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## Tourist Attractiveness and Sources of Financing and Development of Tourist Infrastructure in National Parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the study is to present the results of research on sources of funds in 2019 - 2020 for the development of tourism infrastructure, as well as existing problems with its construction and interest in park areas among tourists based on own survey research. The condition of tourist infrastructure, in addition to tourist values and attractions, most often determines the choice of a place to rest.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The configuration and methodological requirements of the research process were based on own survey, available literature, observation and available data from national parks and forest inspectorates of Podlaskie voivodeship.

**Findings:** The research will contribute to the formation of promotional strategies in individual parks, and increasing tourist traffic may influence the development of a given area and greater interest in the natural environment, and consequently the creation of new jobs for the local community. This is determined mainly by tourist infrastructure. The Directorate of the Wigierski National Park cares the most about the development of tourist infrastructure. In the Park tourist trails are created (walking, cycling, canoeing, skiing, educational trails), which aim to improve the physical and mental fitness, as well as the ecological and natural environment awareness of the visitors. The study shows that the development of tourist infrastructure depends solely on the potential of park management staff.

**Practical implications:** Reliability and universality of research is becoming an absolute requirement at the present time and is a decisive argument for the effectiveness of analyses and evaluations. The research methodology presented in the study, due to its universality, can be used in any region, referring to the sources of obtaining funds for the development of tourism infrastructure in national parks in other voivodeships.

**Originality/Value:** The given research methodology of the presented issues, is a comprehensive research based on pragmatic assumptions with the support of specialized literature and observations. It defines the scope and authenticity of the results in the presented topic.

**Keywords:** Tourism infrastructure, national parks, financial resources, tourist values and attractions tourist attractions.

**JEL codes:** Q56, Z3, P23, L83.

**Paper type:** Research article.

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## **1. Introduction**

The development of civilization has significantly contributed to the degradation of the natural environment (Wei and Meyer 2014). Destructive human activity has led to the extinction of many plant and animal species. To prevent the loss of more species, national parks began to be established to protect flora and fauna as well as valuable landscapes. Currently, there are 23 national parks in Poland, covering an area of 317,386 ha, which is about 1 % of the country's area (Ministry of the Environment, [archive.mos.gov.pl](http://archive.mos.gov.pl); 24.12.2020), in which nature is unique. Two of them are located in the coastal belt, five in the lake district belt, another five in the lowland belt, three in the uplands and eight in the mountains. The parks are of great cultural and educational importance. They serve to preserve biological diversity, as well as inanimate nature forms, such as boulders, springs and caves. They allow observation of wild nature and teach respect for it. They are eagerly visited by tourists. In general, it can be said that national parks are the highest and most effective form of nature protection.

National Park buffer zones shall be delimited in the areas bordering the parks. In the buffer zones a protection zone for game animals can be created, which is not included in hunting districts. The areas of national parks are open to the public, while tourist traffic may only take place in designated areas (trails, roads or paths). Numerous scientific studies are conducted in the national parks.

National parks also play an important role in the environmental education of the public. On their territory it is possible to do sightseeing and tourist infrastructure is made available. A significant part of them has specially prepared trails and didactic centres as well as natural museums. In accordance with the Act on Nature Protection, entry to national parks may be free of charge or charged. Each park has its own unique symbol, or logo, as a distinctive sign.

There are 149 didactic paths and 3630 km of hiking trails available for tourists in national parks in Poland. Tourists are increasingly looking for opportunities to experience adventure, emotions and experiences during their trips, which stimulates the emergence of new products and forms of tourism (Sekulić, Petrović, Dimitrijević 2017). Almost all parks have museums or teaching and information centres. The parks also run their own publishing activities. The number of visitors to Polish national parks is about 11 million per year (Ministry of the Environment, [archiwum.mos.gov.pl](http://archiwum.mos.gov.pl); 24.12.2020).

