

## Tłumaczenie artykułów

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### Multiculturalism of Podlasie Region and the Possibility of its Use in Tourism

**Key words:** multiculturalism, Podlasie, tourism, cultural tourism

#### Abstract

Multiculturalism, understood as coexistence of many cultures, can significantly increase attractiveness of a particular area for tourists, and thus become the impulse for developing tourism-related features and for promoting the area for cultural tourism. Podlasie, as a contemporary administrative region, is not only an area of outstanding natural beauty, but it is also unique among Polish regions because of the diverse cultures coexisting in this region for many centuries. In the Podlasie region you can find many sites reflecting the area's multiculturalism, in terms of both ethnic and religious aspects. The purpose of this paper is to present some of them and to show the potential of Podlasie for development of various forms of cultural tourism.

#### Introduction

Tourism is inseparably connected with culture, because – as emphasized by K. Przeclawski [2009, p. 22] – it is “(...) *human behaviour related to physical, social and cultural sphere*”. Therefore we can talk about tourism as a function of culture, element of culture, transfer of culture, meeting of cultures, as well as a factor which can cause cultural transformations [Przeclawski 1994]. Alternatively, due to the difficulty in making clear distinction between the above relations between tourism and culture, we can “(...) *make a simplified assumption that tourism, on the one hand is an attribute of culture, and on the other hand it is a factor transforming culture*” [Kowalczyk 2008, p. 11].

Culture, both in the broad and more narrow meaning of the word, is increasingly often an object of interest for travellers who are motivated to take trips by the need for contrast and escape, by curiosity for “otherness” which is frequently equated with “strangeness” [Podemski 2005]. This „*fascinating otherness, distinctiveness, diversity attracts not only (...) the so-called genuine travellers, but also “/.../may definitely be an attraction for tourists craving for exotic adventures as well as searching and longing for that which is authentic*” [Jarnecki 2011, p. 9]. Therefore, tourists are particularly drawn to visit regions which are different in terms of culture as well as those in which diverse cultures exist side by side.

The purpose of this study is to present the multicultural aspect of Podlasie region, which holds a lot of unrealized potential for the development of cultural tourism. The term Podlasie, as it is used in this paper, refers to the administrative region called *Województwo Podlaskie*. The authors adopted this approach for pragmatic reasons, even though they are aware of the fact that the present-day Podlaskie Voivodeship is not identical with the historical region of Podlasie.

#### Concept of multiculturalism and its significance in tourism

According to *Encyklopedia PWN* (encyclopaedia of Polish Scientific Publishers) [<http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3995791/wielokulturowosc.html>, 6.04.2013], *wielokulturowość* – concept, which is derived from the English term multiculturalism, comprises three meanings:

- 1) in its descriptive plane it indicates multitude of cultures; multiculturalism therefore indicates the objective fact of cultural diversity existing in a given society or the fact that in the world there is a variety of ethnic cultures, religious groups, subcultures, etc.;
- 2) it also relates to administrative policies aimed at eliminating social tensions resulting from cultural diversity of a given population;
- 3) this is also a name of a certain doctrine, movement or even philosophy. In the latter case multiculturalism denotes operations carried out by minorities, aimed at emancipation and increased involvement of various communities in social, political and cultural life of the country.

Similarly E. Puchnarewicz [2010] emphasizes that multiculturalism, on the one hand means simply cultural diversity, i.e. the occurrence of a number of cultures within a specified area, and on the other – the term refers to a society whose members come from various ethnic or religious groups and depicts their relationships as well as the solutions applied by the state to regulate their mutual relations. From the standpoint of a tourist, the first meaning of multiculturalism is most important, as it describes the phenomenon where „(...) within the same area (or in immediate proximity, with no clear boundaries, or when aspiring to occupy the same area), there coexist two or more social groups with diverse and distinctive cultural qualities: external looks, language, religious denomination, system of values, which contribute to mutual perception of otherness with varying results” [Gołka 1997, pp. 54-55]. Operations performed by authorities to maintain multiculturalism in a population may be important for keeping up the tourism-related functions of a given area. Importantly, multiculturalism and the resulting cultural heritage must be accepted by a local community. Only then will they receive a permanent place in the catalogue of the nation’s cultural assets, or they will be rediscovered and restored. Indeed, efforts aimed at protection and promotion of heritage which is forgotten, unwanted and deprived of successors, usually encounter great obstacles [Owsiakowska 2010].

