

## Local dimensions of cultural tourism

JOANNA MAŁEK

Warsaw University, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, Poland

### Abstract

Contemporarily, tourists are mainly interested in broadly understood culture. In the case of rural areas, manifestations of culture, previously discerned only by ethnographers, may be turned into their assets. Thus, preservation of the local heritage takes on an economic dimension, with all the positive and negative consequences it implies.

In the regional policies of the European Union, cultural tourism is regarded as a development opportunity for economically backward areas, the backwardness of which facilitates the preservation of old traditions. The strategic documents formulated at the Community level are reflected by activities undertaken by the Member States and the candidate countries – as part of the PHARE programmes. The author, based on the case study of the Mielnik gmina (municipality), situated in the Podlasie region in the poorly developed, north-eastern part of Poland, discusses some problems which may arise while trying to utilise the cultural potential as one of the local development factors in poorly developed rural areas.

**Key words:** local development, tourism, culture, Podlaskie voivodship (Poland)

### Overview

The regional policy of the European Union envisages – among other things – assistance in seeking solutions to alleviate the difficult economic situation of underdeveloped areas. In this context, multi-functional development of rural areas is frequently brought up. Tourism is one of the more frequently listed ways to diversify employment in such areas. Classical rural tourism, sometimes referred to as agritourism in the Polish literature of the subject, has until recently been identified with recreation “closer to nature”, with familiarising the town dwellers with the traditional farm, healthy food and unpolluted, yet specifically transformed natural environment. Currently, in response to the growing interest of tourists in the manifestations of culture characteristic for the visited areas, more and more attention is devoted to the material and non-material heritage, while preparing the tourist offer. Courses and demonstrations of traditional crafts or various types of folk events are frequently added to diversify the offer for tourists. A typical feature of the new approach to culture is to facilitate the visitors to have contact with it outside the open-air museum context. Tourists will frequently *participate*, instead of just passively admiring the exhibition in a museum. The positive aspect of the development of this type of tourism is an opportunity to

see phenomena which until then have been regarded as uninteresting. Local customs or traditional crafts which were earlier identified with backwardness (e.g. as in the approach presented in Kneafsey's article [1997] on Brittany, affected by a "complex of the rural") are rediscovered and brought back to life. The commercial aspect of the phenomenon, which is the driver behind it, is, unfortunately, also the source of its main problems. Many authors (e.g. Richards [1996b], Cosgrove [1992], Tucker [2001]), bring up the issue of the authenticity of "culture products" sold to tourists. Another problem may be the adoption of the visitors' culture – which is in most cases mass culture that might easily disturb the local culture – by the local residents. Attempts at minimising the damage of this kind are described, among others, by Tucker (2001). It should be borne in mind, however, that in the world dominated by laws of economy and mass culture, the commercial interests of tourists (regardless of the ethical evaluation) may be the only way to preserve the part of the heritage that is gradually sinking into oblivion.

The significance of cultural assets as a local or regional development factor may be overestimated. It is still too early to say. It cannot be denied however that the links between cultural heritage protection and the development of tourism are commonly encountered in the strategic documents formulated at all levels in the past few years. One of the authors to see it was Przybyszewska-Gudelis (2001), who emphasised that actions related to the elaboration and implementation of cultural tourism plans became an international issue. The basis for a suitable use of cultural assets, one that brings more benefits than losses, is, in her opinion, a thorough knowledge of them, shared by many. In the case of the cultural heritage in rural areas, only specialists have such knowledge. The "rural complex", mentioned above, is a very common phenomenon in Poland. Also, for the case in question, a conscious refusal to see the ethnic diversity and treating all inhabitants of Poland as a homogenous nation, characteristic for the centrally planned economy era, does matter to some extent. The study that follows was primarily intended to provide an answer to the question on how the local residents view the value of their own culture and, consequently, of local development, since – in the author's opinion – the attitude of the local community to its own heritage plays a major role in this respect.

#### **Relationships between cultural tourism and local development**

In the case of cultural tourism in rural areas, its local dimension is very important. The resources that might provide the basis for creating attractions for tourists are – at least potentially – best known at this level. It should be emphasised that, for contemporary tourists, cultural assets other than traditionally understood material heritage assets are regarded as more and more valuable. However, the traditional approach, whereby only historic monuments can be regarded as cultural attractions, is still dominant in many publications, while the contemporary definitions of cultural tourism considerably expand its scope. According to the "Encyclopaedia of Tourism" (2000), cultural tourism is "a commercialised manifestation of the human need to see how others live, to satisfy curiosity and wish to see other people in their "authentic" milieu and to see physical manifestations of their activity in art, crafts, music, literature, dancing, eating, having fun and performing rituals".

