

Clusters as a Tool for Raising Tourism Competitiveness of a Region (on the Example of the Land of Loess Gorges in Lubelskie Voivodship)

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze a case study of a successfully developing tourism cluster, named the Land of Loess Gorges, located in the western part of Lubelskie Voivodship and consisting of 11 communes. The content of the present study consists of: (1) a synthetic description and typology of clusters, taking into account the specificity of tourism clusters; (2) an assessment of tourism potential (in the natural and cultural dimension) of the Land of Loess Gorges; (3) an analysis and evaluation of tourism products offered by this cluster and their impact on tourism competitiveness of the Lubelskie Voivodship.

Keywords: touristic cluster, loess gorges, touristic products, Lubelskie Voivodship

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Introduction

Tourism is a potentially attractive tool to stimulate local and regional development. In fact, it turns out, however, that the possession of natural and/or cultural resources does not suffice to succeed in the development of tourism in a given area. What is much more important is the attitude of local and regional communities, and in particular the existence of a leader (or leaders) supported by integrated elites, which are able to lead social mobilization around a universally accepted strategy. The cooperation with the environment, including other local government units, and the ability to attract an external supply of financial and human capital are also significant (Kozak 2009, 264–277). It seems that a cluster is the most adequate organizational and institutional structure which takes into account these factors of success in tourism. That is why clusters are becoming an increasingly popular form of the organization of tourist services. On the one hand, clusters contribute to building competitive advantages resulting from expanding the offer, diversification of tourism products and improvement of their quality, and on the other hand, they stimulate initiatives of tourism entities and public authorities. As a result, they help to strengthen the position of tourism as a local and regional specialization.

In Poland there are at least a dozen tourism clusters of various sizes, areas of specialization, as well as the degree of formalization.¹ One of the most interesting organizations in this regard is the Valley of Palaces and Gardens,² located in Jelenia Góra Valley, based on rich cultural assets, consisting of 27 facilities. In turn, in Lubelskie Voivodship the Land of Loess Gorges was one of the first cluster initiatives.

1. These are, among others,: Ciechociek Spa Cluster “Health Valley,” Elbląg Tourist Cluster, Inowrocław Local Tourist Organisation, Karkonosze-Izery Tourist Cluster, Karpaty Tourist Cluster PROCARPATHIA, Lubuskie Regional Tourist Organisation LOTUR, Pomorskie Medical Valley.

2. See: <http://www.dolinapalacow.pl/>.

The aim of the article is to analyze the case study of the Land of Loess Gorges, a successfully developing tourism cluster, located in the western part of Lubelskie Voivodship and consisting of 11 communes: one city commune (Puławy), four urban-rural ones (Kazimierz Dolny, Nałęczów, Opole Lubelskie, and Poniatowa) and six rural ones (Janowiec, Karczmiska, Końskowola, Puławy, Wąwolnica, and Wojciechów), belonging to the 3 counties of Lublin, Puławy, and Opole. The content of the presented study consists of a synthetic description and typology of clusters, taking into account the specificity of tourism clusters, an evaluation of tourism potential of the Land of Loess Gorges and an analysis of tourism products offered by the cluster, and their impact on the tourist competitiveness of the Lubelskie Voivodship.

Competitiveness—according to Klasik (2006, 15–16)—can be seen as: an advantage (or distance) or attractiveness (or repulsiveness). In the former case, competitiveness is the resultant of strengths of the region and we deal with the overall competitiveness of the region or in a particular sphere (e.g., tourism). On the other hand, in the latter case, competitiveness is specific, and is a combination of strengths distinguishing the region, providing its uniqueness. The article uses a synthesis of the two approaches. Starting from specific tourist resources of the area of the Land of Loess Gorges, the directions of their use (in the form of tourism products) were characterized in order to improve the tourism competitiveness of Lubelskie Voivodship.

1 The specificity and typology of clusters

Cluster structures date back to industrial activity. According to Marshall (1961) and Hoover (1937), industrial companies tend to concentrate, thereby achieving external benefits (and not only internal benefits associated with the enlargement of production within one company). These include location benefits (resulting from the proximity of businesses in the same industry), urbanization benefits (associated with the location of companies from different industries) and agglomeration benefits (which is the result of dynamic growth in the number of various companies located together in the given area). Sources of external benefits are, among others: dissemination of knowledge, availability of qualified labor resources, possibility of production of prefabs for many customers, availability of infrastructure, etc. An extension of this approach is, in turn, the growth pole theory. According to Perroux (1950), an area is a type of network maintained by centripetal forces. A growth pole is a combination of companies and industries. It is important—according to Boudeville (1966)—that they have a driving character, and thus generate stable regional growth through linkages with other companies in the region. Krugman, a creator of a so-called new economic geography, claims that the formation of aggregates (clusters) of economic activity is the result of a combination of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Companies with large economies of scale of production would like to conduct business in one plant located (in order to save transport costs) near a large market. It is a region where other companies have already located their plants, guided by the availability of labor resources. This leads to the creation and operation of a zone consisting of large industrial companies (Dawkins 2003).