In Podlaskie Voivodeship the natural environment is particularly characterised by a high degree of naturalness. It is evidenced by primeval forests and the largest marshland complex in Europe. The functioning four national parks: Białowiecki, Biebrzański, Narewski and Wigierski are characterised by particular natural, historical and tourist value. The entire area of Podlaskie Voivodeship is located in the area of the Green Lungs of Poland. Legal protection covers 32.0% of the

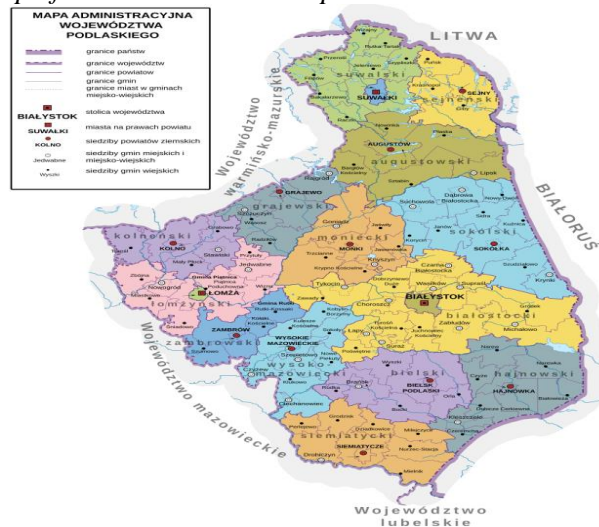
voivodeship area, which puts the region in the lead in Poland. It should be noted that in the Podlaskie Voivodeship there are favourable conditions for the development of various types and forms of tourism in forest areas, including national parks (sylvan tourism).

Podlaskie voivodeship is characterised by fairly high forest cover (29.8%), diversified topography and a relatively poor hydrographic network (water covers 1.8% of the area). The main watercourses are: the Narew, the Biebrza, the Rospuda and the Bug, which is a border river. The area with numerous lakes is the northern part of Podlaskie Voivodeship. The landscape and nature values as well as cultural heritage of Podlaskie Voivodeship favour the development of tourism. Tourism in Podlaskie Voivodeship currently fulfils an important economic function, and in the future, it should be the driving force of entrepreneurship development (Jalinik, 2016). Tourism is one of the important functions of national parks, and from a social point of view, tourism has become a lifestyle element that guarantees relaxation, leisure, and the expansion of knowledge about the country and the region.

## **2. The Features of National Parks in Podlaskie Voivodeship**

Podlaskie voivodeship (Figure 1) is one of the most attractive regions in north-eastern Poland in terms of its nature and it is also the least polluted one, covering an area of 20.2 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. It is a land of large primeval forests, preserved in their natural state, river valleys and extensive wetlands. The population of the voivodeship amounts to 3.2%, i.e., (1.2 million) of the country's population. Podlaskie neighbours the Lubelskie, Mazowieckie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships, and borders Belarus and Lithuania to the east.

*Figure 1. The map of Podlaskie Voivodeship*



*Source:* [Województwo podlaskie pl.wikipedia.org](http://Województwo podlaskie pl.wikipedia.org).

The voivodeship is home to two of Europe's best-known and exceptionally highly valuable natural sites, i.e., Białowiecki National Park and Biebrzański National Park. Among Polish natural attractions, national parks show the highest attendance of visitors (Kruczek, 2017). This is also the case in Podlaskie Voivodeship. Also important among the natural values of the voivodeship are extensive wetlands, which are a bird sanctuary (Bielawska, Kiryluk, Michałowski, Rąkowski, and Ziółkowski, 2001). The natural value of the voivodship is also confirmed by its numerous protected areas including four national parks, three landscape parks and 95 nature reserves (23692 ha) which constitute 1.2% of the region (Figure 2). Within the voivodship there is one UNESCO World Heritage site - it is Białowiecki National Park (which is also a biosphere reserve) and three sites protected under the international Ramsar Convention (protection of the most valuable wetlands) - Biebrzański National Park, the Narew National Park and the Wigierski National Park.

National parks in Podlaskie Voivodeship cover an area of 92,177 ha, which accounts for 4.6% of the region. They are all located in lowland areas with dominant flora and fauna, diverse tree stands and surface waters.

