

# Creating Tourist Offers on the Basis of Anthropological Values

## The Example of Gospodarstwo Edukacyjno-Agroturystyczne “Mazowiecki Zaścianek”

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### Abstract

*The main goal of the paper is to assess the possibility of creating a successful tourist offer in areas which are not considered attractive for tourism. In order to do so, the authors analyze the case of an agrotourism farm called “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” which is located in the small Tłuszcz Commune west of Warsaw. The research carried out in 2013 was focused not only on the tourist product of the farm and its assessment, but also on ways in which the owners of the farms were able to enter a small community and stimulate its development.*

**Keywords:** farm tourism, rural tourism, tourist product

### Introduction

Tourism is considered the fastest developing sector of the world economy. As it stimulates development of building, transport and other industries it is perceived as a new way of economic recovery and opportunity for small rural communes where introducing the principles of a market economy resulted in a decrease in the life quality of the people living there. These societies often cannot or are incapable of adjusting to the reality of modern farming. Tourism creates new earning opportunities for such societies and new functions of rural areas. However, not all rural areas have enough natural and environmental values and they are not naturally predestined for tourism. The issue of numerous scientific debates is the effectiveness and profitability of developing tourism in areas characterized by low environmental attractiveness.

### 1 Regional tourist products in regions of low environmental attractiveness

If we want to answer the question as to whether it is possible to create an attractive tourist offer mainly on the basis of anthropological values, we should visit Gospodarstwo Edukacyjno-Agroturystyczne “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” (an agrotourism farm, henceforth “the farm”). It is located in the Tłuszcz Commune which is situated in the north-eastern part of Mazowieckie Voivodship, in Wołomin County (fig. 1).

Drzewiecki's (2001) valorization of farm tourism zones has revealed that the Tłuszcz Commune is not one of the communes that create the recreational space of our country (tab. 1), because it meets only two out of seven standards that have been listed by the author. A commune must meet at least three of them to be one of the communes that create the recreational space of Poland. However, although the Tłuszcz Commune does not possess the sufficient environmental values to be a part of the attractive tourist area, it does have some unused potential that could be developed and a regional tourist product could be created on their basis. As Karczewska (2004) writes,

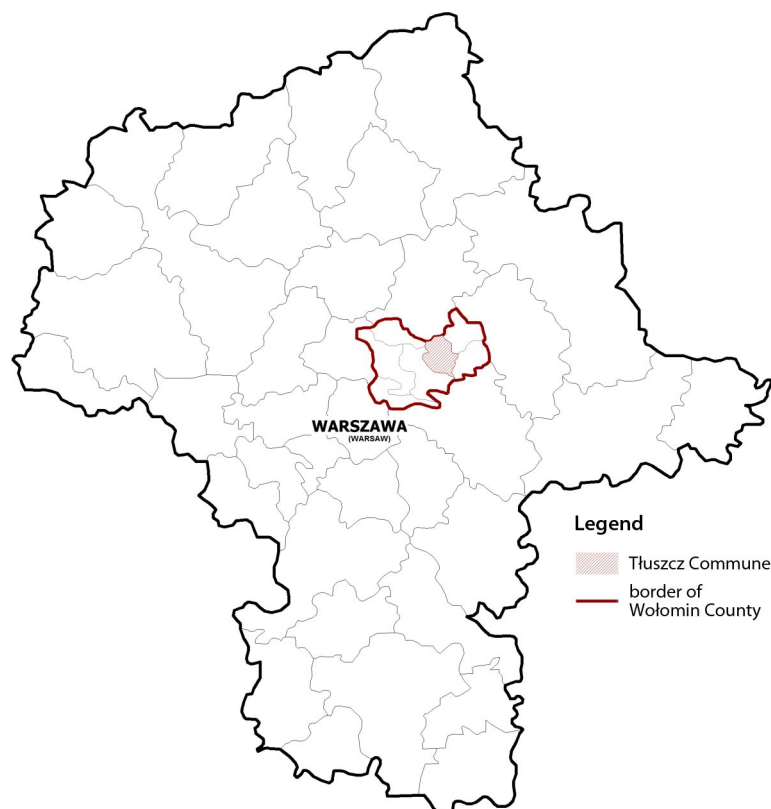


Fig. 1. Location of the municipality of Thuszcz

Tab. 1. Drzewiecki's valorization of farm tourism for the Thuszcz Commune

Elements of valorization (features)	Feature level for a commune which is attractive for farm tourism	Feature level for the Thuszcz Commune
Population density per 1 km <sup>2</sup> of agricultural land	less than 80 people	251
Non-nationalized farming—percentage of agricultural land	more than 60%	100%
Meadows and pastures—percentage of agricultural land	more than 30%	24,6%
Forest—percentage of landscape	30%–60%	15,4%
Water—percentage of landscape	at least 5%	1%
Percentage of people working in non-farm sectors	less than 60% of inhabitants	75% of inhabitants
Types of rural settlement	scattered rural building is a disadvantage	compact rural building

rural and farm tourism allow us to emphasize some elements of folk culture in a very natural way as they are the basis of its specificity. Cultural heritage as well as environment and service quality are the most important elements taken under consideration when choosing a tourist offer. Its cultural heritage, folk traditions, peace and quiet can be the basis of a regional tourist product of the Thuszcz Commune.

