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## THE REASONS FOR CHOOSING A LEISURE DESTINATION IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE BUG RIVER VALLEY IN TOURISTS' OPINION

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the study was to identify factors that may determine the choice of leisure destination as a form of tourism in the rural areas of the Bug River Valley. The analysis of these factors also considered the nationality of the people surveyed. A total of 148 people took part in the study: 73 of Polish nationality (45 women and 18 men) and 75 foreigners, mainly Belarusians (51 women and 24 men). It was found that Polish tourists most often chose to spend leisure time in guesthouses/hotels or the houses of friends and family, while international tourists rest mainly in the houses of friends and family. Regardless of their nationality, the majority of tourists were satisfied with their stay in selected facilities, highly rating the communication, accommodation, catering and cycling routes and trails. The factors determining the choice of their place of stay, irrespective of nationality, were peace and quiet, attractive surroundings and convenient location. Respondents rested most frequently with family or friends. Polish tourists preferably used catering from the owners of holiday facilities, while foreigners cooked their own meals.

**KEYWORDS:** Bug River Valley, tourism, choice of location

## Introduction

According to the authors of the Development Strategy of the County of Biała Podlaska for 2018-2026 (Szot-Gabryś, 2018), the Bug River Valley is one of the most valuable natural resources of the county. The valley is rich not only in places of high natural value but also there are numerous architectural and construction monuments, historical and military objects connected with the Brest stronghold, remains of former manors, manor houses, churches, places of former settlements and old folk customs and crafts. This makes the area very attractive to tourists. Apart from the values mentioned above of the natural and cultural environment, the advantages of the Bug Valley include its favorable geographic location and well-developed logistics and transport infrastructure as well as high quality of human resources. Despite this, it is believed that the tourist potential is insufficiently promoted and exploited (Baker 2007).

The area of the Bug River Valley is characterized by forests, mountains or water reservoirs (Sokół, Boruch, 2011). According to many authors (Obidziński, 2010; Sokół, Boruch, 2011; Czarnecka, 2016), the present-day vegetation of the Bug River Valley is a result of centuries of plant migration, from the early glacial period to the present day. As a result, almost 1300 species of vascular plants have been found in the Bug River Valley, not counting 64 minor species of the dandelion genus (14 species are now considered extinct). Almost all of them are permanent flora components, and only 6 of them occur ephemerally or temporarily.

Due to the diversity and richness of species and habitats, a number of protected areas have been created in the rural areas of the Bug River Valley. As part of the Natura 2000 system, 26 special habitat protection areas and 19 special bird protection areas have been created in the Bug River basin. In 2012 the West Polesie Transboundary Biosphere Reserve was created. It integrates three national biosphere reserves: Polesie Zachodnie (Poland), Szatskyi Biosphere Reserve (Ukraine) and Pribuzskoye Polesie (Belarus). In addition, four landscape parks are connected with the Bug River Valley: Strzelecki Landscape Park, Sobiborski Landscape Park, Podlasie Bug River Gorge Landscape Park and Nadbużański Landscape Park (Iwaniuk, 2005).

Lifestyle is the most general form of activity of a given social group, including physical activity, which consists, among others, of tourist and recreational activities (WHO, 2002). The manner, environment and period of rest are also significant. Resting is of great significance for physical, mental and social wellbeing (Steiner 1999) as people cannot function without resting for a longer time. Relaxation is necessary, even indispensable, for both older and younger people and their lives, just like air, water, and food. That is

why a survey among domestic and foreign tourists was conducted on this subject.