Such a broad classification of cultural assets, taking into account values that are directly related to the local community, including non-material ones such as customs, was proposed as early as 1978 by Ritchie and Sins (cf. Kruczek, Sacha 2000). In Polish literature, this approach was taken by Kołodziejczyk, who proposed her classification in 1979. Lowenthal (Richards 1996a) goes even further, making a point that in the era of post-modernism the range of heritage was extended to include modernity, which means that all forms of human activity are of interest to tourists. Since in this study the author analyses tourism in poorly developed rural areas, developing primarily based on the preserved manifestations of traditional culture, the approach presented in the "Encyclopaedia of Tourism" seems most appropriate to follow.

While the connection between any type of tourism with local development – be it positive or negative – is obvious, in the Polish context it is much more distinct in the case of cultural tourism than nature tourism. The table below presents the most pertinent features of those extreme (although not mutually exclusive) forms of tourism.

Tab. 1 Relationships between cultural tourism and local development

Nature tourism	Cultural tourism
Assets largely independent of the local community	Assets connected with local community
Usually protected areas, often having supra-local importance	Locally-centred activity
State ownership, weak sense of identification of the local community	Frequently private ownership, stronger identification of the local community
Access through intermediaries	Specific "producer" and "first seller"
Income generated outwards	A large portion of income retained locally
Popular belief in the society in the need of nature protection	No such belief in the society vis a vis broadly understood cultural assets
No threat of universalisation	Threat of universalisation of culture
If it stimulates local dimension, it is primarily so in economic terms	Stimulates local development also in cultural terms (sense of cultural identity, preservation of heritage, etc.)
Strongly seasonal character	Frequently use of assets possible throughout the year
Relatively easy to create a tourist product (evident assets)	Sometimes very difficult to create a tourist product (often hidden assets)

Source: Joanna Małek

The table shows that the stronger "localness" of cultural tourism can also generate some negative phenomena. The above reflection applies to rural areas. In the case of towns, the situation is different, owing to the dissimilar character of the assets involved. This remains outside the sphere of interest of this study.

Nuriyanti (1996) observes that cultural tourism most strongly affects local development in countries and regions which are economically underdeveloped. It has already been mentioned that underdevelopment quite often facilitates the preservation

of heritage. This means that the problem and its potential solution may have the same source. If such a form of tourism is to contribute to the local development, the product must be offered by local residents, and not by intermediaries. In formulating the recommendations for sustainable tourism, which should also include cultural tourism in rural areas, Iwicki (2001) and Gaworecki (2000) point to the need to ensure the involvement of the local population in both activities and profits (economic, ethical and social) and to create opportunities for contacts which would be enriching both for the visitors and the visited. The first recommendation pertains not only to economic gains, since such involvement and social participation also increases the acceptance of the local community and is transposed not only into the material aspect of its development. In the latter case, protection of indigenous cultural assets against the destructive influence of mass culture is particularly important. It is not possible to eliminate completely such negative impacts, even if contact with visitors is reduced to a minimum. Therefore, the optimal solution would be a middle-of-the-road one, with limited impacts, to ensure that the gains balance the losses. This is an extremely difficult issue, which the author would not wish to discuss in the present study. Tucker's article describing such an equilibrium in one of the tourist destinations in Capadocia, quoted above, can be regarded as an apt illustration of this problem.

The local community very frequently generates a product (in such manifestations of culture as crafts or customs), and, in the case of non-material culture manifestations, it is also frequently its carrier. For this reason, the characteristics of the receiving community (knowledge of, and attitude to the cultural heritage, entrepreneurship, level of interference from the outside, etc.) is one of the crucial internal factors driving the development of such a form of tourism. It determines not only the form (quality) of the initial product, but also its development prospects and impact on the broadly understood local development.

In view of the above considerations, studies in cultural tourism as a factor of local development were commenced with one of Poland's economically poorest areas, where the unique material and non-material heritage has been preserved.