**Figure 2.** Landscape parks and 95 nature reserves (23692 ha)



**Source:** [www.wigry.org.pl](http://www.wigry.org.pl) › parki.

**Białowiecki National Park (BPN)** was created in 1921, and in 1932 it received legal grounds and became the first national park in Poland. The protected area is a refuge for a herd of a few hundred bison. From the Belarusian side, the forest areas are under strict protection with the status of a national park. Its area is 10,517 ha, of which 6059.27 ha are under strict protection. This area together with the area on the Belarusian side was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Białowiecki

National Park is the most valuable object in terms of nature of the Polish part of Białowieża Forest (Jalinik, 2017). The park has an extensive tourist infrastructure - numerous resting places, an open-air forest railway museum, terraces and observation towers, footbridges and educational boards. The BPN includes the Palace Park in Białowieża with buildings from the Tsarist times, the headquarters of the park management and the Education and Museum Centre.

The Park also manages the Bison Show Reserve, where the large animals inhabiting Białowieża Forest live and are exhibited. In the part of the park under partial protection, there are marked tourist trails: three walking and one bicycle, as well as educational paths. When choosing routes to visit Białowieża National Park, it is worth taking into account the facilities of the Forest Inspectorates of the State Forests in the vicinity - the Promotional Forest Complex "Białowieża Forest".

**Biebrzański National Park (BPN)** is one of the largest national parks in Poland in terms of area, covering 59233 ha. It was established in 1993 in order to protect the unique ecosystem and terrain on which it is located. The ecological values of the park are known throughout Europe, which is reflected, among others, in numerous visits of ornithologists during bird migration. Biebrzański National Park is a leader in terms of the richness of flora. It is one of the most mysterious areas in Poland and constitutes one of the richest bird sanctuaries in terms of species. There are nearly 270 species in the park, of which about 180 species nests on the Biebrza River.

Apart from numerous bird species, there are as many as 70 plant communities. The vascular plants alone have more than 950 species. The park is home to 48 species of mammals, with the largest of them - the moose, which survived the period of its extinction in the "Czerwone Bagno" (Red Swamp), and now can be found almost all over Poland. In the area of BNP and its buffer zone there are over 600 km of tourist trails - walking, cycling and canoeing ones. Among many bicycle routes, the "Podlaskie stork route" deserves special attention. Canoeing trips down the Biebrza River are organised, starting in Lipsko and ending in Wiżno on the Narew River. The symbol of the park is a battalion, which is included in its emblem.

**Wigierski National Park (WPN)** is situated on the northern edge of the Augustów Primeval Forest. It was established at the beginning of 1989 and is one of the largest Polish national parks. Its area is 15086 ha. Wigierski National Park together with other three parks located in Podlaskie Voivodeship cover more than 30% of the area of all national parks in Poland. In the area of Wigierski National Park there are 15 marked terrestrial tourist routes with the total length of 208 km and 47 km of water routes. Following the trails you can see the strongly undulating terrain with moraines, kames, eskers and rich flora and fauna. Tourist facilities include educational and cycling paths, observation towers and platforms, car parks, footbridges, footbridges on wetlands, shelters and resting places. There is also a rich accommodation base consisting of: hotels, guest rooms, agritourist farms, camping sites, guest rooms in the forester's lodges of the Wigierski National Park.

**Narwiański National Park (NPN)** was established in July 1996 and occupies an area of 7350 ha. The length of the coastline of the main channel of the Narew River, in a straight line, is about 45 km. It has countless bends where the river meanders, so the stretch is about 60 km. The park is an important bird sanctuary of European rank. Over 200 species of birds have been observed, 154 of which are breeding species. Many of them are in danger of extinction. The park is surrounded by hiking and cycling trails, and is surrounded by really charming villages and towns. You can spend all day wandering through the water maze, among the marshes, mineral islands and the sounds of waterfowl. The park can be visited by anyone seeking peace, quiet and contact with still wild nature. In many places you can stay overnight in numerous agrotourism farms.