The research report on the domestic tourism market commissioned by the Polish Tourism Organisation shows that Poles prefer moderately active forms of spending leisure time during tourist trips. The form of activity most frequently indicated by respondents is visiting places of natural and cultural interest, followed by less active rest and recreation, entertainment and social contacts. Only one in five tourists primarily undertake sports activities during their holidays. The least popular forms of activity among respondents include shopping, health and beauty care, and participation in religious practices. In the group of so-called “explorers” (sightseeing), historic towns or sites are particularly preferred. Active recreationists spend their time mainly in the mountains, at the seaside or on a lake. They often go cycling, swimming or trekking. In turn, the so-called “all-inclusive tourists” much more often than the others spend time shopping or participating in religious practices (Polish Tourism Organisation, 2014). Numerous studies have shown that agritourism is gaining popularity among many forms of leisure activities (Flanigan, Blastock, Hunter, 2014). It is addressed mainly to individual customers, families and small tourist groups. The advantage of this form is the possibility to use existing housing resources of farms, as well as unused livestock facilities and recreational space within the farm (Sokół, 2012). The authors point out that a significant percentage of tourists are those interested only in good, authentic, traditional and regional cuisine. The authors argue that food and catering services occupy a significant place in any form of tourism and that unique, original, and above all tasty “Podlasie cuisine” can significantly increase the recognition of Podlasie and contribute to the development of tourism in the area (Sokół, 2015). For example, W. Alejskiak (2015) presented the research results on the role and importance of active tourism in the health-promoting lifestyle of university students from Kraków. The author analyzed the preferences of science students and tourism and recreation students and found that most science students chose mass tourism rather than active tourism. In contrast, tourism and recreation students chose the opposite. Despite these differences, the preferences of “engineers” and tourism students were very similar. In both studied groups, the largest number of young people participated in mountain and lowland hiking and cycling tourism.

Moreover, tourism students practised skiing and snowboarding in winter and canoeing in summer. A much smaller group of respondents pursued other forms of active tourism from both engineering and tourism studies. It mainly concerned climbing, sailing, horse riding and survival tourism.

The research aim was to determine the decisive factors regarding choosing a leisure destination in the rural areas of the Bug River Valley. The analysis of these factors also reflected the nationality of the respondents. On the Polish side of the Bug River, the research concerned Polish tourists and foreigners, mainly Belarusians, on the other side of the river.

Research shows that the respondents (especially foreigners) paid the least attention to the healing values of the environment as a very important motivating factor when going on holiday.

## Material and methods

The study used one of the qualitative research methods, i.e. a diagnostic survey (Andersen, Hepburn, 2015). The research technique applied was a questionnaire, and the research tool was the original questionnaire sheet.

The research was conducted in 2020, with 148 participants, including 73 Poles (45 women and 18 men) and 75 Belarusians (51 women and 24 men). In the group of tourists from Poland, every third person lived in a city with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, and every fourth person came from cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. In the case of tourists from outside Poland, the vast majority were residents of cities with a population over 100,000 (65.3%).

The largest percentage of Polish tourists was 26-40 years old and 41-60 years old (34.2% each). The others were aged 18-25 (23.3%) or over 60 (8.2%). In the group of foreigners, most tourists were aged 18-25 (80%).

The largest percentage among Polish tourists were those with higher education (76.7%). In the case of foreigners, this percentage was 45.3%. 54.7% of Polish and 21.9% of foreign respondents graduated from secondary school.

More than half of respondents from both groups revealed that their material status was average (Polish tourists – 58.9%, foreigners – 54.7%). On the other hand, high status was held by 20.5 and 45.3% of tourists, respectively.

The majority of Polish tourists chose to relax on the Polish side of the Bug River (87.7%). On the other hand, foreigners preferably rested on the Belarusian side (66.7%).

## Results

The study has shown that many reasons prompted the respondents to visit the Bug River Valley region. According to the survey, the main reasons to relax in this region, both for Polish and foreign tourists, included natural values (68.5% and 64% respectively) and natural landscape (50.7% and 53.3%

respectively), and, to a much lesser extent, transport accessibility (25.3% and 9.6%), regional cuisine (13.3% and 23.3%), cultural values (25.3% and 21.9%) or a multitude of tourist and recreational attractions (29.3% and 19.2%) –figure 1.