Today, most authors cite the definition of a cluster by Porter (2001, 248), according to which a cluster is a geographic agglomeration of interconnected companies (especially SMEs) and institutions that simultaneously compete and cooperate with one another. Thus, characteristic features of clusters are:

- spatial concentration due to which participants can feel external beneficial effects;
- links between companies, called co-competition, which means simultaneous competition and cooperation; and
- common trajectory of development aiming to the end of providing companies with benefits resulting from their geographical proximity and nature of the links between them (Budner 2011, 255).

The diversity of clusters allows us to make their typology, taking into account different criteria cited in the literature. Their synthesis is shown in table 1.

Tourism as a rapidly growing and increasingly innovative field of the national, regional and local economy can be conducive to the formation of clusters. The reason for the formation of such structures are external benefits connected with access to tourist (natural and cultural) attractions,

Tab. 1. Typology of clusters

Criterion	Types of clusters
Territorial range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local • regional • domestic • international
Type of entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sector networks • horizontal networks • vertical networks
The number of stages of the production/service chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shallow • deep
Competitive position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • world leaders • domestic leaders • average competitive position • weak competitive position
Ability to create jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with growing employment • with stable employment • with decreasing employment
Importance of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high technology • traditional (historical)
Types of benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • based on knowledge • based on economies of scale • dependent on the supplier • specialized suppliers
Development stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • embryonic (emerging) • growing (developing) • mature (developed) • declining (collapsing)
Form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • network • concentric • satellite • institutional

Source: Own study on the basis of Baran (2008, 41–44) and Budner (2011, 256)

creation of common infrastructure enabling the development of both traditional and innovative tourism products or a joint marketing strategy. Clusters have become today one of the main instruments to build competitiveness of tourism enterprises, especially in the conditions of globalization (Nessel 2014, 26).

According to Pleśniarski (2013, 179) there are four possible paths leading to the creation of a tourism cluster:

- continuation and evolution of tourism in the area, which means that the cluster is a higher form—in relation to the existing ones—of tourist space management based on a competitive partnership
- reconstruction of the regional/local tourist economy after its earlier collapse or fall, thanks to a new network structure based on the development of the existing products or finding new ones
- substitution of other declining sectors of the local/regional economy with tourism, then the cluster becomes one of the most important tools for restructuring
- organization of a completely new tourist space with a network management structure

A tourism cluster may include both entities offering typically tourist services (basic and complementary)—i.e., accommodation, catering, tourist transport, tourist organizations and agencies, tourism piloting and guidance and tourist information, as well as tourism-related (para-tourist) entities offering craft, commercial, banking, insurance, public transport, postal, telecommunications, health care, public safety, cultural, entertainment, and sport and recreation services (Balińska, Sieczko,

and Zawadka 2014, 107–108). What is also significant is the presence of research institutions and local government units, whose purpose is to conduct advisory activity and provide institutional support (Rzewuski 2007, 261).

A tourism cluster — apart from the spatial concentration of constituent entities, should be based on cooperation (which is supported by a continuous flow of knowledge and information), which should not, however, eliminate competition, particularly between providers of basic and complementary tourist services (Rzewuski 2007, 261). Confronting the specificity of a tourism cluster with the typology contained in table 1, it can be said that tourism clusters can have a local, regional, national or international range. As far as the type of entities is concerned, clusters usually form horizontal and vertical networks. They generally include a vast majority of stages of the tourism service chain. They have different competitive positions, and the products they offer can be innovative or traditional. The main types of benefits for which they are created are external benefits, but to some extent they are also based on knowledge. They are characterized by various stages of development and the ability to create jobs, but in the case of Poland we can say that tourism clusters in the embryonic or growth stage predominate, which is generally accompanied by an increase in the number of jobs. They most frequently take the form of a network. Their institutionalization, especially in the form of associations, is also possible. Quite often, tourism clusters in Poland arise as a result of the evolution of tourism in the area, especially on the basis of spa functions.

Apart from undeniable benefits resulting from the operation of tourism clusters, connected with the economic recovery of the area, raising its competitiveness and innovation and promoting links between individual entities, possible risks arising from the development of cluster structures are also recognized. The most important of these include:

- excessive concentration of tourism in a limited space,
- polarizing character of development taking place at the expense of weaker entities and areas,
- development of monoculture tourist areas with high susceptibility to market fluctuations,
- bureaucratization and inertia as the cluster expands, and
- the success of the cluster development can strengthen the competitive activities of entities at the expense of cooperation ties (Pleśniarski 2013, 183–184).