There are also nature exhibitions, observation towers, camping places and an educational path called "A footbridge among the marshes". Canoes are available for tourists. An unforgettable experience may be a trip "Around Kurowo by kayak". A trip along the so-called "Narew ring road", which runs around the park, may prove equally attractive. The route is approximately 90 km long. It can be recommended to motorised tourists as well as persistent cyclists. The route is crossed in many places by hiking trails, which gives tourists a wide choice of options for exploring the area. National parks have been and still are undoubtedly tourist attractions, both for people seeking contact with nature in their area and for aesthetic impressions, traces of human activity or simply relaxation (Fennell and Nowaczek, 2010; Frost and Hall, 2009).

### **3. Research Methodology and Results**

Surveys carried out on sources of funding and development of tourism infrastructure in national parks have made it possible to analyse, equipment and condition of infrastructure in the parks mentioned. The specific nature of the tourism economy and industry is reflected in the way tourism infrastructure is used. Tourism infrastructure should be understood as a set of devices and institutions being a material and organisational base for tourism development. It includes five basic elements: accommodation, catering, sports and cultural facilities and tourist routes. It is also a tourist development of the tourist reception area, which conditions the use of tourist values. Some authors define it as a set of devices and institutions being the material and organizational base of tourism (Panasiuk, 2007). In view of this why the state of tourism infrastructure in each park is so important - because it determines its popularity and attractiveness.

Taking into account tourist values and attractions, further development of tourist infrastructure in the national parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship is necessary. On the state of tourism infrastructure in four national parks, surveys were carried out in November and December 2020. Research questionnaires containing 42 closed and open type questions on the functioning of the parks and sources of funds for the

development of tourism infrastructure were addressed to the managements of the parks. The author received 100% responses.

The main aim of the study was to obtain opinions on the development of tourism infrastructure in national parks in the Podlaskie voivodeship and sources of funds for its development. The specific goal was to find out the occurring problems related to the construction and development of tourist infrastructure and the interest of tourists in the parks' areas. Observation and inductive-deductive methods were used as well as specialized literature.

Another research problem is tourists' expectations related to visiting national parks in Podlaskie voivodeship. Two parks (Narwiański National Park and Biebrzański National Park) stated that tourists expected and still expect up-to-date information about the park, the possibility to use available tourist infrastructure and to learn about tourist attractions. In turn, in Białowiecki National Park tourists would like to learn about the most attractive tourist products, while in the Wigierski National Park tourists were most interested in forest habitats, surface waters (lakes, rivers), natural values and the park area.

An important issue is the frequency of visits to the parks. From among four parks, only the management of Biebrzański National Park stated that their park is not visited very often. The directors of two parks stated that the state of tourist infrastructure is well prepared. This is the opinion of Wigierski National Park and Białowiecki National Park, while Biebrzański and Narwiański National Parks require modernisation. However, all parks were in favour of the construction and development of tourist infrastructure. Tourist trails are an important element of tourist infrastructure. Their distribution in the national parks is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Hiking trails in national parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship*

<b>Types of hiking routes</b>	<b>Białowiecki National Park</b>	<b>Biebrzański National Park</b>	<b>Narwiański National Park</b>	<b>Wigierski National Park</b>
Walking trails	S	S	S	S
Cycle trails	S	S	S	S
Canoe trails	-	S	S	S
Ski trails	-	-	-	S
Educational trails	-	S	-	S

**Note:** S – it means that routes exist

**Source:** Compiled on the basis of surveys.

When building and developing tourism infrastructure, funds are necessary and hence there are problems with obtaining them, as stated by interviewers from three national parks, except for Wigierski National Park, where such problems were not indicated. Other problems were related to natural conditions, lack of maintenance staff and fear of pollution. Climate change was considered the greatest threat, according to the directorates of the Narwiański and Białowiecki National Parks. Other threats

included urbanization, drone flights without authorization, pressure to photograph wildlife, invasive species and human activities (poaching, littering, "wild" penetration of parks). As already mentioned for the construction of tourist infrastructure funds are necessary. For its construction, park directorates in 2019 obtained them from the following sources (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Sources of funding for tourism infrastructure construction in 2019

Origin of funds	Białowiecki National Park (in PLN)	Biebrzański National Park (in PLN)	Narwiański National Park (in PLN)	Wigierski National Park (in PLN)
1. National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW)	-	-	-	39.575,25
2. Forestry fund	173.268,34	563.146,34	-	222.995,82
1. The Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment (OPIiŚ)	-	-	8.688.416,97	-
2. Marshal's Office	5679,50	-	-	-
3. Danwood Company S.A. in Bielsk Podlaski	123.000,00	-	-	-
4. The Regional Operational Programme of the Podlaskie Voivodship	-	-	-	664.000,00
<b>Total</b>	<b>301.947,84</b>	<b>563.146,34</b>	<b>8.688.416,97</b>	<b>926.571,07</b>

*Source:* Compiled on the basis of surveys.