#### **Podlaskie – regional characteristics**

The Podlaskie voivodship (province) is situated in north-eastern Poland. In the east, it borders with Lithuania and Belarus. It is the sixth largest voivodship in the country, with an area of 20,180 km<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, it is the least populated region, with average population density of 60 people per 1 km<sup>2</sup>, versus the country's average of 124. Among its 36 towns, small towns prevail, very seldom with populations in excess of 20,000. The largest town, and the region's capital, is Białystok (285,000).

Podlaskie is a predominantly agricultural region. This sector, and the related food-processing industry, are the major components of the production structure. Due to the poor quality soils and the short vegetation period, coupled with a low level of economic development, agriculture in the region is not very productive. Hidden unemployment remains very high. Migration from villages to towns and seasonal work abroad is very common. Many of 3,947 villages have less than 100 population. The

outflow of the young, especially women, is the cause of the depopulation of the rural areas. Over the past few years, three settlement units have disappeared from the map of the region.

Poor development of infrastructure, bad condition of transport links, inherited from the past as well as the peripheral location along the future EU border make the voivodship one of the country's least attractive regions for investment. In this respect, the situation of the border belt, the so-called "eastern wall", is the most unfavourable. The zone with a width of several dozen kilometres, bordering on the former Soviet Union countries and stretching along the entire eastern border has for many years been neglected for strategic reasons. Currently, these areas are the least populated and affected by most severe economic problems.

Owing to the low level of the region's development, lack of industry and deposits, the mining of which might negatively affect the condition of the natural environment, the natural assets of the region are extremely high. 32% of the region's area is under legal protection. Among Podlasie's national parks is the Biebrza National Park with Europe's largest marshland areas and the Białowieża National Park, considered a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Part of the Podlaskie voivodship makes up the so-called "Poland's Green Lungs", embracing unpolluted and valuable areas in the north-east of the country.

These assets are known and already utilised in tourism. However, less attention has been devoted so far to the cultural diversity of the region, which is unique on the scale of Poland. For centuries back, different ethnic and religious groups have settled in this area, which many times throughout its history was incorporated into different countries. Three diverse cultural regions border here, namely Podlasie, Mazowsze and the former Prussia. Here, the ethnical diversity is the highest in Poland. The region is inhabited by Poles, Belarussians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Tatars, Roma and Jews. Each of these ethnic groups have had its share in the shaping of the cultural landscape in this area. Unique – not only on the Polish scale – is the heritage of the Tatar settlers, whose descendants still live in Białystok and several villages on the Belarussian border. Podlasie has also the famous Holy Mount Grabarka, a pilgrimage site, whose significance for Orthodox Christians can be compared to that of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa for Roman Catholics.

The voivodship's development strategy for the years 2000–2006, which constitutes the basis for granting EU structural assistance, names – among others – "support to folk and amateur culture, folklore and handicrafts, taking into account the specific ethnic, national and religious diversity of the Podlaskie voivodship and its promotion in Poland and abroad". The cultural diversity of the region, coupled with poor economic situation, renders activities for the development of cultural tourism quite well justified in this case.

The wealth of these areas with respect to cultural assets that can be the drivers of the development of tourism, was brought to light in the publication "Strategy of the Development of Tourism in the Bug River Podlasie" (Kowalczyk, Lewkowicz 1995). These authors observe that tourist functions in these area (mainly connected with sight-seeing and pilgrimage tourism) appeared at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the inter-war period, sojourn tourism developed, which was connected with hiring lodgings

with the local population. The Mielnik gmina, the subject of the study in question, is located in south-eastern part of the voivodship. For this gmina, the aforementioned programme document envisages multi-functional rural development, taking into account rural tourism.

### **Characteristics of the Mielnik gmina**

The Mielnik gmina is located in south-eastern part of the Podlaskie voivodship. Its southern border lies on the Bug river, while in the east the voivodship borders on Belarussia. In an area of 196.2 km<sup>2</sup> lives a population of 3,000, with one third of this number in the village of Mielnik, once (between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century) an important town. The majority of the gmina residents seek employment outside agriculture, which is not very profitable. Part of the population work in different jobs in the nearby town of Siemiatycze, several dozen people are employed in the Chalk Production Plant in the village of Mielnik. The gmina authorities estimate that about 150 people permanently stay abroad as seasonal workers. This problem pertains to the entire region. For example, Siemiatycze maintains a regular bus connection with Belgium. The positive aspect of this phenomenon is the learning of foreign languages, popular with the local people, primarily French. Taxes paid by the petroleum pumping station represent an important source of the gmina revenues. Currently it is under reconstruction and most of accommodation in Mielnik is rented to in-coming workers.