2 The genesis and potential of the Land of Loess Gorges

The origins of the analyzed tourism cluster date back to 2003, when the Local Tourist Organisation “Nałęczów Land” was established, located in Nałęczów, covering with its range three communes — i.e., Nałęczów, Wąwolnica and Wojciechów. Four years later, in 2007 the name was changed to the current one — i.e., the Local Tourist Organization “Land of Loess Gorges,” and the changed statute enabled entities from another 8 communes — i.e., Janowiec, Kazimierz Dolny, Karczmiska, Końskowola, Puławy, Opole Lubelskie, Poniatowa and the city of Puławy to join the Organization. The main goals of the Organization’s activities are:

- development of an integrated system of tourist information, promotion and booking,
- assisting the Organization members with regard to obtaining and making use of structural funds,
- contributing to improved tourist infrastructure, and
- preparing and implementing strategy for the tourism development.³

Currently, the LTO “Land of Loess Gorges” associates 24 entities belonging to the category of accommodation (hotels, boarding houses), 13 agritourism lodgings, 15 health care and beauty centers, 12 local governments (apart from offices of the city and communes mentioned above, also the County Office in Puławy is a member) 11 eateries, 12 entities offering cultural attractions, 2 travel agencies and 1 supporting member (Cooperative Bank in Nałęczów). It is worth noting a fairly wide variation in terms of the size, legal form and standard of companies offering accommodation and spa & wellness services.

3. See: http://www.kraina.org.pl/about_the_organisation__id_809.html.

From the physiographic point of view the Land of Loess Gorges covers (fig. 1) a significant portion of the Nałęczów Plateau, the south-western part of the Lubartów Upland, the northern part of the Malopolska Vistula River Gorge (from Janowiec and Kazimierz Dolny to Puławy), and the southern portion of the Central Vistula Valley, as well as very small eastern parts of the Radom Plains and the Koźnice Plains and the western part of the Bełżyce Plain, the central part of the Chodelka Valley and the northern part of Urzędów Hills (Kondracki 1994, 145, 215–218). The cluster name is associated with the structure of the Nałęczów Plateau extending from Nałęczów to the Vistula River Gorge near Kazimierz Dolny. It is covered with a thick layer of loess (20–30 m), susceptible to water erosion. As a result, a dense network of eroded gorge forms was created in the form of: gullies, defies, hollows and dingles called ravines or gorges. These are mostly dry valleys (leading water episodically), narrow in width and large in depth (up to several meters), steep walls (covered with vegetation), and a narrow and flat bottom (Gliński and Przesmycki 2011, 100–101). They form a kind of a labyrinth. The most famous gorges are located around Kazimierz Dolny, such as the Małachowski Gorge, Plebanka, Granicznik or the Root Ravine.

The gorges are protected within two landscape parks. The first of them—Kazimierz Landscape Park, created in 1979, is the oldest in Lubelskie Voivodship. It covers the area of 14 961 ha (protected zone: 24 189 ha)⁴ in the communes of: Kazimierz Dolny, Wilków, Puławy, Janowiec, Karczmiska, Końskowola, Nałęczów and Wąwolnica. The other, Wrzelowiec Landscape Park, was established in 1990 and covers the area of 4,989 ha (protected zone: 13 625 ha) in the communes of Opole Lubelskie and Józefów nad Wisłą. Moreover, in the area of the Land of Loess Gorges there are four nature reserves: Cow Island (on the Vistula) — fauna, the Elm Forest in Puławy — forest,

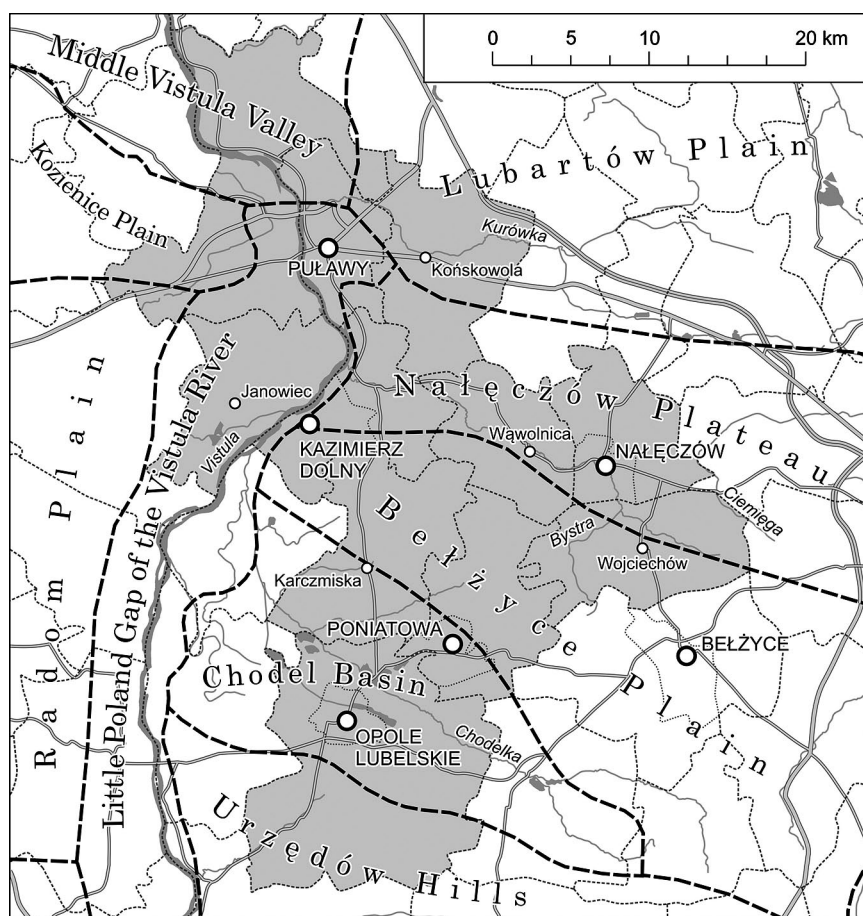


Fig. 1. The physiographic division of the Land of Loess Gorges

Source: Own study on the basis of Kondracki (1994)