**Figure 3.** Sources of funding for the development of tourism infrastructure tourism infrastructure in 2019



*Source:* Data based on surveys.

National parks are financed from the central budget. However, some funds in 2019 were obtained from the Forest Fund, the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW), the Regional Operational Programme of the



Podlaskie Voivodeship, the Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment, the Marshal's Office and sponsors.

The research asked for the amount necessary for the construction and development of tourist infrastructure. The answers were unambiguous of all parks, the amount is minimum 50 thousand euro. With regard to the decision to allocate funds for the construction of tourist infrastructure, they were not unambiguous. Two parks stated that this decision is made by park directors (BPN, BPN) and two others that it is made by the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, the Ministry of Environment, the Centre for Coordination of Environmental Projects (CKPŚ) or forest inspectorates (WPN, NPN). The research confirmed that the directorates of all parks are willing to use the funds allocated for the construction of tourist infrastructure. As far as the preparation of projects is concerned, the Białowiecki National Park and the Wigierski National Park stated that they are willing to prepare such projects, but with different final results, while the other two parks did not answer this question. Significant support, as it was stated, should be financial means of local governments, but only the Biebrza National Park does not use such means, while the other three parks use such means. According to the Parks' directorates, tourist infrastructure is not subsidized.

The financial situation in 2020 was worse compared to 2019 regarding the sources of fundraising. There was a significant deterioration in the amount of money received by the parks. For comparison, in 2019 parks raised 10,480,082.22 PLN for the construction and development of tourism infrastructure, while in 2020 7,412,256.08 was received (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Sources of funds for the construction of tourist infrastructure in 2020

<b>Origin of funds</b>	<b>Białowiecki National Park (in PLN)</b>	<b>Biebrzański National Park (in PLN)</b>	<b>Narwiański National Park (in PLN)</b>	<b>Wigierski National Park (in PLN)</b>
1. National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (NFOŚiGW)	-	-	-	-
2. Forestry fund	<b>278.123,93</b>	<b>377.418,58</b>	-	<b>109.224,00</b>
3. The Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment (POLiŚ)	-	-	<b>5.790.336,19</b>	-
4. Marshal's Office	-	-	-	-
5. Danwood Company S.A. in Bielsk Podlaski	-	-	-	<b>857.153,38</b>
6. The Regional Operational Programme of the Podlaskie	<b>278.123,93</b>	<b>377.418,58</b>	<b>5.790.336,19</b>	<b>966.377,38</b>

Voivodship				
<b>Total</b>				

Source: Compiled on the basis of surveys.

Figure 4. Sources of funds for development Tourism infrastructure in 2020



Source: Data based on surveys.

There is also a question and a problem to be solved, whether tourism and recreation should develop in national parks. All respondents answered in the affirmative. On the other hand, there was no agreement as to the type of tourist infrastructure that should be developed in them. The expectations of the managing boards of national parks concerning the construction and development of tourist infrastructure are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Needs in the area of construction and development of tourist infrastructure in national parks of the Podlaskie Voivodeship for the coming years

Planowany rodzaj infrastruktury turystycznej	Białowiecki Park Narodowy	Biebrzański Park Narodowy	Narwiański Park Narodowy	Wigierski Park Narodowy
Walking paths	yes	-	yes	yes
Cycle paths	-	-	-	yes
Car parks	yes	yes	-	yes
Barbecue areas	-	yes	-	-
Lookout towers	-	-	yes	yes
Educational paths	-	-	-	yes

Note: yes – it means that there is a need to build or expand tourism infrastructure

Source: Compiled on the basis of surveys.