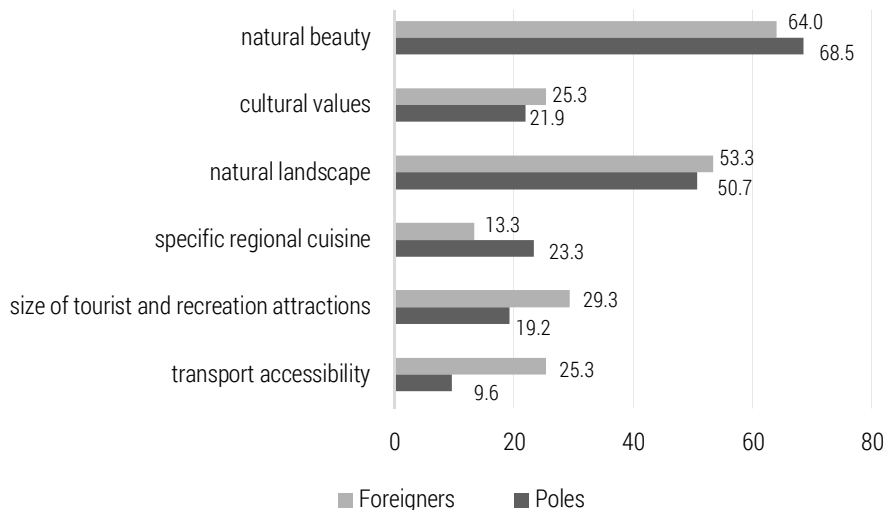


Figure 1. Reasons for visiting the region (in %); (the respondents could choose more than one answer)

Source: author's work.

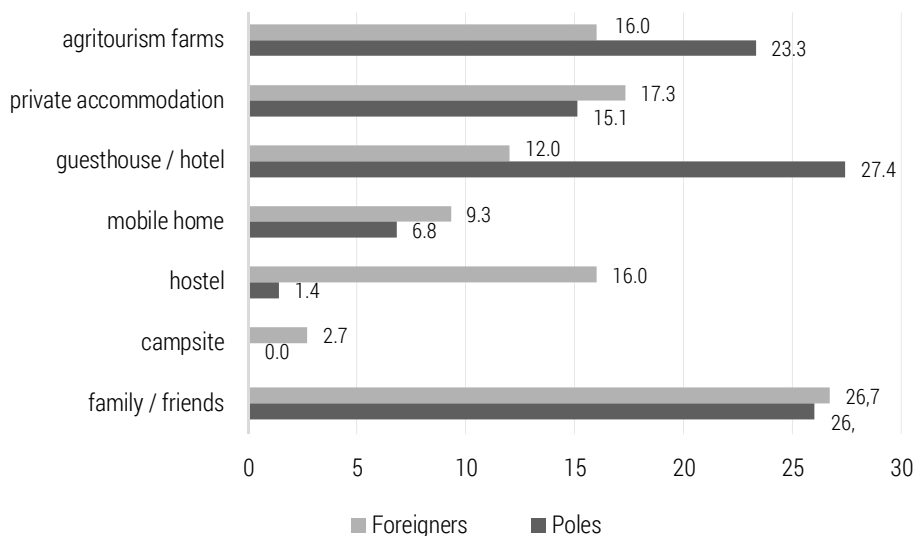
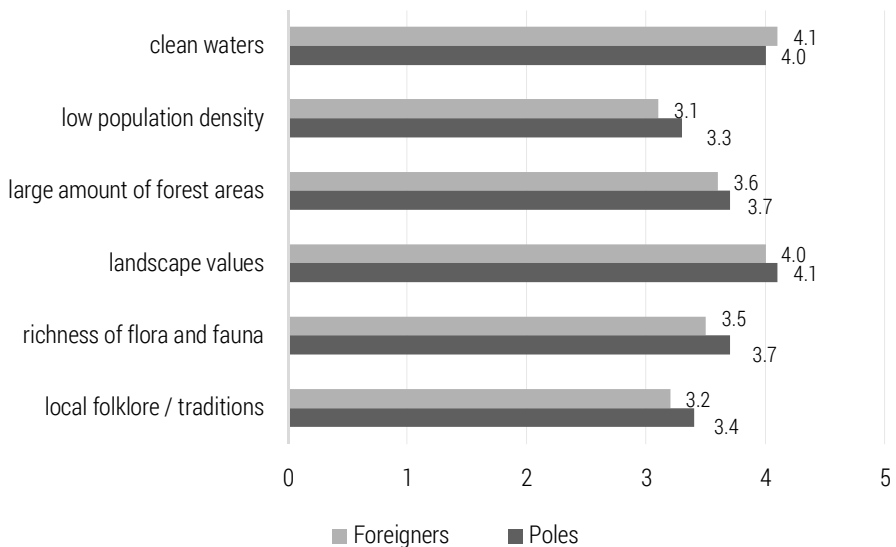