4. [In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

Czapliniec near Gołęb—fauna and Dobrska Slope—landscape. Moreover, in the framework of Natura 2000, the Malopolska Vistula River Gorge is covered by the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Nałęczów Plateau—the Habitats Directive.

The loess cover has a positive effect on the quality of agricultural production in the area of the Land of Loess Gorges. A large percentage of agricultural land results in a relatively low forest cover on the Nałęczów Plateau, amounting in the communes to: Wojciechów—5,8%, Nałęczów—7,1% (including the town—11,9%), Końskowola—10,8% and Kazimierz Dolny—21,9% (including the town—12,9%). In other communes of the Land the situation is better because the rate of forest cover amounts respectively to: Karczmiska—24,8%, Opole Lubelskie—29,8% (including the town—7,4%), Puławy—32,9%, Wąwolnica—36,0%, Janowiec—38,5% and the city of Puławy—32,5%. A certain exception is the Poniatowa Commune, where the forest cover is low (16,9%), but the town itself is one of the most forested in Poland (50,9%).⁵

A starting point for the analysis of the socio-economic potential of communes belonging to the Land of Loess Gorges are the data contained in table 2. It shows that they occupy a total of 1 032,2 km², which represents 4,1% of Lubelskie Voivodship and are inhabited by 138 527 people (6,4% of the population of the region). We can also see their great diversity in terms of the area, population, population density, migration balance, economic activity, the labour market situation, the spending capability of local government and the civilizational level expressed in the availability of the sewage system.

Undoubtedly the biggest local government unit of the Land of Loess Gorges is the city of Puławy. It primarily performs a function of a center of a modern chemical industry (Nitrogen Plants), it is also home to nationally and internationally well-known research institutes (the Institute of Soil Science and Plant Cultivation, the Veterinary Institute, the Institute of Fertilisers and the Apiculture Division of the Institute of Horticulture) and the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

Tab. 2. The socio-economic characteristics of the communes of the Land of Loess Gorges in 2014

Commune	Area (in km ²)	Population in persons	Population density (in persons/km ²)	Migration balance per 1 000 persons	Entities of the national economy per 10 000 persons	Unemployment rate (in %) ^a	Commune budgetary expenditure (in PLN per 1 inhabitant)	Population using the sewage system (in % of the total)
Janowiec	78,8	3 664	46	+4,1	1 262	7,2	4 040	29,3
Karczmiska	94,6	5 745	61	-0,5	395	10,0	3 006	15,1
Kazimierz Dolny	72,4	6 902	95	-1,2	1 690	7,7	3 222	31,5
of which urban area	30,4	2 599	85	-	-	-	-	-
Końskowola	89,9	9 013	100	-1,4	1 062	7,3	3 068	51,6
Nałęczów	62,9	9 140	145	-1,3	1 535	7,3	3 735	42,5
of which urban area	13,8	3 892	282	-	-	-	-	-
Opole Lubelskie	193,7	17 719	91	-4,2	1 334	9,2	2 929	40,1
of which urban area	15,1	8 792	581	-	-	-	-	-
Poniatowa	84,5	14 752	174	-5,4	1 129	11,3	2 532	67,6
of which urban area	15,3	9 553	626	-	-	-	-	-
Puławy	161,2	11 934	74	+5,5	1 016	7,0	2 658	37,0
city of Puławy	50,5	48 864	968	-6,1	1 708	6,6	3 762	95,7
Wąwolnica	62,9	4 820	77	+3,1	1 018	7,6	2 669	24,0
Wojciechów	80,8	5 974	74	+2,5	1 209	8,4	2 832	3,8

Source: Own study on the basis of (*Województwo Lubelskie. Podregiony...* 2015)

^a The share of the unemployed in the population of working age

5. Unless stated otherwise the numerical information comes from the Central Statistical Office of Poland Local Data Bank database and the Statistical Office in Lublin.

Branch training, among others, in agricultural chemistry and technical chemistry. Cultural potential of the city is primarily connected with the activity of the well-known aristocratic Lubomirski and Czartoryski families in the seventeenth and eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The result of their activities include the Czartoryski Park stretching over the area of 32 hectares—representing a romantic garden with many exotic trees. Around the Park, as well as on its premises there are numerous monuments, among which worth mentioning are: the magnificent Czartoryski Palace built in the seventeenth century and rebuilt in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and moreover Marynka's Palace, the Temple of Sibyl, the Gothic House, the Greek House, the Yellow (Alexandria) House and the Chinese Arbour. Roman inspiration can be traced in the church of the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary (a former palace chapel) modelled on the Pantheon, the Roman Gate inspired by the triumphal arch of Titus. Modern facilities that attract tourists are furthermore: an astronomical observatory and a modern marina on the Vistula River.