The purposefulness of building and developing tourist infrastructure is also an issue. However, the respondents stated that it improves physical and mental health, as well as leisure activities, as stated by the managements of Biebrzański and Wigierski National Parks. In the opinion of Białowiecki National Park it channels the tourist traffic by limiting anthropopressure, and in the opinion of Narewski National Park it only influences leisure activities. All respondents agreed that the park should serve

the local community and all visitors (scientists, students, pupils, nature lovers, and local community), because it is a national asset that should be skillfully used.

This opinion of the respondents indicates that all efforts should be made to ensure that the areas of parks are indeed used by the public and accessible, but with respect for the principles of nature protection, proper behaviour, walking on designated trails and roads, as well as not destroying undergrowth and littering with various waste products. Hence, recreation in unpolluted environments, such as national parks, should be promoted and used as much as possible. Their natural and landscape values should serve the public, and not only strive to admire the flora and fauna without the existing tourist infrastructure.

The respondents indicated that in the following years they will strive to develop beaches and bathing beaches, reconstruct footbridges and bridges with disabled access, build car parks and viewing platforms - such activities are planned to be undertaken by Wigierski National Park. Narewski National Park intends to modernise and extend the Mlynarzówka building, develop ecological education by extending the didactic base and improve the effectiveness of management of Natura 2000 areas and the Ramsar site. Białowiecki National Park would like to build several car parks and increase the number of footpaths. Biebrzański National Park intends to carry out similar projects, focusing mainly on building car parks and modernising the existing tourist infrastructure.

The parks are managed by directors and the Park Council is an advisory body. Until May 2004 the parks were supervised by the National Parks Board, and from 1 May 2004 its duties were taken over by the Ministry of the Environment - the Department of Forestry, Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection, and from 19 January 2007 the Independent Department for Natura 2000 Areas and National Parks took over. After the establishment of the General Directorate for Environmental Protection (GDOŚ) and Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection (RDOŚ) on October 15, 2008, the tasks resulting from the supervision of the Minister of Environment over national parks are fulfilled by the Nature Protection Department of the Ministry of Environment.

#### **4. Tourist Attractiveness of National Parks**

Tourist attractiveness is a complex and not always unambiguous concept. An area, region, town or specific object can be attractive to tourists. On the one hand, the tourist attractiveness of regions and tourist facilities is determined by objective factors, such as occurrence of natural and anthropogenic values or innovative elements of tourist and para-tourist infrastructure. On the other hand, the attractiveness of a given place is determined by the subjective perception of all these factors by tourists, investors and residents (Rapacz and Jaremen, 2011).

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The basic element of tourist attractiveness of national parks are tourist values and attractions. Attractiveness manifests itself through the existence of a specific characteristic that attracts tourists to a given area, thanks to the values of the natural landscape, climate, natural monuments, as well as various interesting objects of tourist development. The degree of tourist attractiveness of a given area or locality is mainly determined by Ozimek, Gralak, and Pomianek (2019):

- tourist attractions,
- tourism development,
- transport accessibility.

The concept of tourist attractions is closely related to tourist values. However, this term has not yet been clearly defined in the literature. Nowacki (2014) believes that tourist attractions can be understood in two ways:

- in a broad sense - tourist attractions, i.e., all features and elements of the environment (places, objects, and areas) that attract tourists;
- in a narrower sense, as visitor attractions, i.e., places, objects or small areas set aside from the surrounding space, functioning all year round and managed to be accessible to visitors.

However, it is often believed that tourist values become tourist attractions only after they have been adapted to the needs of tourism (Kiryłuk and Borkowska-Niszczoła 2009). In a broad sense, tourist attractions include all phenomena and objects which attract tourists, so not only elements and objects of nature and culture, but also the level of prices, the attitude of the local population towards tourists, tourist facilities with the entire technical infrastructure, and others. A tourist attraction may be any natural or cultural value or element of tourist development that attracts tourists to a particular place. A tourist attraction means an object or event of interest to tourists. Any object or event that is a tourist attraction should/should be distinguished by the following characteristics (Ozimek, Gralak, and Pomianek 2019):

- it attracts tourists;
- it has a core (nucleus), i.e., a distinguishing feature from other objects or events;
- it has a marker, i.e., relevant information about the core, so that the tourist knows about the existence of the attraction (e.g., information boards, description in a guidebook or other publication).