Figure 2. Rural tourism facilities most frequently selected by tourists (in %); (respondents could choose more than one answer)

Source: author's work.

As opposed to foreign tourists, domestic tourists preferably stayed in guesthouses/hotels (27.4% and 12% respectively) – figure 2. Both groups of tourists willingly and equally enjoyed staying with their friends' families (26 and 26.7% respectively). Besides, Poles often used accommodation in agritourism farms (23.3%), whereas foreigners in private accommodation (17.3%). Both groups equally used accommodation in agritourism farms (16%) and hostels (16%). It should be noted that tourists from Poland rarely stayed at hostels (1.4%).

In the opinion of both Polish and foreign tourists, the most important assets contributing to tourism development in the region include landscape values (4.1 and 4 points respectively) and clean water (4 and 4.1 points respectively) – figure 3. The least important factor for both groups was the low population in the region (3.3 and 3.1 points, respectively).



**Figure 3.** Main tourist values important for the development of tourism in the region in the opinion of the respondents (in points); scale – 0 points (unimportant) to 5 points (very important).

Source: author's work.

In most cases, in the group of Polish tourists, the respondents rated the stay at the selected facility as very good or good (49.3 and 42.5%, respectively). In the case of foreigners, the largest group were those who rated their satisfaction as good (58.7%) – figure 4.

When choosing a place to stay (figure 5), Polish tourists primarily took into account peace and quiet (46.6%) and a convenient location (38.4%).

In the group of foreigners, it was mainly the pleasant environment (57.3%), followed by a convenient location (46.7%) and peace and quiet (44%).

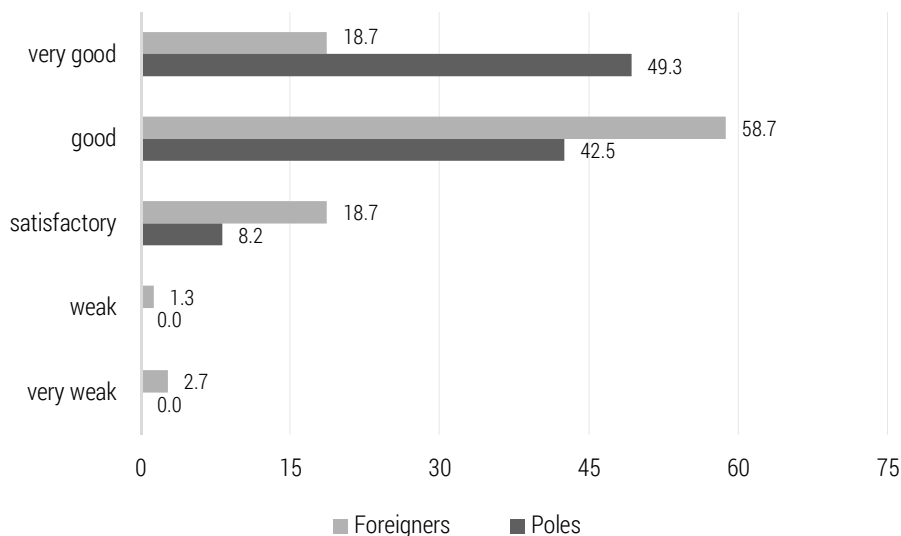


Figure 4. Degree of respondents' satisfaction with their stay in the selected facility (in %)

Source: author's work.