Co-existence of various cultures is a consequence of cultural contact resulting from conquest, colonization, annexation or migration [Paleczny 2002]. Treating multiculturalism as cultural diversity, A. Śliz and M.S. Szczepański [2011] point out two particularly significant aspects of the phenomenon. Firstly, we can distinguish the so-called ethnic multiculturalism, i.e. identity based on qualities originating from the heritage of the past, and secondly – non-ethnic multiculturalism which is a result of democratization of social life. On the other hand S. Fish [1997] distinguishes “strong multiculturalism” and “boutique multiculturalism”. The former requires deep respect for all cultures co-existing at a given territory, since each of them is entitled not only to establish its own collective identity but may also define standards for rationalism and humanism. The latter is characterized by a superficial attachment to different traditions, which as a consequence leads to simple saturation of the social sphere with symbols designed to identify the cultural diversity of the area. Such symbols include, e.g. restaurants offering regional menus, festivals or cultural events showcasing some aspects of the region’s cultural otherness [Fish 1997; Śliz, Szczepański 2011].

Undoubtedly, cultural diversity may significantly increase attractiveness of a given area for tourists, and therefore, it may be an impulse for developing tourism-related functions and for promotion of a region for broadly understood cultural tourism. Therefore, as it has been pointed out by S. Owsiakowska [2010], various initiatives carried out to promote and encourage exploration of heritage of various ethnic and national groups increasingly often include such project as, e.g. *Małopolska of Many Cultures: Mirrors* – promoting the knowledge of Lemko, Slovak, Romani and Hungarian people inhabiting this region; thematic routes (e.g. Wooden Architecture Route, Trail of Carpathian Churches,

Tatarian Route, Kashubian Route); cultural events (e.g. Festival of Jewish Culture in Kraków, Lemko Watra in Zdynia, Festival of Three Cultures in Włodawa, “Galicja” Multicultural Festival in Przemyśl, “Neighbours” Polish-German-Ukrainian Festival in Trzebiatów). Operations aimed at maintaining cultural diversity and at promoting a region (town/village) as a tourist destination are met with particularly positive response in the case of areas with the so-called ethnic multiculturalism. The following examples present places in Poland and abroad, where multiculturalism is one of the factors generating tourist traffic.

### **Example 1 - Jerusalem (Israel)**

Jerusalem, the capital and the largest city of Israel, is located in the historical area of Judea, between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea. Even though it holds the official seat of the president, most national administrative offices, parliament and other important institutions, Jerusalem is not recognized by the United Nations and most countries (because none of these have their embassy here but in Tel Aviv).

Jerusalem is a holy city, and the only city in the world which is called by seventy names expressing love and longing [<http://www.goisrael.pl>, 1.05.2013]. Its history spans many ages, and it is the central place for Judaism, and Christianity and a significant place for Islam. In accordance with the Act passed by the Israeli parliament (Knesset) in 1980 (Basic Law of Jerusalem), the holy places of all religions are inviolable here, and the state of Israel ensures free access to them.

Of central importance for followers of Judaism is the Wailing Wall (or Western Wall), the only relic of the old Temple of Jerusalem originally built in the times of King Solomon. Synagogues throughout the world are oriented towards this particular structure, and during their daily prayers Jewish people traditionally turn towards Jerusalem.

Jerusalem also continues to be a holy place for Christians of specific factions and denominations. Pilgrims' itineraries follow places connected with the traditions of the Old Testament (heritage shared with Judaism), and those related to Jesus Christ and events depicted on the pages of the New Testament. It was Jerusalem that Jesus was brought to shortly after he was born, and during his later life his path frequently led to the Temple of Jerusalem.

Christians most of all visit the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre (in addition to the stone from the grave, it comprises the Golgotha with reliquary of the True Cross); and they also walk through Jerusalem retracing the Way of the Cross (Via Dolorosa).

Followers of Islam recognize Jerusalem as the third holiest city. Muslims believe that Muhammad made a “Night Journey” from Mecca to the Farthest Mosque located in Jerusalem (Masjid al-Aqsa). It is also believed that Muhammad ascended to heaven accompanied by Archangel Jibreel from a rock located in Jerusalem; today the site holds the Dome on the Rock. These two structures located on the Temple Mount are particularly important sites for all Muslims throughout the world.

Multiculturalism of Jerusalem is visible in the four quarters of the Old City: Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Armenian. Each of these has distinctive qualities and atmosphere which can be seen in the diversity of religious structures, commercial and catering facilities as well as residents' lifestyles. Depending on the part of the city, we can hear Arabic music or Jewish singing (performed exclusively by men, as it is not appropriate for women to sing), or words of greeting either *As-salam alaykum* or *Shalom*!

Interesting comment related to the capital of Israel was posted by a traveller on his blog [<http://www.tomontheroof.com/blog/jerozolima/>, 28.04.2013]. According to him “*real Jerusalem does not only provoke reflection but is also surprising and shocking. (...) the noise of explosions coming from the Gaza Strip has just stopped but no one knows for how long...*” This is what Jerusalem is like; a city which regardless of the passage of time continues to

fascinate and inspire, but can also cause fear; a city which in old maps appears as the world's centre, yet continues to be admired like a young bride [<http://www.goisrael.pl>, 1.05.2013].