Until now, the interest of tourists in the gmina has resulted mainly from its natural and landscape resources. They are used to a considerably smaller extent than on the other bank of the Bug, where the Bug Landscape Park is located. In practical terms, cultural tourism is limited to sight-seeing several out of several dozen material heritage sites located along the typical excursion routes: Góra Zamkowa [Castle Mount], the Orthodox church and the Chalk Production Plant in Mielnik, in addition to the historic church in Tokary. Notice boards on the churches, maps of the area and promotional materials are practically nonexistent. There is no local guide on the spot, and the knowledge of the area among external guides is usually restricted to the location of major historic sites. Many town dwellers come to live here, mainly from Warsaw. In this way, the Wajków settlement on the Bug has been colonised by retired artists. In Mielnik, about 20 farms have been taken over by new owners. Many of the newcomers have different kinds of relationships with art.

For several years now, folk events have been organised in the summer: the Mielnik Days and the Musical Dialogues on the Bug. Initially, they were supposed to promote the local culture, yet they have been gradually transformed into mass events. In the local Culture Centre, demonstrations of handicrafts and poetry evenings are organised. Their reach, however, is limited to the adjoining areas.

In the gmina, there operates a folk group, "Mielniczanki". At the moment, it is composed of four elderly people. The young show no interest in this form of preserving tradition.

In the area, traditions related to Orthodox church feasts are still very vivid. Many women, primarily older ones, make embroidery and laces, but they are mainly used for decoration of their own houses or as gifts for friends and relatives.

The research findings presented in Kowalczyk and Lewkowicz's article, quoted earlier, indicate that as early as in 1993 the local authorities were aware of the gmina's potential for tourism and embarked upon various activities to utilise it. Among other things, many plots were reserved for tourism-related housing. The gmina itself owns several facilities. The assessment of the present situation calls for further analysis, yet the main problems highlighted in the 1995 study: lack of sufficient tourist information, lack of relevant signs on most of tourist trails, poor information about the region's history and popularisation of cultural assets have not been solved as yet.

The gmina development strategy lists tourists' interests in natural and cultural assets as one its top priorities. The document further proposes specific solutions, such as the use of religious and historic sites for international tourism. However, in reality, no impact of such solutions can be seen so far.

### **Analysis of findings from research conducted in the Mielnik gmina in 2003**

#### **Introduction**

The discussion below is based on observations made by the author on the spot, interviews with local residents, analysis of literature and strategic documents as well as analysis of surveys carried out in May 2003. 98 persons took part in the survey; they were both local opinion leaders and randomly selected residents. The detailed analysis of the research material exceeds the scope of this article. It should also be observed that many issues call for further analysis (as will be mentioned in the text), since the conducted research was a part of a broader programme, planned to cover four gminas located in different regions of Poland, characterised by different potentials and degrees of utilisation of their cultural assets. The surveys will be supplemented with in-depth interviews with local opinion leaders.

#### **Key findings**

As it has been mentioned before, its natural environment is the principal tourist asset of the gmina. The gmina has a large potential for the development of cultural tourism, but there are no signs of its being realised. There is no information about material heritage sites, either in the form of promotional leaflets (the few existing ones are hardly accessible and of poor quality) and information notice boards. Access to tourist facilities is frequently limited. Let us take, for instance, the historic 18<sup>th</sup> century Orthodox church in Mielnik. The Orthodox priest named it as the only one worth seeing tourist attraction in the vicinity, and added that one might manage to see it if one "goes about, asks and knocks long enough". For the author of this study, it took three times before she was successful. Another issue is the lack of a qualified tourist guide. The author was even once asked by a person guiding an excursion about the information on the location of one of the key attractions of Mielnik – the Castle Mount. This also proves that the scope of publications about the area, accessible outside the gmina, is not sufficient. There are not promotional materials and notice boards describing the

dazzling history of this region (it has already been mentioned that what is now the village of Mielnik for several centuries was a town of more than just local significance). An apparently banal issue is the lack of local postcards, which tourists frequently wish to buy (information obtained from assistants in Mielnik shops).

While in 1993 the gmina had a development strategy for tourism, at the present moment the staff of the Gmina Office did not confirm the existence of such a document. On the other hand, the aforementioned provisions in the general gmina development strategy were related to this sphere.