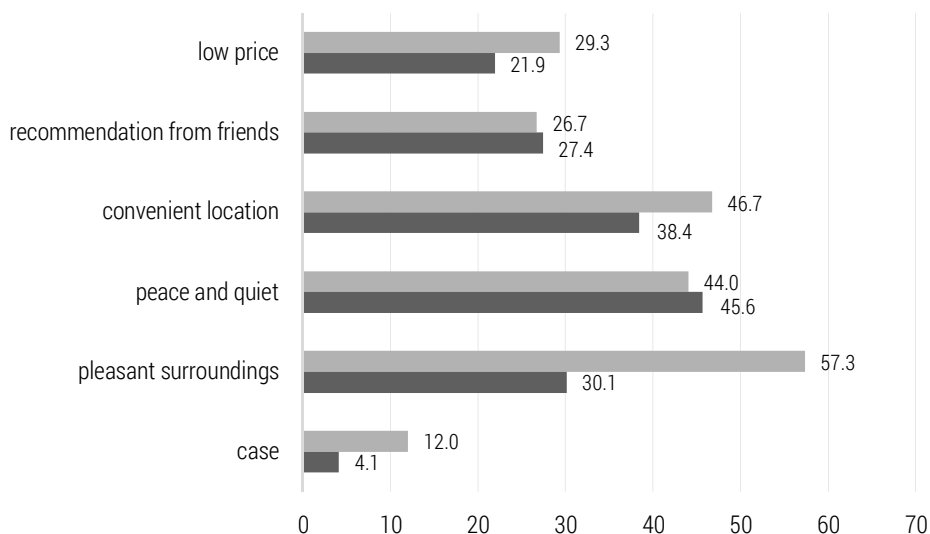


Figure 5. Factors influencing the choice of accommodation facilities by respondents (in %); (respondents could choose more than one answer)

Source: author's work.

Polish tourists most often used self-catering (45.2%), while foreign tourists ate meals prepared by themselves (44%) or used the offer of small catering establishments (29.3%) – figure 6.

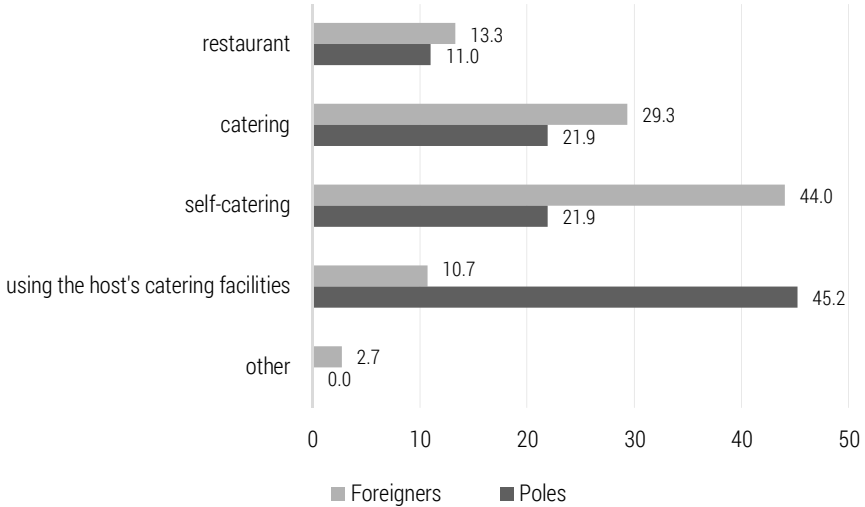


Figure 6. Types of catering facilities most frequently used by respondents during trips related to rural tourism in the Bug River Valley (in %)

Source: author's work.