**Photo. 1. Wailing Wall (Western Wall) – the only relic of the old Temple of Jerusalem**

*Source: photo by Piotr Kociszewski (April 2011)*

### **Example 2 - Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh, India)**

With its three thousand year long history, Varanasi – located on the Ganges – is one of the oldest continuously populated cities in the world. According to a legend it was established by the God Shiva, and as a result it is one of the holiest places for followers of Hinduism. *“It is assumed that Varanasi is a spiritual capital of India, just like Częstochowa in our country. At the same time Muslims and followers of religions other than Hinduism account for over 30% of its population”* [Flodrowski 2010, p. 14]. Varanasi is also a significant destination for Buddhist pilgrims, because of the nearby Sarnath (Deer Park), where the Buddha preached his first sermon and where he stayed several times during the wet season. This is one of the four holiest Buddhist sites (besides the places of birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha), and the location where the Buddha gave his teachings is marked with Dhamek Stupa [Zaborowska (ed.) 2006].

Varanasi is not only a major place for pilgrimages, each year drawing millions of followers of Hinduism and Buddhism; it is also an important centre for broadly understood cultural tourism and it attracts travellers from all over the world with its diversity, and unique features so distinctively differing from the culture of the Occident. The greatest assets of Varanasi are located along the banks of the Ganges. *“Here we can see the major temples of the city, the most impressive palaces and most importantly the famous ghats”* [Flodrowski 2010, p. 120], i.e. the steps leading to the river, used by the Hindus for performing ritual ablutions (e.g. Dashashwamedh Ghat) and as places of cremation (Manikarnika Ghat). On the other hand, major complexes of temples are to be found in areas farther away from the river. In fact, Indian people recognize Varanasi as a “city of temples” because of the large number of sites connected with various religions.

Yet, as it was rightly pointed out in the guidebook by T. Flodrowski [2010], the unique atmosphere of the place is not only a result of the sites and their amazing atmosphere, but it is mainly created by people, the Hindus, Muslims, Jains and Sikhs. “During a walk along the Ganges one is constantly bewildered with the variety of colours, scents and people encountered along the way. Fishermen, shepherds, priests, craftsmen, guides, merchants,

carriers, pilgrims, tourists – all of these can be seen along the Ganga (Ganges – note: M.D.) every day. It is enough to sit down on ghat steps and look at pilgrims immersed in the river, priests delivering their prayers or widows waiting to depart from this world, to see life in its most genuine form stripped of all pretence and disguises” [Flodrowski 2010, p. 124].

### Example 3 – The Bieszczady Mountains (Poland)

The Bieszczady Mountains rank among Poland's most beautiful regions and their natural attributes are most often emphasized because the area is *“/.../recognized as Europe's oasis of wildlife which has reclaimed its former habitats”* [www.wrota.podkarpackie.pl/turystyka/atraccje/ bieszczady/bieszczady, 18.06.2010]. Yet, we should remember that for a few hundred years the area of the Bieszczady had been populated with various nationalities and ethnic groups (e.g. Poles, Ukrainians, Bojko people, Vlachs, Jews, Germans and Greeks) who represented various religions (Greek-Catholicism, Roman Catholicism, Evangelical Protestantism and Judaism). During the interwar period, the Bieszczady were one of Poland's most varied regions in terms of nationalities, ethnicity and religions. The situation changed radically as a result of World War II (mainly due to extermination of Jewish populations) and events occurring shortly after the war (forced relocation of Bojko people). Despite the fact that efforts aimed at repopulating the Bieszczady after WWII were unsuccessful in terms of both number of new inhabitants and – even more importantly - national and religious diversity, remnants of the previously long-standing multiculturalism are still visible in the architecture and art of the region, most of all in the wooden and brick tserkovs and churches (e.g. tserkovs in Równia, Smolnik, Czarna and Hoszów as well as churches in Łobozew, Średnia Wieś and Lutowska), which undoubtedly contributes to the cultural attractiveness of the Bieszczady. Thematic routes, which have been delineated, bear witness to the multicultural features of that area (e.g. Wooden Architecture Route, Chassidic Route) [Durydiwka 2011]. Nevertheless, due to the significantly impoverished national and religious structure, in accordance with terminology proposed by S. Fish [1997], the term boutique multiculturalism seems to be more fitting in the case of the Bieszczady. This can be exemplified for instance by the fact that some Orthodox and Uniate tserkovs today function as Roman Catholic churches; what is more iconostases from many tserkovs were moved to museums, and the local residents have a “light-hearted” attitude towards traditions of former populations. Yet, an experienced tourist and a keen observer will detect the unique multicultural qualities of the Bieszczady even today, because – in accordance with information posted at Wrota Podkarpackie website: *“(...) abandoned, deserted and ruined, the Bieszczady were reclaimed by nature which took back lands once heavily exploited and now conceals the scarce relics of the past; these mountains have become a Mecca for those looking for thrills, for tough people and dreamers, for those who have lived through hardships and have no future. (...) Thus the Bieszczady have become a very special place, varied through the diversity of the new settlers, tinted with the colours of their existence and rich with the wealth of their dreams for self-fulfilment”* [www.wrota.podkarpackie.pl/turystyka/atraccje/ bieszczady/bieszczady, 18.06.2010].