In relation to the Land of Loess Gorges, Puławy also functions as the most important junction. The national road No. 12 runs through the city, leading from Łęknica (on the Polish-German border) through Kalisz, Piotrków Trybunalski, Radom, Lublin and then to Chełm and Dorohusk (on the Polish-Ukrainian border) as well as the railway line No. 7 from Warsaw through Lublin to Dorohusk, providing easy access from everywhere in Poland. City buses run between the train station Puławy-Town and Kazimierz Dolny.

Apart from Puławy, Nałęczów and Kazimierz Dolny are the best known communes of the Land of Loess Gorges. Nałęczów has been a spa for almost 200 years. It specializes in the treatment of heart disease. In balneological treatment water from local sources is used. Moreover, two brands of mineral water “Nałęczowianka” and “Cisowianka” are well-known in Poland. The Nałęczów Spa was privatized, as the first one in the country, in 2001. Its current owner is the Dutch firm East Spring International NV of Amsterdam. The new owner modernized the existing facilities and built new ones (the Atrium, the Palace Baths).

The most interesting place in Nałęczów is an eighteenth-century Spa Park with old trees and a pond located in the center. In the park there are the following eighteenth and nineteenth-century buildings: Malachowski's Palace, the Old Baths, the Prince Joseph Sanatorium and the Spa House. The main streets of Nałęczów (Aleja Lipowa and Armatnia Góra) are lined with villas built in the Swiss style and that of Zakopane in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The chapel of St. Charles Borromeo was also built in the style of Zakopane. In turn, on the church hill there is a seventeenth-century parish church of John the Baptist, and a nineteenth-century cemetery where distinguished residents of Nałęczów are buried, including Michał Elwiro Andriolli, Henryk Wiercieński, Oktawia Żeromska, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina. The location of Nałęczów on the railway line No. 7 (from Warsaw to Dorohusk) provides relatively easy access to it. Nałęczów Railway Station is also a place of departure of the Nadwiślańska Narrow-Gauge Railway.

The town of Kazimierz Dolny is a unique urban, architectural and landscape complex, which the President of the Republic of Poland declared a Historic Monument in 1994. The beginnings of Kazimierz date back to approximately 1170, but it flourished in the second half of the sixteenth century in connection with the trade in grain which was floated down the Vistula to Gdansk. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the town has developed into a summer tourist attraction, mainly for the residents of Lublin and Warsaw. Cultural potential of Kazimierz Dolny includes ruins of a fourteenth-century castle, providing a great viewing point, like a thirteenth-century tower in the vicinity of the ruins. There is also the parish church of St. Bartholomew and John the Baptist, built in the style of so-called Lublin Renaissance and a sixteenth-century monastery of the Order of Friars Minor. Also in the sixteenth century the current shape was given to the market square with a characteristic well. The tenement houses of Mikołaj and Krzysztof Przybyło, and Celejowska built in the seventeenth century also have a historic character. Characteristic granaries located along the Vistula River are now accommodation facilities. South of Kazimierz Dolny, a former rafting village, Męcimierz, is a live open-air museum, consisting of old cottages and a distinctive windmill, inhabited in summer by famous Polish artists.

Opposite Kazimierz Dolny, on the left slope of the Vistula the village of Janowiec is located, where there are well preserved ruins of a magnificent sixteenth-century castle of the Firlej family,

as well as a mini-museum of rural architecture (the eighteenth-nineteenth century) and a sixteenth-century church of Bishop Stanislaus and St. Margaret. In the summer season passenger car ferries cross the Vistula River facilitating the movement of tourists between Kazimierz Dolny and Janowiec.

The other communes making up the Land of Loess Gorges have much smaller cultural potential. It is worth mentioning, however, Poland's largest and best preserved early medieval town, discovered in the early twenty-first century in Chodlik (the Karczmiska Commune), called the Troy of the North, inhabited probably by Lendians with more than 1 200 year-old burial mounds in the same village. In turn, in the Końskowola Commune, known for growing roses, as well as the activities of the Regional Agricultural Advisory Centre, there is the sixteenth-century parish church of Discovery of the Holy Cross and St. Andrew and the seventeenth-century hospital church of St. Anne and St. John the Evangelist.

The town of Opole Lubelskie is a local service center for the population and the county seat, with a fairly well-developed agri-food industry, connected with the fruit-growing traditions of the Vistula region. The Lubomirski Palace, a seventeenth-century church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary and an eighteenth-century Piarist monastery, and a cemetery founded in 1 772 have historic value here.