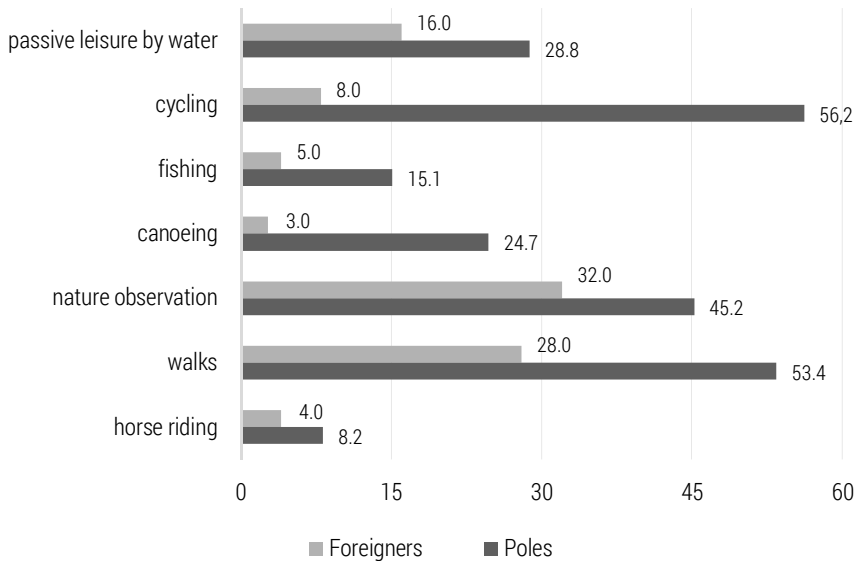


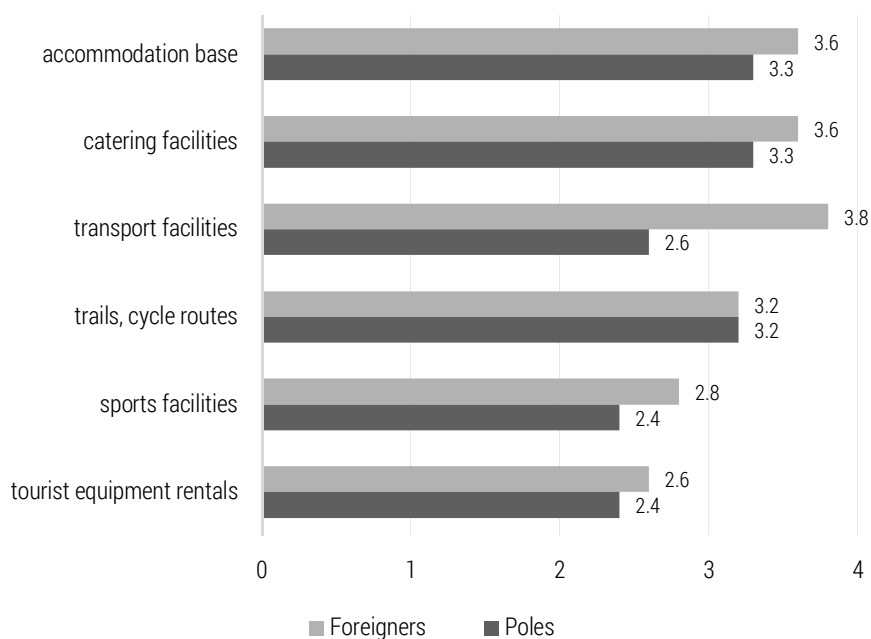
Figure 7. Forms of tourist activity preferred by respondents during their holidays (in %); (the respondents could choose more than one answer)

Source: author's work.