### Podlasie as a multicultural region

The multicultural region of Podlasie is a unique phenomenon in Poland; in addition to its Polish population it is inhabited by representatives of such national and ethnic minorities as: Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Romani people and Russians. As for religions – beside followers of Roman Catholicism there is a large group of Orthodox Christians and a slightly smaller group of Muslims. The area is one of the most varied regions of Poland in terms of nationalities and religions. The region's multiculturalism is reflected *„(...) not only in the specific architecture which in addition to structures of Roman Catholic churches, consistently features domes of tserkovs and towers of mosques; there are also*

*all those languages and dialects, which we can hear in many places of Podlasie, the traditional customs and rituals, schools teaching in minority languages, as well as organizations and institutions whose operations focus on maintaining culture and cultural heritage of ethnic minorities*" [<http://narew.home.pl/portal/content/view/75/63>, 21.04.2013]. Unquestionably, from early Middle Ages this was an area of clashes between Poland (Mazovia), Ruthenia, Yotvingians, Teutonic Knights and later Lithuania, therefore it is frequently described as borderland of nations and religions [Barwiński 2004] or historical and cultural borderland [Plit 2008].

Podlasie can be discussed in terms of its history, geography and as an administrative unit.

### **Podlasie and its history**

Etymology of the name "Podlasie"<sup>1</sup> has been explained in three ways. The first and most frequently quoted hypothesis assumes that the land situated amidst forests or near forests was over time called by people "pod-lasam", and then "Podlasie". According to the second hypothesis the name originated from Ruthenian language and was derived from the word "Podlasze", which may have referred to the fact that these were ethnically Polish areas, i.e. they were "pod Lachami"<sup>2</sup> [Darmochwał 2003]. The third version originates from the chronicle by Jan Długosz, in which the name "Podlasie" is derived from the Latin spelling of the word "Pollexiami" or "Polesitae", which in old Polish was used for Yotvingians [Darmochwał 2003]. On the other hand it is unquestionable that words "Podlexia" and then "Podlachia", referring to Podlasie, first were used by Polish chroniclers and in Papal bulls as early as the 13th century [Plit 2008].

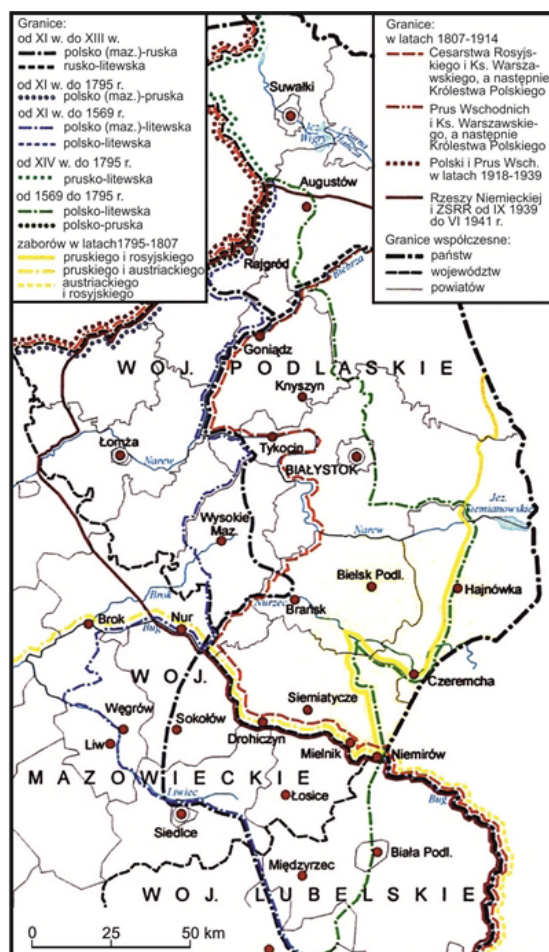
The territory of Podlasie – customarily treated as the lands located on both sides of the middle Bug River and upper Narew River – is an area of old settlements, yet at the early phase of the development of the Polish state, it was situated outside the borders of the state governed by the Piast dynasty and it functioned as a frontier area separating Mazovia from Lithuania and Ruthenia [Gloger 1903, as cited in: Barwiński 2004]. Due to such location, these territories were a source of contention as the adjoining countries were striving to acquire it through conquest and colonization.