The town of Poniatowa, belonging in the past, among others, to the Poniatowski family (hence the name), owes its development to the implementation of the Central Industrial District plan during the inter-war period, under which the construction of the Tele- and Radio Plants began in 1937. A characteristic feature of the city is very large forestation, exceeding more than half of the city, which was intended to protect the industrial plant from aerial bombing. The town fulfilled an industrial function till the 1990s, when the EDA factory producing household appliances failed. Due to the large forestation a tuberculosis sanatorium is located here.

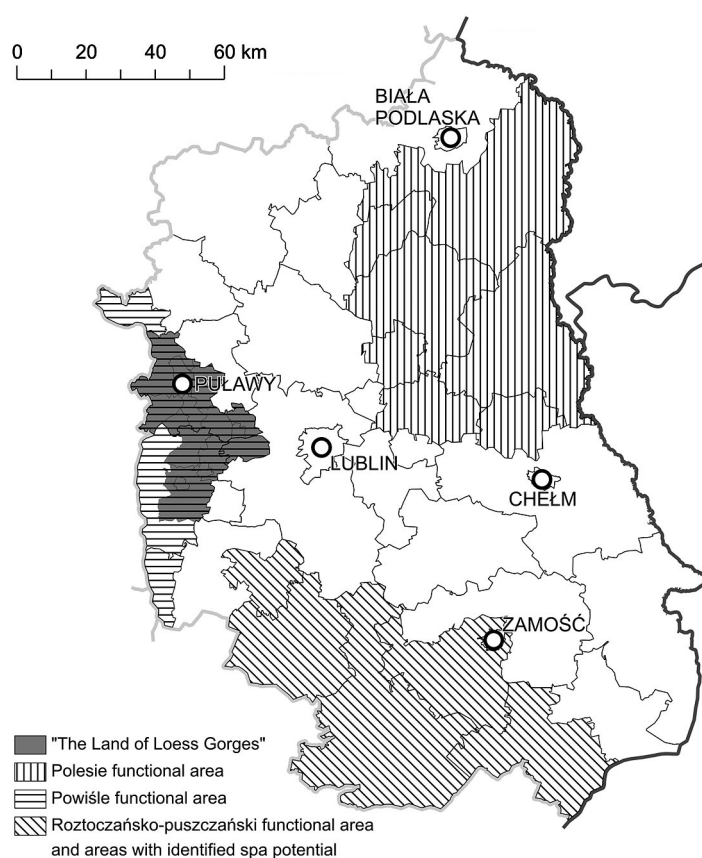


Fig. 2. The Land of Loess Gorges against the background of the area of strategic intervention in the field of tourism

Source: Own study on the basis of Strategia rozwoju województwa lubelskiego na lata 2014-2020 (z perspektywą do 2030 r.). 2014. Lublin: Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Lubelskiego.

In the rural commune of Puławy there are interesting religious buildings—i.e., the seventeenth-century church of St. Florian and St. Catherine, the Loreto House in Gołęb, and the eighteenth-century church of St. Adalbert in Góra Puławska. In turn, Wąwolnica has the biggest shrine of the Virgin Mary in the Archdiocese of Lublin. A fourteenth-century statue of the Virgin Mary with the Infant Jesus located in the basilica church of St. Adalbert is an object of a cult. A fifteenth-century palace and park complex in Celejów is also worth attention.

The last commune characterized as part of the Land of Loess Gorges is that of Wojciechów, which is situated near Lublin, and known in Poland as a center of artistic blacksmithing. A Gothic-Renaissance Arian Tower from the first half of the sixteenth century, which is a military and residential facility, as well as the larch church of St. Theodore built in 1725 are interesting buildings in this village.

At the end of this part of the discussion it is worth noting that due to its natural and cultural potential the Land of Loess Gorges is one of three functional areas included in the area of strategic intervention, associated with the development of tourism in the framework of the Development Strategy for the Lubelskie Voivodeship 2014–2020 (with a 2030 perspective)⁶ (fig. 2).

3 Tourism products of the Land of Loess Gorges

Tourism products may take a simple form (a thing, a service), a complex form (an event, a party) and a spatial form (a building, a trail, an area) (Balińska, Sieczko, and Zawadka 2014, 102–105). The ability and speed of adaptation to changing circumstances and innovation in the offer of tourism products are necessary to achieve success in tourism (Nessel 2014, 25). Then we can talk about competitiveness in the sense of uniqueness which gives a definite advantage over other players and areas of tourist reception (Klasik 2006, 15–16).

Due to the size of the paper I have limited my analysis to selected tourism products of the Land of Loess Gorges. And thus, starting from simple tourist products it should be stated that the website www.kraina.org.pl describes (including contact information allowing for booking of places) 319 accommodation facilities with different standards, prices and locations, which consist of 75 hotels, 101 agritourism farms, 134 guest rooms and 9 sanatoriums. In turn, among 204 catering facilities there are 31 cafes, 76 restaurants, 8 pizzerias, and 89 other objects. More complex products are tourist attractions, which are divided into 19 museums, 69 historical buildings (with different use), 15 natural sites, 20 spa and wellness entities, as well as 24 other attractions (including the Nałęczów small zoo, a medieval town in Chodlik, an astronomical observatory in Puławy, the Nadwiślańska Narrow-Gauge Railway, etc.).