Another interesting phenomenon is the influx of new settlers from towns, primarily Warsaw. They are a self-contained community, and while no manifestations of conflict between them and the local community can be seen, neither are the two groups interested in one another. The newcomers are not interested in the development of tourism in the neighbouring area. The issue of local development does not apply to them because they derive their income from elsewhere, while the backwardness of the gmina is largely to their liking.

Lack of interest of the native residents in the local culture is well visible. One of the "Mielniczanki" folk group pointed to the lack of profits from this type of activity as the most serious problem. At the same time, the passive attitude to reality is the prevalent one, despite the frequently stated difficult financial situation. These observations were corroborated by the survey findings discussed below.

In all probability, there exist conflicts hampering the development of private business, however this would require confirmation.

#### **Review of survey findings**

The survey was primarily aimed to answer the question as to how the local community perceived its own cultural assets and what kind of problems might appear while trying to develop cultural tourism. The survey consisted of 15 questions, most of them open-ended. The respondents were encouraged to express their opinions freely and to quote all associations they might have with a given problem. Thus, many surveys were transformed into in-depth interviews, which were carefully written down. Below is a review of the most frequent responses.

In the case of the first question: Is the gmina where you live attractive for tourists? The most of the respondents chose the answer: Very Attractive (the remaining answers, "Medium Attractive" and "Not Attractive", were given only in several cases). The next question asked the respondents to list the most important tourist assets of the gmina. The responses given were the following:

##### *What are the key tourist assets of the Mielnik gmina?*

The Bug river	49 responses
Nature	45 responses
Landscape	43 responses
Historic monuments	35 responses
No pollution	25 responses



The vast majority of the respondents pointed to natural assets and assets indirectly related to the quality of natural environment (lack of pollution) as the key attractions of the gmina. This answer corresponds to the evaluation of the situation in Podlasie near the Bug River (Podlasie Nadbużańskie) made in 1993 by Kowalczyk and Lewkowicz (1995). One person pointed to the cultural and ethnic diversity, and one – to the wealth of traditional crafts and customs.

The subsequent question asked about the most significant manifestations of the local culture. Below is a review of the most frequently given answers:

*What are the key manifestations of the local culture?*

Festivals (Mielnik Days, Music Dialogues on the Bug)	63 responses
Local customs and traditions	27 responses
Crafts / handicrafts	23 responses

A large majority of the respondents listed folk events organised every summer. However, they are gradually losing the originally intended character of an event promoting the cultural diversity in favour of mass culture (this was pointed out by several respondents). The interviews also implied that the local residents mainly saw these events as an attraction. The local folklore is definitely losing in the encounter with “exotic” folklore. The only artists listed as ones taking part in the aforementioned events included a Polish popular singer and an African folk group. It can be said therefore that the broadly conceived dialogue between cultures is mainly true for the performers, while the audience chiefly hopes for entertainment.

Even though artefacts crafted by local craftsmen can be found in nearly every household, the respondents had problems with talking about it. In most cases, it took some “guiding” by the pollster. Therefore it seems quite likely that it implies certain underestimation of the value of indigenous heritage, observable also in other situations. Its appreciation is possible only through people from the outside. In the case of the third listed response, most respondents indicated customs and traditions related to the Orthodox church (primarily in connection with Christmas and Easter). During one of the interviews, the author learned that the waning of the Catholic custom to visit the houses as Christmastide was connected with the ban imposed many years ago by one of the priests.

Even though the number of such responses was not large, in the author’s opinion it should be noted that 12 of the respondents listed, as cultural attractions, an art gallery in the former synagogue and 10 – a professional potter. The gallery is run by retired artists who moved to Mielnik several years ago. It exhibits quality art, recognised in Poland and abroad and is seldom visited by local residents. The same applies to the professional artist, listed as frequently. None of the local craftsmen was as distinctly recognised as the Warsaw-born artist, selling his works outside Mielnik. Only one of the respondents admitted seeing his works.