It has not been unanimously confirmed whether in the early Middle Ages the territory of Podlasie was subjected to the power of western or eastern Slavic states. Possibly, these two groups merged in the area of Podlasie. In the 13th and 14th century the territories today occupied by the Podlaskie Voivodeship, were temporarily comprised within Mazovia (the western part) and Lithuania (the eastern and northern part), while the southern part was temporarily within the borders of the Principality of Volodymyr and Galicia, whose monarch, Daniel Romanovych was crowned in 1253 in Drohiczyn as the King of Rus. From the 13th to the 15th century Podlasie was a source of dispute between Mazovia and Lithuania. The gradual process where the area of today's Podlaskie Voivodeship was acquired by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, began in the first half of the 13th century and only in the 15th century was the border between Lithuania and Mazovia established; it ran from the north along the rivers of Elk, Biebrza, Narew, Ślina and further to the Bug at the outlet of the Nurzec, and from there up the River Bug [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013]. Generally, in those times the area of Podlasie remained under the reign of Rus and then Lithuania for a significantly longer period than within the borders of Poland [Barwiński 2004].

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: the word "pod" – means under, below, near; "lasie" – might have been derived from the word "las" i.e. forest

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: pod Lachami – literally "under Lach people", Lach being an ancient name for Poles





**Fig. 1 The layout of major national borders in the area of Podlasie from the 11th until the 20th century**

Source: Barwiński [2004, p. 43].

In 1413 the eastern areas of today's Podlaskie Voivodeship were part of the Trakai Voivodeship, a part of which was designated in 1517 to establish Podlaskie Voivodeship; it comprised principalities of Brześć, Mielnik, Bielsk and Drohiczyń and its first voivode, by a decree of Sigismund the Old, was Iwan Sapieha. On the other hand its western part (i.e. today's districts of Łomża, Zambrów, Kolno, significant part of Grajewo and a part of Mońki) belonged to Mazovia. After the Union of Lublin was signed, in 1569 the Podlaskie Voivodeship was incorporated into the Crown (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) and until the time of partitions it was one of the eleven voivodeships of Małopolska.

The partitions of Poland in the latter half of the 1700s interrupted the process of the region's development since Podlasie was split between various countries and administrative units. M. Barwiński [2004] pointed out that the borders

established as a result of partitions were artificial and destroyed the division of the Polish land which traditionally had district and church-based structure. After the Third Partition of 1795, the western and northern part of Podlasie was under Prussian authority – within the Białystok department of New East Prussia, the eastern outskirts (including the towns of Narewka, Milejczyce, Jałówka and Krynki) were subject to Russian authority and the southern part of Podlasie was acquired by Austria. The Prussian-Austrian border running along the middle Bug, split in two the former Podlaskie Voivodeship [Darmochwał 2003; www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia, 27.04.2013]. New changes were brought by Napoleonic Wars. „Following the Congress of Vienna, Podlasie in its entirety was under authority of the Russian Tsar: the southern part and a narrow strip stretching as far as the Neman River belonged to the Congress Poland, and the remaining part, including Białystok, was incorporated directly into the empire (Grodno Governorate)” [Plit 2008, p. 8]. This decision had profound consequences related to nationality, religion and economy (e.g. a customs border was established in 1832, different calendar, and different rules with regard to worship and religious festivals).

The borders changed a number of times in the first half of the 1900s. During the Congress of Versailles in 1919, while designing the new territorial division of Europe, leaders of the coalition supported the fashionable concept of nation states, therefore they favoured the idea of Polish-Soviet border based on ethnic and ethnologic criteria, and in particular taking into account the language factor. This was reflected in the border proposed by Lord Curzon, whereby the entire area of Podlasie, including Drohiczyń, Mielnik, Siemiatycze, Kleszczele, Czeremcha, Bielsk Podlaski and Białystok was to remain on the Polish side, and Grodno, nearly the entire Białowieża Forest with the village of Białowieża would be on the Soviet side. Yet, the actual border was not delineated along the so-called Curzon Line but as a result of the peace treaty signed in Riga in 1921 at the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet War. The border was not based on any geographical

or historical factors, since this was actually the line where fire had been temporarily ceased. In comparison with Curzon Line it was located significantly more eastwards, and as a result the territory of Poland comprised significant areas with clear majority of Ukrainian and Belarusian populations. Therefore, nearly the entire area of Podlasie ended up within the boundaries of Poland, and it was really the first time in history that it was no longer a border zone, or a peripheral region [Barwiński 2004]. In accordance with an act passed by the parliament in August 1919, the Białostockie Voivodeship was established, with a capital in Białystok.

In September 1939, Podlasie witnessed Polish-German warfare, which was particularly severe along the line of the Narew river. Towards the end of September – following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, which divided Poland into spheres of influence – the Soviet Army gradually took over occupied areas from the German authorities. Most of the territory of the voivodeship was incorporated into the USSR, except for the Suwałki district, which was acquired by Germany. During 1941-1945 Podlasie was occupied by Germans. The borders of Bezirk Białystok (Białystok district), established by a decree issued by Hitler, comprised majority of the former Białostockie Voivodeship, except for the District of Suwałki and areas previously incorporated into the General Governorate. In accordance with plans assumed by the Reich authorities, after the war Białystok district was to be incorporated into East Prussia and subjected to absolute germanization [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013].