The Thuszcz Commune is a typical rural area and it is located near Warsaw, so it is a great place for short-term holidays (weekends) for the citizens of the capital city. It is noticeable that farm tourism has become an important social need during the last few years. The relatively clean natural environment of the commune and its rural character create sufficient conditions for a typical, hardworking citizen of Warsaw to regenerate his or her physical, psychological and spiritual strength. One-day stays connected with a specific anthropological tourist attraction are also a chance for the Thuszcz Commune. In order to create that kind of attraction a unique product must

be created and then promoted to attract and hold the attention of the clients. This process has been started by the owners of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek.”

## 2 “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” — localization and the offer

“Mazowiecki Zaścianek” is situated in the central part of Tłuszcz Commune, relatively near the city of Tłuszcz. However, it is located in the forest, in the remote part of Grabów village, so it is still a very peaceful and quiet place. The forest creates a natural barrier that separates the farm from a busy public road, yet this road provides an excellent communication accessibility. According to Majdecka-Strzeżek (2000) small adjacent gardens complemented all traditional rural houses in the past. People grew herbs and other useful plants there as they were often used during ceremonies and celebrations as well as in every-day life. Several such gardens located in “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” are the owner’s wife’s domain and they are an undisputable value of the farm. The large number of species and vast knowledge of the owner’s wife give the gardens a special aura and they arouse the attention of many visiting tourists.

As above-mentioned, the farm is located near the city of Tłuszcz and such a location has lots of advantages. In fact, many cultural and anthropogenic attractions of the city are easily accessible to the visitors of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” as they can reach them by bike or on horseback. Such a ride is an additional attraction. From time to time some antique and historic objects are presented in the city hall of Tłuszcz as a part of cooperation between the city and the owner of the farm. Thanks to this cooperation “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” is constantly strengthening its position as a main center of tourism in the region. Moreover, the farm is situated near many other attractive sights and places of the region (e.g., Franciszków Mansion, the church in Postoliska or the castle in Chrzęsne).

Gospodarstwo Edukacyjno-Agroturystyczne “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” specializes in organizing educational lessons for groups of children and teenagers. As Graja (2003) writes, the cultural heritage of the Polish countryside has been created by rural or small town communities. This centuries-old heritage consists of traditional architecture, everyday life items, regional clothing, and folk art of a wide range of folk customs and rites. However, this heritage could be used by tourists only if it is properly commented upon and this is a tourist organizers’ task (Łęczycki 2003). All information must be clear and understandable for a wide circle of consumers. A simple talk, lecture or a board is not a sufficient source of information, especially for children of kindergarten age. That is why all educational programs held in “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” are organized in a form of workshops or, so called, live museum lessons.

The main room of the largest building where a fireplace is situated has been designed as a copy of a former hallway of an old rural mansion. In this room most of the workshops take place. Inside there are antique and historic objects — i.e., a hand mill, a traditional bread stove, old dishes and other equipment collected by the owners (fig. 2).

Almost all programs are thematically connected with the life of peasants and farmers in the past, traditions, superstitions and rites. During the workshops only natural materials and organic food are used. There are year-long programs that are in the offer of the farm (e.g., “From stone to bread” — the history of grain and bread, making flour and bread) and seasonal programs which are usually connected with celebrating Easter and Christmas and with the rites connected with the four seasons (e.g., “Farewell Party for Summer”) (tab. 2). There are several dozen educational programs. In winter sleigh rides are organized. During the period of 2009–2013 there were about 480 educational programs for children and teenagers organized. The most popular program was “From stone to bread”, which was ordered 208 times during those five years. The second popular program was the “Indian village” and the number of its followers is still growing (tab. 2). Each group visiting the farm for the first time takes part in a special tour. Tourists are familiarized with all objects that are gathered in Zaścianek. It is an active way of sightseeing because almost every exhibit item can be used by visitors. Since there are many objects gathered in “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” some groups visit it only to see them, so some visitors treat it as an open-air ethnographic museum.