According to the local residents, the festivals (51 responses) are the area’s cultural attractions that are of most interest to tourists. Merely 11 respondents indicated the Castle Mount in Mielnik (a hill with historic ruins), even though it is the most popular tourist

destination. 49 people admitted that the local culture has values which are not used in tourism, even though they well could. In this context, crafts, traditions and music were listed. The question as to how these resources could be used elicited very few different answers. 11 respondents expressed opinions on the need to organise production and sale of handicrafts. The authors heard from the respondents that formerly Cepelia, a state enterprise, took care of this. Other proposals included organisation of a facility to exhibit and sell handicrafts and to promote the gmina. What the responses had in common was the form, pointing to third persons as those people who should undertake relevant activities. Many people began their statements with words "should be done" or "somebody should". Five respondents even said directly that "the right person should be found". The context of these statements suggested that these people could not see any such person among the local community. Some opinions were ventured that the local people highly value peace and even if they create artefacts, they do not necessarily want to share them with others. The pessimistic opinion expressed by the Orthodox priest should be mentioned here, since he ought to be regarded as a local opinion leader owing to the size of the parish (more than half of the gmina's population). The priest refused to be interviewed on the grounds that there was nothing left in the local culture that was worth preserving. A teacher from the Mielnik school expressed a doubt shared by many researchers of cultural tourism, that "the local culture could at best be recreated, but in this case it would not be authentic". Several respondents ventured quite original ideas of specific activities – organisation of cart rides or shows with the participation of spectators, featuring wedding traditions or a typical day from the past.

The respondents unanimously agreed that the development of cultural tourism should be supported. In their opinion, such support should be provided by the local authorities (79 responses, a vast majority) and by the local population (20 responses) and should take a financial (55 responses) and organisational (34 responses) form. Only three respondents mentioned education. Very few respondents were able to list any activities related to cultural tourism in the gmina, even though a definite majority of them agreed that the development of such a form of tourism would primarily produce benefits. However, mainly financial benefits, from renting accommodation, were listed here, which may mean that, in the minds of the local residents, cultural tourism does not differ in any way from other forms of recreation. The visitors are looked at as revenues from accommodation. Other potential gains, such as making the life of the local community more diverse, satisfaction with the interest shown by visitors or preservation of the local heritage was only sporadically listed. In addition, the respondents were not able to see any dangers that might accompany the development of this form of tourism. In this context, only possible typical damages related to the presence of a large number of strangers were listed, such as littering or acts of hooliganism. Several respondents could see the danger of disseminating negative behaviour patterns among the local youth, hungry for contacts with the outside world and very susceptible to pathologies, commonly associated with urban life.

## Summary and conclusions

Preliminary research in the Mielnik gmina confirms the existence of problems typical of poorly developed rural areas. The local cultural heritage is underestimated (a phenomenon noticed by researchers), while mass culture is much more appreciated. Frequently the local residents fail to appreciate elements of the local culture as being too "ordinary", such as handicrafts, very popular in the area. There is a shortage of ideas how to make use of the local resources, and no initiatives are displayed in this respect. A sizeable group of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their financial situation. However, the only perceived "innovative" way to address this problem was going abroad to do seasonal work. The local community looks to external assistance, primarily in the financial form. Many research studies, including an analysis of a PHARE project promoting the development of cultural tourism in Swołowo, (Słupsk gmina) have proved that success is not possible without active participation and resourcefulness of the local population.

Town-dwellers coming to settle down here, as more educated and knowledgeable, could set a positive example for the local community, but they have no interest in doing so. For them, Mielnik is a retreat from noisy city life and an increased influx of tourists would be against their best interests. Local residents and new settlers represent two separate groups. Possibly those Mielnik residents who emigrated to towns many years ago and are now coming back to spend their retirement here (several people so far) might be seen as a development opportunity for the gmina.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the phenomenon that could be dubbed the "vicious circle" of cultural tourism can be observed in the Mielnik gmina. The indigenous, rich heritage is disappearing. The only chance of its preservation probably lies in the interest shown by visitors, which would be converted into financial benefits. Well-educated youth who, in theory might amend this situation are emigrating to towns, whereas new settlers coming from towns, are not interested in changing the status quo. The gmina is not promoting its cultural assets either outwardly or among the local dwellers (there is the Culture Centre, but its impact among the local population is rather small). It is difficult to attract tourists with no such promotion. It has to be admitted that tourist traffic in the area is maintained owing to natural assets (in the village of Mielnik alone there is accommodation for 130 persons), but local development is not limited to economic profit alone. Appreciation of the richness of their own heritage would facilitate its preservation by the local residents. It might also affect the attitudes of people who, proud to be residents of Mielnik, would seek solving their difficult financial situation on the spot rather than elsewhere in the world.

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