In turn, spatial network products are thematic routes that have been delineated and labelled, partly with the support of the Swiss Programme (Swiss Contribution). These are:

- Nordic Walking routes with a length of 160 km running through the communes of: Nałęczów, Kazimierz Dolny, Końskowola, Puławy and Janowiec, in winter used for cross-country skiing
- horseback trails including four loops—i.e., Kazimierz Dolny – Wąwolnica – Kurów, Janowiec, Puławy–Żyrzyn–Końskowola, Baranów–Żyrzyn–Markuszów–Kurów, and 18 equestrian agritourism farms
- a trail of water mills of the Bystra river, including 20 facilities in communes of Wojciechów, Nałęczów, Wąwolnica and Kazimierz Dolny
- a 150 km long museum trail, including facilities in: Nałęczów, Wąwolnica, Puławy, Gołęb, Janowiec, Kazimierz Dolny, Karczmiska, Kluczkowice, Poniatowa, Wojciechów and Nowy Gaj
- 9 walking trails with a total length of 52,5 km and 12 natural education paths with a length of 88,4 km
- 11 bicycle routes running through the Land of Loess Gorges with a total overall length of 506 km, and also a designed trail integrating the Land of Loess Gorges community, starting and ending in Nałęczów, with a length of 133,3 km
- 7 hiking trails with a length of 440,6 km

6. See: Strategia rozwoju województwa lubelskiego..., op. cit.

- 4 canoe trails with varying rank and degrees of difficulty on the rivers: Vistula, Wieprz, Kurówka, and Chodelka with a total length of 150 km,
- a trail of historic churches in the communities of: Wojciechów, Nałęczów, and Wąwolnica
- a Nałęczów literary trail presenting places where famous writers and poets stayed in Nałęczów (among others: Bolesław Prus, Stefan Żeromski, and Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina)
- a trail of flavours of the Land of Loess Gorges, including cafes and restaurants in the communes of: Nałęczów, Wąwolnica, Kazimierz Dolny, and Poniatowa

In the winter season four ski trails are available in the communes of: Kazimierz Dolny (Kazimierz Dolny, Parchatka) and Wąwolnica (Celejów, Rąblów). More advanced products are travel packages, including accommodation, meals and various attractions in the Land of Loess Gorges. They are divided into an individual package and a group package (including for children and youth).

The individual package offers individual tours from Nałęczów for individual tourists to Lublin, Kazimierz Dolny, Kozłówka, Puławy and Janowiec or Puławy and Czarnolas. The offer of group packages is, however, much broader. And so the package “The Land of Loess Gorges in a nutshell” covers a 3-day stay, which consists of: a visit to Wojciechów (the Blacksmith Museum in the Tower Arian, a show in a forge), sightseeing in Nałęczów, Kazimierz Dolny, Puławy and Janowiec, a night walk with torches in a gorge, an evening in the style of the Polish People’s Republic, a visit to a vineyard and a walk with Nordic walking poles with an instructor.

In turn, a 3-day package for seniors consists of a tour of Kazimierz Dolny, Wąwolnica and Wojciechów, artistic palm-making workshops, weaving workshops, a visit to a rustic garden and an oil producing mill, a walk with Nordic walking poles, and accommodation on a farm.

The remaining two packages are educational, intended for children and youth, and have been prepared in cooperation with the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Spatial Management of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, which has been examining the problems of gorge erosion and its consequences for years. They have a common name—the Loessland Academy. The first one (3 days) includes: a tour of the loess ravines with a guide, workshops in the Museum Manufacture, art workshops in a recreation and education park called the Insectland, visiting the Park of Labyrinths and Miniatures in Rąblów, workshops in producing handmade paper in a paper mill in Celejów, sightseeing of the oil producing mill “Treasures of Nature” and a visit to a forge in Wojciechów. The other package (2 days) consists of classes in the Mineral Museum in Nowy Gaj, visiting the Museum of Blacksmithing in Wojciechów and classes at the Institute of Discoverers of the Secret of Iron, workshops in producing handmade paper in a paper mill in Celejów and “vertical and horizontal” exercises in the Rope Park in Kazimierz Dolny. An additional incentive to use the offered tour packages or create one’s own, tailored to individual needs and capabilities, is a discount card of the Land of Loess Gorges, entitling the user to discounts in 35 different types of facilities, offering both tourist and tourism-related services.

4 The Land of Loess Gorges and the tourism competitiveness of Lubelskie Voivodship

It is difficult to give a definite answer to the question, essential from the point of view of the article, to what degree the tourist cluster of the Land of Loess Gorges has strengthened the tourism competitiveness of Lubelskie Voivodship. Certainly cities like Kazimierz Dolny (with Janowiec), Nałęczów and Puławy have been successfully developing the tourist function for years, therefore the creation of the tourism cluster Land of Loess Gorges should be understood as the evolution of the tourism economy, previously conducted separately by operators in these towns, in the direction of coepetition, and the expansion of this activity to the area of the other communes, not so rich in cultural potential, but capable—in spite of this—of creating attractive tourism products. It undoubtedly contributes to the improvement of competitiveness (in the sense of uniqueness) of Lubelskie Voivodship.