After World War II, Podlasie became part of the Białostockie Voivodeship, however the eastern areas of the pre-war region were incorporated into the USSR, and the new voivodeship was expanded to include the District of Łomża, and three districts from the part of East Prussia which was acquired by Poland, i.e. Elk, Gołdap, and Olecko. This territorial unit existed until the administrative reform of 1975, when three voivodeships: Białostockie, Łomżyńskie and Suwalskie were created in its place. Following the administrative reform of 1999 the name of Podlaskie Voivodeship was reinstated and the administrative unit comprises the area of the Białostockie and significant parts of Łomżyńskie and Suwalskie Voivodeships [Darmochwał 2003; [www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013].

Archaeological findings (barrows, cemeteries) show that the area of Podlasie was populated as early as the 3rd-6th century [Darmochwał 2003]. Particularly, the areas of southern Podlasie were a borderland, from times immemorial delineating boundaries between cultures, peoples and states. From the early Iron Age, the northern area was inhabited by Baltic peoples, and in the 6th century the lands in the river basins of the Narew and Bug were taken over by Slavic peoples arriving here probably from Volhynia, yet it is difficult to confirm whether they settled down in deserted areas after these had been abandoned by peoples of the so-called Wielbark culture, or if they merged with and imposed their own culture on older populations [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia/spotkania+z+przeszłością](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia/spotkania+z+przeszłością), 29.04.2013].

As an area which is “(...) *open to territorial expansion of adjoining countries, Podlasie in the early Middle Ages was a settlement area for Polish peoples from Mazovia as well as for Lithuanians and Ruthenians*” [Barwiński 2004, p. 40], or using contemporary terminology – Belarusians from the east and Ukrainians from the south-east [Plit 2008], and presumably Yotvingians from the north<sup>3</sup>. But it was only after the Polish-Lithuanian Union that the entire region gained political and economic stability and, as a result, in the 14th and particularly 15th century there was an increased speed of colonization which moved in three directions. Mazovian settlers proceeded towards the north-east, along the Biebrza river and eastward between the Narew and Bug rivers [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013]. These lands were colonized to a significant degree by minor gentry, which mainly settled

<sup>3</sup> Many contemporary researchers argue that Yotvingians settled farther north – between Suwałki and Kaunas rather than in Podlasie [Barwiński 2004].



in villages between Tykocin and Brańsk as well as between Goniądz and Knyszyn as well as in Drohiczyn area [Barwiński 2004]. „*These noble traditions were then maintained for many generations, and some elements of that attitude can still be seen today. For instance residents of some places refuse to agree with a statement that they live in a village (peasants live “in villages” and gentry – “in the countryside”)*” [Plit 2008, p. 8]. Ruthenian (Ukrainian) settlements spread from the south-east along the Bug River, from the direction of Brest as well as from the east from Volkovysk and Grodno along the lower Hańcza, Łosośna and Świsłocz. Settlers of Belarusian origin, mixed with Lithuanians and probably descendants of Yotvingian refugees moved from Merkinė and Alytus towards south-west along the Neman and Šešupė rivers. Because of the growth of settlements in the 15th century municipal rights we granted to e.g. Łomża, Tykocin, Nowogród, Radziłów, Ciechanowiec, Zambrów, Wąsosz, Kolno, Bielsk Podlaski, Mielnik, Drohiczyn and Brańsk (in fact some of these were urban settlements even before that). In the 16th century the Lithuanian forests were also rapidly colonized. Approximately 40% of all location privileges in Podlasie were granted at that time. These included royal towns (Milejczyce, Berżniki, Kleszczele, Knyszyn, Narew, Kuźnica, Nowy Dwór, Krynki, Jałówka, Wasilków, Augustów, Lipsk, Filipów, Przemośl, Włajny), as well as towns owned by magnates (Choroszcz, Siemiatycze, Goniądz, Boćki, Gródek, Zabłudów, Sidra, Rajgród, Raczki, Sejny, Bakalarzewo, Grajewo). This favourably impacted the growth of spiritual life, as well as improving standard of life, which to an extent can be credited to *folwarks* (farming estates) owned by nobility [www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia, 27.04.2013].

Warfare of the mid-17th century, i.e. the so-called Cossack wars, the Swedish “Deluge” (1655-1660) and wars with Russia (1654-1667), adversely impacted the process of colonization in Podlasie, or indeed were the reason why some areas of the Podlaskie Voivodeship became deserted. Most towns deteriorated never to regain their magnificence; the former centres of highly specialized crafts and industry (e.g. Bielsk, Brańsk, Drohiczyn, Tykocin) transformed into farming settlements. At the same time the area witnessed growing religious conflicts which also adversely impacted developments in cultural life; tolerance was undermined as a result of counter-reformation.