The highest percentage of Polish tourists declared that during their holidays in the Bug River Valley they went cycling (56.2%), walking (53.4%) and observed nature (45.2%). Foreigners, on the other hand, most often observed nature (32%), went walking (28%) and resting by the water (16%) – figure 7.

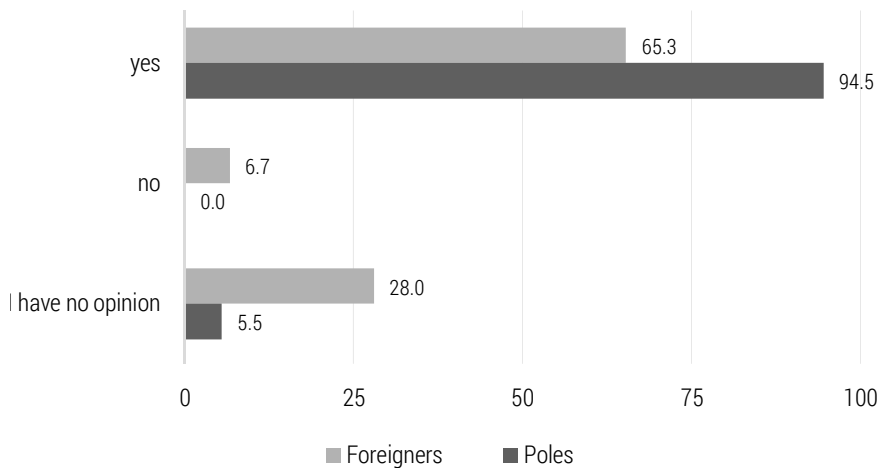
Polish tourists engaging in rural tourism in the area of the Bug River Valley gave the highest ratings to the accommodation and catering facilities (3.3 points each) as well as cycling routes (3.2 points). A similar infrastructure assessment was given by outside Poland tourists (figure 8). In their opinion, the best-developed facilities are transport (3.8 points), catering and accommodation (3.6 points each) and bicycle trails and routes (3.2 points). The lowest ratings were given by tourists for tourist equipment rentals (Poles – 2.4 points, foreigners – 2.6 points) and sports facilities (Poles – 2.4 points, foreigners – 2.8 points).



**Figure 8.** Condition of tourist infrastructure in the region in respondents' opinion (in points); scale – 0 points (unimportant) to 5 points (very important).

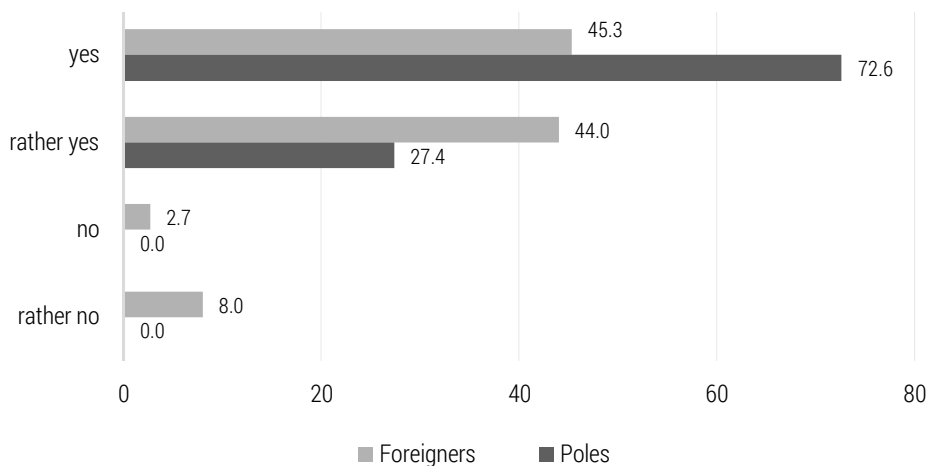
Source: author's work.

The majority of Polish tourists, as well as foreign ones, stated that they would come to the Bug River Valley again for tourist purposes (94.5 and 65.3% respectively) – figure 9.