**Fig. 2.** “Mazowiecki Zaścianek”: *A*—the main entrance, *B* and *C*—the interior; *D*—the owners. Photo by author

**Tab. 2.** The number of the most popular educational programs held in “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” during the period of 2004–2006

Program	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
From stone to bread . . . . .	50	34	36	42	46	208
Painted birds . . . . .	6	10	8	7	9	40
Gone with the wind . . . . .	2	3	6	2	8	21
Indian village . . . . .	7	13	18	20	24	82
Angels’ time . . . . .	–	1	3	10	8	22
Making preserves . . . . .	5	3	5	5	6	24
Easter Palms and Eggs . . . . .	7	1	2	9	3	22
Easter cakes . . . . .	–	1	2	4	2	9
Christmas decorations . . . . .	0	1	4	5	12	22
Meeting Santa Claus . . . . .	1	1	1	1	1	5
Parents and children party	–	0	1	0	2	3
The first day of spring . . . . .	1	0	1	2	0	4
Flowers for Mother’s Day . . . . .	–	1	2	3	3	9
Farewell Party for Summer	–	–	0	0	1	1
Autumn decorations . . . . .	1	1	0	0	2	4
Christmas Party . . . . .	–	0	1	2	1	4
Willow pipes . . . . .	1	–	–	1	0	2
Total	81	70	90	113	128	482

*Note:* “–” means that the program was not in the offer in a particular year

There are also many other events that are organized in “Mazowiecki Zaścianek,” for example occasional and integration parties, professional trainings and courses in a form of regional workshops combined with a feast. Nineteen events of this kind have been organized since 2009. Having dinner in a spacious room at the wooden table and being surrounded by lots of period objects in an atmosphere of kindness and warmth is an extraordinary experience and it is an additional advantage of feasts organized on the farm. Sleigh rides are also very popular among visitors in winter.

The number of tourists that visit the farm depends on many factors such as, among others: city proximity, communication, quality of products and services that are in the offer and promotional actions. This number depends also on time and it is conditioned by the time of the day, days of the week and seasons (Sznajder and Przezbórska 2006).

According to the source materials, in the period of 2009–2013 almost 19,4<sup>1</sup> thousand people visited “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” and 92% of the visitors were children and teenagers. The range of influence of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” can be assessed by analyzing the places its visitors come from. Almost all of them come from towns and villages that lie south-west of the farm and no more than about 65 km away from Grabów. There are only two exceptions: groups from Gdansk and Ołdaki, but these groups visited the farm only once and it was not the main destination of their journey—it was on the list of many attractions that they visited during their trip to Mazowsze. As much as 91% of all groups which visited the farm in the period of 2009–2013 came from cities or towns. The most visitors came from Warsaw (about 59%). Many tourists came also from Wołomin (17%) and Tuszcz (5,5%)—the two nearest cities.

The farm’s tourism load factor can be described on the basis of the number of days (of a particular month or year) when tourists visit it. The highest number of tourists visited “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” in spring and summer (May-June: 17 days of the month on average in 2009–2013) and in autumn and winter (September-October: 15 days of the month on average in 2009–2013). This regularity is observed from the very beginning of its functioning. It is probably caused by its specialization as it is visited mostly by schools and kindergartens. The above-mentioned months are also relatively warm, so the children can play outdoors and it is an additional attraction. During the period of 2009–2013 the yearly tourism load was 93 days on average. In the same period the highest number of events was held in October—tourism load: 20 days. In the period of April-September of 2013 a public opinion poll was held among 100 tourists aged above 15. The main purpose of the survey was to obtain detailed information about their opinion on events that are organized on the farm.

The largest group of all interviewed people was adults aged between 27 and 60 (72%). There were not many representatives of other age groups: 14 aged 60 or more and 7 people aged under 18 and 18–26. No less than 84% interviewed people were women. This is caused by the fact that the survey was held mainly among teachers who came with the children and it is a very feminized profession. 75% of respondents had a university degree and 56% of them were employed in the public sector. A large group of respondents consisted of the elderly (18 people). Only 2 out of 100 people were unemployed and 9 were students or pupils. A great majority of respondents lived in Warsaw and Wołomin (69% in total), as the analysis of the source data have shown.

As many as 52 people claimed that the main reason why they visited “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” was to take part in the educational program, another 18 took part in the integration parties and 14 that they visited the farm to meet friends. 12 respondents think that “Zaścianek” is a tourist attraction and it can be treated as a museum, other interviewed people took part in family meetings, conferences or a scouts camp. 44% of respondents visited “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” more than once so it can be stated that the farm has a considerable large group of regular visitors.

There were two questions concerning the quality of services provided by the farm in the poll: “What do you like the most in Mazowiecki Zaścianek?” (fig. 3) and “What would you change in Mazowiecki Zaścianek? Is there something missing here?” Almost 20% of respondents pointed out the “location in a quiet and peaceful area” as the largest advantage of the farm, over 15% of them

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1. [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.]

