition from other mountain locations, it seems necessary to enhance the commune's tourist appeal. What is vital, however, is the answer to the question of how that can be accomplished? The area, despite the successful development of tourism for years, has largely retained its true character and its primeval nature. Surveys conducted with tourists have shown that many still see Zawoja as an oasis of peace and quiet where a tourist can rest after the bustle of daily life, and that it's just these assets that act as the prime motivator of their arrival. Thus, a question arises: Should this attractiveness be enhanced?

The author argues that it is necessary to make some alternatives for Babia Góra available, so that tourists are encouraged to make use of other attractions of the area. A prime example of this is activities of the inhabitants of the hamlet of Przysłop, teachers and pupils of the local Primary School No. 4. Within the framework of the "Przysłop" Society for Sustainable Development, they have developed a project called *An Environmental Education School on the Amber Trail*, which has become part of an international programme entitled *The Amber Trail*. One of its main goals is to discover and strengthen local identity and the importance of local heritage. The inhabitants of Przysłop appreciate and support local craftsmanship, traditional professions and development, promote the development of sustainable tourism and ecological farming, and participate in the ecological education of local youth (Zasadziński 2000). The author contends that such actions based on environmentally friendly tourism constitute a major opportunity for the area in question. More emphasis should be placed on the development of eco-tourism and agro-tourism, primarily through enhancing the awareness of the local inhabitants, organising meetings and a series of training sessions. It is also recommended that assets that have been virtually forgotten be promoted more vigorously, such as wooden architecture of historic sites (e.g. through establishing a wooden architecture trail) or disappearing folk culture (through meetings with folk artists, painting workshops, teaching crocheting and the Babia Góra regional dialect).

All these actions must be implemented consciously and sensibly, so that Zawoja may retain its unique character without becoming another over-invested location in the Polish mountains.

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## Walory turystyczne gminy Zawoja i ich wykorzystanie przez ruch turystyczny

### Streszczenie

Gmina Zawoja znajduje się w województwie małopolskim, w powiecie suskim. Jest to gmina wiejska obejmująca dwie wsie: Zawoję i Skawicę. Do jej głównych walorów przyrodniczych należy Pasma Babiogórskie, (z unikalną roślinnością i formami przyrody nieożywionej), na terenie którego utworzono w 1954r. Babiogórski Park Narodowy, uznany w 1977r. za Rezerwat Biosfery, a także otaczające ją Pasma Policy i Jałowca. Wśród walorów antropogenicznych wyróżnia się niewielki skansen na Markowych Rówienkach, Muzeum Turystyki Górskiej na Markowych Szczawinach oraz liczne pozostałości drewnianego budownictwa zawojskiego.

Walory te powodują, że od dawna gmina ta jest licznie odwiedzana przez turystów, pochodzących w większości z najbliższych województw – małopolskiego i śląskiego. Ich głównym celem jest najczęściej zdobycie wierzchołka Babiej Góry, najwyższego szczytu w Beskidach. Dane uzyskane z Parku Narodowego i wybranych obiektów noclegowych oraz obliczony na ich podstawie współczynnik sezonowości świadczą, że bardzo widoczna jest tutaj koncentracja czasowa ruchu turystycznego w miesiącach od maja do października oraz w lutym w związku z dobrymi warunkami do uprawiania narciarstwa zjazdowego.

Badania terenowe wykazały, że turyści odwiedzający babiogórską ziemię w niewielkim stopniu poznają jej walory antropogeniczne. Największą popularnością cieszy się Muzeum Przyrodnicze BgPN mieszczące się w Ośrodku Edukacyjnym (41% ankietowanych) oraz skansen (38%).

Cechą charakterystyczną Zawoi jest fakt, że większość turystów to jej prawdziwi miłośnicy, którzy odwiedzają ten teren nieprzerwanie od wielu lat. Są to głównie osoby młode do 30 roku życia ale także osoby starsze będące tutaj już 50 czy nawet 100 razy.

Badana gmina to obszar bardzo atrakcyjny przyrodniczo, przede wszystkim dzięki Babiej Górze. Zbyt duża koncentracja ruchu turystycznego w tym paśmie górskim powoduje jednak, że konieczne jest znalezienie pewnych alternatyw, innych form turystyki, rozwijanych tu w sposób świadomy i racjonalny, tak aby zachować niepowtarzalny charakter gminy. Szczególny nacisk należy położyć na rozwój eko – i agroturystyki a także wypromować walory praktycznie już zapomniane jak drewniane zabytki architektury czy zanikającą kulturę ludową.

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