The occurrence of tourist values in national parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship is presented in Table 5. The table does not include tourist trails and paths.

**Table 5.** *Tourist values in national parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship*

<b>Rodzaje walorów turystycznych w Parkach</b>	<b>Białowiecki National Park</b>	<b>Biebrzański National Park</b>	<b>Narwiański National Park</b>	<b>Wigierski National Park</b>
Museum of Nature and Forestry	W	-	-	-
Museum of Osowiec Fortress	-	W	-	-
Archeological Museum and a medieval castle	-	-	W	-
Lookout towers	W	W	W	W
European Bison Show Reserve	W	-	-	-
Places of Power	W	-	-	-
Centre for Nature Education	W	-	-	-
Field Education Centre	-	W	-	-
Strict Protection Area	W	-	-	-
The Palace Park	W	-	-	-
Narew Gallery	-	-	W	-
Fort "Koziołek" from the 16th century	-	-	W	-
Nature Room	-	-	-	W
Ethnographic exhibition	-	-	-	W
"Wigry" Monastery Complex	-	-	-	W
Educational facility	-	-	-	W

**Note:** *W – it means that facilities exist in the area of parks*

**Source:** *Compiled on the basis of surveys.*

The research shows that Białowiecki National Park has the most values to offer to tourists. If we take into account also Białowieża Forest, the number of values and tourist attractions should satisfy all visitors. Białowiecki National Park is characterised by varied forest cover, while the other three parks in the buffer zone can offer attractions related to surface waters and agrotourism farms as well as the configuration of the terrain.

Tourist attractiveness is mainly influenced by the natural and harmonious arrangement of the four basic natural components (relief, surface waters, forest cover and vegetation), anthropogenic elements (although some architectural objects, such as monuments, are elements that make the natural landscape more attractive) and the extent of views and uniqueness of the landscape (at the same time the typicality of the landscape is also a valued value), as well as its variety. E. Laws pointed out that tourist attractiveness can be divided into two categories, i.e., primary (basic) attributes, which are attributed to the place, and secondary attributes, related to the tourist infrastructure present in the area (Laws, 1995; Viveiros de Castro, Beraldo Souza, and Thapa 2015).

## **5. Summary and Conclusions**

National parks are an important and popular tourist destination. As naturally valuable areas they are a place of great interest for tourists. Increasing tourist traffic in national parks of Podlaskie Voivodeship led to conducting research on the

attractiveness of parks, construction of tourist infrastructure and sources of funds for its development. Four national parks were analysed, i.e., Białowiecki, Biebrzański, Narewski and Wigierski National Parks. Research questionnaires on the state of tourist infrastructure in the four national parks and the financial resources obtained for its development were used for the study. The research tools were sent to the managements of the parks in paper form. The opinions made it possible to analyse the attractiveness and functioning of the parks with the existing tourist infrastructure, and to obtain information on the sources of obtaining funds for the development of infrastructure, as an important element of park attractiveness.

The research can contribute to the formation of promotional strategy in individual parks, and increasing tourist traffic can influence the development of a given area and greater interest in the natural environment, and consequently create new jobs for the local community. The research shows that the most developed tourist infrastructure is in Wigierski National Park. In the parks there are created tourist trails (walking, cycling, canoeing, skiing, and educational), which aim to increase the physical and mental fitness, as well as the ecological and natural environment of visitors. On the basis of studies, it is also possible to formulate a conclusion that the development of tourism infrastructure depends solely on the potential of park management staff.

Narewski National Park stood out as the most creative in raising funds for the development of tourism infrastructure in 2019-2020. The least funding in the period under review was obtained by Białowiecki National Park. In the first case this testifies to the efficiency of the park management, and in the second case it satisfies mediocrity. In the studied period there were many opportunities in raising funds for the development of tourism infrastructure, but this required commitment and dedication to visitors.

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