Due to the lack of detailed Central Statistical Office of Poland (CSO) data in the field of tourism in the cross-section of communes, it is impossible to use quantitative methods for demonstrating the appropriate relations. However, assuming some simplification that the majority of communes

of the Land of Loess Gorges belong to the county of Puławy (8 out of 11), and in turn two urban and rural communes of this cluster—i.e., Opole Lubelskie and Poniatowa are the most important and largest communes of the county of Opole. Table 3 summarizes the main indicators of tourism development in the area of the two counties, against the background of Lubelskie Voivodship and Poland, starting from 2003 (i.e., the establishment of the cluster) to 2015. Because the CSO publishes more data in the field of tourism in the cross-section of counties, we can roughly assume that the information on the counties of Puławy and Opole together illustrate the situation of the Land of Loess Gorges.

Table 3 presents a picture of very dynamic changes in the number of accommodation facilities created in the area of the Land of Loess Gorges in the analyzed period, i.e. the years: 2003–2015, much more rapid than the national average and Lubelskie Voivodship (where this growth was clearly below the national average). This resulted in a 90% increase in the number of beds, while the national average increase did not exceed 20%, and in Lubelskie Voivodship it amounted to just over 5%. On the other hand, a significant drop was recorded in the number of overnight stays per 1 000 inhabitants, but it still remained at a level exceeding both the national average, and even more—the provincial average. A similar observation can be also made about the number of tourists per 1 000 inhabitants. Great dynamics of changes in this sphere was similar in the Land of Loess Gorges and Lubelskie Voivodship, however, it was below the national average. However, it is worth noting that in 2015 this indicator in the Land of Loess Gorges was more than twice as high as the average in Poland and almost 4 times exceeded the average for Lubelskie Voivodship.

Tab. 3. The development of the tourist function of the Land of Loess Gorges against the background of Lubelskie Voivodship and Poland in the years 2003–2015

Specification	The Land of Loess Gorges			Lubelskie Voivodship			Poland		
	2003	2015	2003 = = 100	2003	2015	2003 = = 100	2003	2015	2003 = = 100
Accommodation facilities	37,0	70,0	189,2	344,0	369,0	107,3	7 116,0	10 024,0	140,9
Number of beds per 1000 inhabitants	21,3	41,1	193,0	9,7	10,2	105,2	15,6	18,5	118,6
Number of overnight stays per 1 000 inhabitants	2 685,2	1 242,4	46,3	576,1	410,5	71,3	1 187,3	1 009,1	85,0
Number of tourists per 1 000 inhabitants	1 018,5	1 543,7	151,6	244,5	370,7	151,6	383,4	700,6	182,7

Source: Own study based on data published by CSO

It can be concluded that the importance of the tourist function in the area of the Land of Loess Gorges clearly increased in the years 2003–2015. There can be many reasons for this state of affairs. One of them is undoubtedly the Polish membership in the European Union, which, on the one hand, contributed to the influx of foreign tourists, and, on the other hand, thanks to the availability of European funds increased investment opportunities both in terms of tourist facilities, especially accommodation, as well as broader tourist infrastructure. These benefits pertain also to the tourism cluster Land of Loess Gorges, which offering attractive and innovative products attracts tourists interested in them. From the point of view of tourism development in Lubelskie Voivodship, the Land of Loess Gorges not only contributes to an increase in the number of visitors to the Voivodship, but also constitutes a good example to be followed by other parts of the voivodship, both by those which already have tourism-related functions developed to some extent (such as Roztocze, the city of Zamość, Janów forests, and Polesie), as well as by those yet undiscovered in this respect (e.g., Działy Grabowieckie).

5 Conclusion

Summing up all these considerations it is worth noting that clusters are a modern structure adequate for the challenges of a new paradigm of tourism development, connected with the change in the expectations of tourists and forms of spending their free time. An indispensable factor for success in tourism is the rich and varied offer of tourism products, which may arise due to the phenomenon of coepetition (**cooperation and competition**), which is typical for companies grouped in clusters and offering both typically tourist and para-tourist services.

The case study of the tourism cluster “Land of Loess Gorges” shows how a higher level of development of tourism can be reached both in terms of quality and quantity. In place of the previously existing three relatively isolated and specialized tourist centers (Nałęczów, Kazimierz Dolny, Puławy), a network of interrelated entities was created located in 11 communes, situated in three counties. This facilitated the development and diversification of the tourism infrastructure and the creation of network package products. The added value of the operation of the Land of Loess Gorges is the possibility to emulate its achievements in other parts of Lubelskie Voivodship and contribute through coepetition, typical of clusters, to building social capital in the region, and especially in its eastern part, where it is very low (Czapiński 2015, 342–343).

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