Then towards the end of the 17th and in the 18th century a number of new towns were established, mainly by owners of large magnate estates, and by monasteries, these included: Szczuczyn, Stawiski, Jedwabne, Czyżewo, Śniadowo, Rutki, Rudka, Białystok, Suwałki. Due to the lack of strong economic foundations most of these from the start were precluded from further growth. One of the few exceptions was Białystok with the splendid palace of the Branicki family, which became an important cultural centre on the border of the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The final years of the First Republic witnessed a slow but consistent growth of the entire Podlasie. Cultural development was favourably impacted by Jesuit and Piarist monasteries, as well as by the magnate families of Sapieha, Radziwiłł and Branicki who extensively supported arts [www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia, 27.04.2013].

Paradoxically, economic growth of Podlasie in the 1800s was significantly impacted by the fact that in 1832 a customs border was introduced by the imperial authorities between Congress Poland and the Empire. To avoid high duty fees some entrepreneurs moved their plants from Congress Poland to the district of Białystok. This instigated the process of industrialization as a result of which a thriving centre of textile industry emerged. Initially textile factories were founded mainly in towns near Białystok e.g. in Supraśl, Choroszcz and Gródek, yet in the 1860s Białystok became the dominant centre. Economic growth was also facilitated by the construction of railways: Warsaw-Petersburg (1862), Brest-Grajewo (1873), Białystok-Baranovichi (1886), Siedlce-Volkovysk (1906), Grodno-Suwałki-Varėna (1899) and many local connections. As a result of the growing industry the area attracted qualified

workforce, and witnessed influx of western models of culture, mainly based on Protestant values [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013].

As a result of colonization, the area of Podlasie may have been mixed in terms of ethnicity even in the 11th to 13th century [Barwiński 2004]. Yet it was only the colonization processes which started in the late 14th/early 15th century and continued until the late 18th century that led to the emergence of four main ethnic areas within Podlasie, i.e. Polish, Ruthenian (Ukrainian), Belarusian and Lithuanian-Yotvingian. Additionally, this ethnic structure was enriched by Tatar colonization in the areas of Tykocin, Knyszyn, Goniądz, Sokółka and Krynki, as well as by Jewish populations arriving in large numbers especially in the 17th century [Wyrobisz 1981].

Tatar settlements first emerged in Podlasie in the 1400s. These settlers descended from exiles or fugitives from the Golden Horde and Crimea. In the first half of the 1400s, following the disintegration of the Golden Horde into a number of Khanates competing with one another, Tatar exiles started pouring into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, with full approval of Duke Vytautas. In return for land granted to them, they served in the army, which is why they were settled near fortified gords and along the border with the State of the Teutonic Order<sup>4</sup>. Tatar colonies near Grodno and along the Łosośna dated from the first half of the 1400s, and small groups of Tatars were settled between Tykocin and Knyszyn in the 15th and early 16th century. During the reign of Casimir Jagiellon and Sigismund I, Tatar colonies continued to spread and develop. Land was granted to soldiers, translators, Tatar scribes, and courtiers. Prisoners of war were settled in towns and villages owned by the king or gentry. They worked as craftsmen, tanners, carters, merchants and gardeners. They were endowed at the time with numerous privileges. Following the Union of Lublin in 1569, Tatars became subjects of Polish monarch, and served Poland in the same manner as Cossacks did – i.e. at their own expense and in return for tax exemption [Darmochwał 2003].

Tatars' situation became significantly less advantageous in the 1600s, particularly during the Swedish "Deluge". Many Tatar settlements in Podlasie were ruined at the time; besides that, financial difficulties faced by Poland and the resulting attempts to both force Tatars to free military service and impose taxes on them led to rebellion of Tatar or the so-called Lipko<sup>5</sup> army units, and as a consequence they took service in the Turkish army. It was only King John III Sobieski who again accepted their services for Poland. To compensate for their overdue pay for army service Tatars were endowed with land near Sokółka and Krynki, i.e. the villages of Kruszyniany, Łużany, Bohoniki, Drahle and some land in the villages of Podlipki, Kamionka, Grzebień and Malawicze Górne. The number of Tatar settlements increased in the 1700s. They were granted with Leszczany, Żylicze, Trejgle, Ciumicze, Talkowszczyzna, Nietupa (today Białogorce) and Górka [Darmochwał 2003; [www.szlaktatarski.pl/tatarzy-na-podlasiu](http://www.szlaktatarski.pl/tatarzy-na-podlasiu), 29.04.2013].