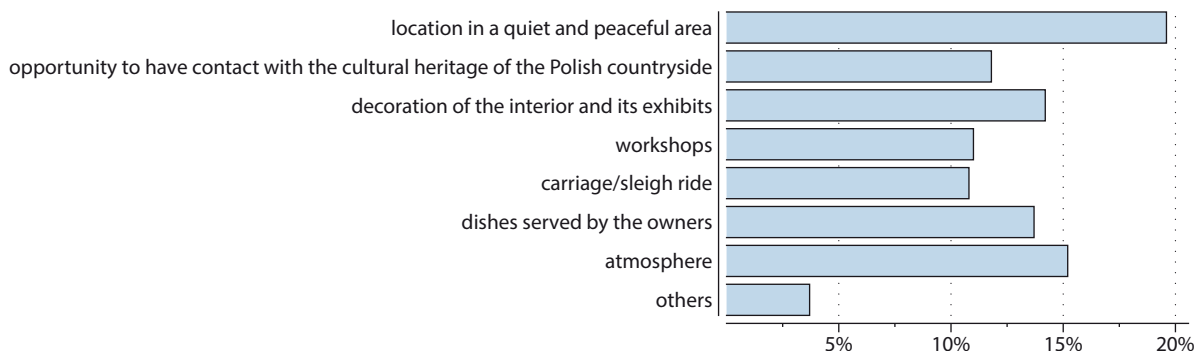


Fig. 3. The most appreciated advantages of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek”

appreciated the atmosphere of the place and about 14% of respondents pointed out the “decoration of the interior and its exhibits”. All respondents marked more than one possible answer here and some of them made some notes as well. They wrote about the hospitality of the hosts, high quality of the service and safety of the place. As many as 95 people out of 100 declared the willingness to visit “Zaścianek” again.

The respondents were also asked about the largest disadvantage of the farm. Most of them did not write anything or wrote “there are no disadvantages”, “I like everything here” or “I would not change anything here”. There were no comments on lack of the environmental values of the place, so if a tourist offer is attractive and of high quality, the environment is not an issue. The main disadvantage of “Zaścianek” was the fact there is no possibility of renting a room for a longer stay mentioned by 10 people.

### 3 “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” — a micro-scale innovation centre

There is no doubt that Mazowiecki Zaścianek stimulates development of Grabów and the Tłuszcz Commune. The owners of Zaścianek are precursors of promoting farm tourism in Tłuszcz. Their success was the beginning of many changes in the mentality of peasants living in surrounding villages, especially in Grabów. The land where the farm is located has been bought from people who were born in Grabów. At first the owners of Zaścianek were strangers and many villagers treated them with reserve. Then, with time, the host became a part of the community. Sometimes he had to “buy” their trust by lending them his tools or devices. When Zaścianek started to work it was necessary to employ some helpers. The host employed some young people from the surrounding villages and this only strengthened his position in the hierarchy of the local community. As Zaścianek and its offer developed, there were many opportunities to start cooperation with the local people. Nowadays the hosts buy fresh milk from the villagers that is served with handmade bread. Tourists can buy eggs, fruit, mushrooms or other products from the farmers. Some of the villagers have offered rental of their horses and now tourists can ride a wooden horse-drawn carriage. The routes for the carriages have been set with the villagers as they know their own neighbourhood best. As a result of creating those routes their mentality has slightly changed because they no longer drop litter in the forest near the places where tourists are taken. Other villagers observe the success of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” and say that they were thinking about starting their own business. Some of them want to rent rooms and it would be a great way to enrich the tourist offer of the whole village of Grabów. Maybe it will be a great starting point for a regional tourist product. Local authorities of the commune also support “Zaścianek” as it is obvious that it stimulates the development of the region and entrepreneurship of the people.

### Summary

It is an extremely difficult task to create a regional tourist product that would be so unique to attract tourists and so perfect that they would like to come back to the Tłuszcz Commune. As the commune does not have many environmental values, it is necessary to focus on promoting its

cultural heritage, traditions of Mazowsze, folk customs and rites that are very interesting for lots of city dwellers, which has been proven by the success of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek.” But creation of such a complicated and multilayered product must involve cooperation between local authorities, communities and owners of all objects that provide tourist services in the Tłuszcz Commune. Agrotourism is also a great chance for the local people to start their own business and participate in a product which will make it even more authentic. In fact, this process has already started as many local people cooperate with “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” as it was described in the previous paragraph. It is also vital as they are gradually gaining experience, learning how to run their own business, how to communicate with newcomers and tourists, how to present themselves and create a positive image, how to sell their products and, what I think is the most important, they are becoming convinced that their region and home village can be a part of something greater and attractive.

The case of “Mazowiecki Zaścianek” is proof that rural and farm tourism can be developed not only on the basis of environmental values and that sometimes it is possible to create something from almost nothing.

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