**Figure 9.** Respondents who declared the willingness to visit the Bug River Valley again (in %) Source: author's work.

A vast majority of tourists from Poland and abroad would recommend the Bug River Valley as a holiday destination (72.6 and 45.3% respectively) – figure 10.



**Figure 10.** Respondents who would recommend other people to spend their holiday in the Bug River Valley (in %)

Source: author's work.

## Discussion

Tourism plays an important role in the development of the economy and society. In the era of globalization and the development of civilization, it is not accidental to pay attention to the tourist attractiveness of rural areas. Rural tourism is frequently mentioned as a development direction in Poland's strategic plans prepared by local governments at various levels. One of the types of non-agricultural activity in rural areas is rural tourism, including agritourism. As J. Bański (2006) writes, the increased interest in rural areas and this form of recreation as a whole took place in the 1960s, and its popularity is not falling. As the research of numerous authors has shown, not only domestic but also foreign tourists rest in rural areas. A question may be asked, what were the tourists from Belarus guided by when choosing a place to rest in rural areas? Research has shown that in the case of tourists from the east, the decisive factor was the amount of fees for services, despite the fact that they came from relatively well-off families, but also the possibility of preparing meals on their own, as a result of which they saved by not paying for the full service.

On the other hand, as they claim, they saw what they were preparing and consuming. Another aspect worth emphasizing is that the respondents were a less demanding group of tourists and most often assessed their stay with satisfaction during their stay in various places. One of the main reasons for choosing a vacation spot was also the realization of their own intentions and hobbies of vacationers. The valley of the Bug River (especially in the border section) is also a unique cultural value resulting from the meeting of three cultures in this area: Polish, Ruthenian and Jewish, which are very visible in the landscape (Mączka 2008). Many authors (Sikorska-Wolak 2006; Cichowska 2011; Ciepiela 2014, Balińska 2014 and others) emphasize that the dynamics of agritourism development is strongly correlated with the natural and cultural attractiveness of the Bug valley. It is also one of the last great river valleys located in the centre of Europe, which so far has retained a very significant degree of naturalness. Hence there is interest in this area, as well as many scientific studies on this subject.

## Conclusions

The topics concerning the motives for choosing a place for rest in the rural areas of the Bug river valley have not been presented in scientific journals so far. Of course, there were studies, but they concerned mainly the tourist and landscape values as well as the general characteristics of the rural areas of the said area. Hence, there was a gap in this subject, which we decided to fill.

Research has shown that the Bug River Valley area is very popular among domestic and foreign tourists. It is mainly determined by the tourism potential, which includes the environment and its surroundings. Conclusion and it can be said that not only coastal and mountainous areas attract tourists, but the area of Podlasie does not differ from the ones mentioned above.

According to the survey, tourists from Poland preferably rested in guest-houses/hotels and at houses friends' and agritourism farms. At the same time, foreigners mainly stayed at friends', and to a lesser extent in private accommodation, agritourism farms or hostels.

In most cases, both Polish and foreign tourists were satisfied with their stay in rural areas of the Bug River Valley. They spoke highly of the transport, accommodation and catering facilities, as well as of the cycling routes and trails. Tourists from Poland preferred self-catering facilities, while foreigners cooked their own meals.

The deciding factors for choosing a place to stay, regardless of nationality, were peace and quiet, pleasant surroundings and a convenient location. Surprisingly, no importance was attached by the respondents, especially foreigners, to the healing qualities.

### The contribution of the authors

Dominik Dąbrowski – 30% (conception, literature review, data analysis, interpretation, conclusions, language correction).

Mikołaj Jalinik – 30% (conception, literature review, data analysis, interpretation, conclusions, language correction).

Janusz Leszek Sokół – 15% (conception, literature review, data analysis, interpretation, conclusions, language correction).

Katarzyna Radwańska – 15% (literature review, data collection, language correction).

Jakub Szwedo – 10% (literature review, data collection)

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