On the other hand the genesis of Jewish settlements in Podlasie goes back to the 1400s, when first settlers arrived in the town of Bielsk Podlaski, even though at that time no organized community emerged. The turning point for colonization of this area by Jewish people was the decision issued in 1522 by the Voivode of Trakai, Albertas Goštautas, concerning the settlement of first nine Jewish families in Tykocin. From that time Tykocin rapidly developed as a Jewish centre whose cultural and demographic impact spread to most privately owned settlements and small towns in [<http://wspolnepodlasie.wordpress.com/category/zydzi-na-podlasiu>, 29.04.2013]. Then in the 1880s the area received a wave of russified Jewish people, the so-called "Litvaks" as a result of which national and cultural relations in this area became even more complex; at the same time Białystok became the most important centre of Jewish cultural life in Podlasie [[www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/region/historia), 27.04.2013]. Generally, in times of the Second

<sup>4</sup> Tatar army participated in the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, supporting Poland and Lithuania.

<sup>5</sup> The name is derived from the term Lipkowie – commonly used for Polish Tatars.

Republic, Podlasie was one of the regions characterized by the highest percentage of Jewish population.

As it has been pointed out by M. Kresa [2010], from historical, geographical and dialectological viewpoint, borders of Podlasie are difficult to determine and recreate with certainty. Podlasie, as a frontier land, for centuries was a source of contention, no-one's land, a land which witnessed clashing impacts - political, cultural and religious: Polish, Ruthenian, Tatar, Yotvingian, German, and Jewish; and the borders of this land were often strictly conventional. In spite of the large diversity of ethnic groups, religions and languages, Podlasie rarely witnessed antagonisms between specific nationalities. What is more, Podlasie managed to develop a unique and integral community, based on diverse, yet not derivative cultures; a community which does not have an equivalent in any other historical area of Poland [Kresa 2010].

### **Podlasie and its geography**

For centuries attempts were made to define physicogeographical regions of Poland; particularly rapid growth in this field of study occurred in the late 19th/early 20th century, after majority of natural environments in the country had been explored. Podlasie, as a region appeared e.g. in the division of Poland into natural regions proposed by A. Rehman [1904, as cited in: Plit 2008], who distinguished "independent" Podlaska Lowland. Later geographers continued a discussion during which it was suggested that Podlasie should be included into Mazowsze (Lowland of Mazowsze-Podlasie according to Pietkiewicz (1962) [Plit 2008]. Unquestionably, one of those who most significantly contributed to defining regions of Poland was J. Kondracki [2009]. He defined the following units, or macro-regions within Podlasie:

- South Podlasie Lowland (318.9) which is a part of Central Polish Lowlands (318)
- North Podlasie Lowland (843.3) which is a part of Podlasie-Belarus Heights (843)<sup>6</sup>.

The above macro-region are divided by the Podlasie Ravine of the Bug, which is delineated by the river forcing its way through moraine elevations of Warta glacial period (part of Wolstonian Glaciation). This is also a geographical border of the highest status, as it separates Western Europe (the area includes South Podlasie Lowland) from Eastern Europe (including North Podlasie Lowland) [Nasiadka 2010].

On the other hand, while discussing attractiveness of Podlasie for tourism, Z. Kruczek [2010] distinguishes two vastly different parts: the north (Eastern Baltic Lake District) and the south, dominated with landscapes of lowlands, valleys and heights (North Podlasie Lowland). On the other hand only a small part of the administrative region today is located in North Mazowsze Lowland, or more specifically in Kurpiowska Forest.

As a result of its turbulent history and location along the border, the Podlaskie Voivodeship today is a multicultural and multinational region, and it is most varied in terms of ethnicity in Poland. Besides Poles, the area is inhabited by Belarusians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Russians, Germans and Romani people. Jewish people "(...) are the missing ones in the ethnic mosaic of today's Podlasie" [Suwalszczyzna i Podlasie, 2006, p. 10]. Belarusians are the largest group among the national minorities in Podlasie; they live in the eastern part of the region adjoining the border, and their number is estimated at approx. 200,000. The Ukrainian minority inhabits the area between the rivers Bug and the Narew, and the Lithuanian minority lives in a single territory belonging to the communes of Puńsk, Szypliszki and Sejny. The small group of Tatars can be encountered in Białystok, Kruszyniany, Bohoniki, Sokółka and Suchowola. The smallest national groups in Podlasie

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<sup>6</sup> Regionalization defined by Kondracki was based on the classification of physiogeographical regions of the world, in accordance with decimal system, proposed in 1964 during the International Geographical Congress in London, hence each name of a region is accompanied with a number.

include Russians (approx. 1,000) and Germans (approx. 800). The Russians constitute two separate groups: the Old Believers inhabiting e.g. the villages of Wodзилki, Grądy and Bór, and descendents of imperial officers, who mainly live in Białystok. The small group of Germans lives within the parish of Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Suwałki. The ethnic structure of Podlasie is supplemented with Romani people living mainly in Białystok, Bielsk Podlaski and Siemiatycze.

### **Podlasie as an administrative unit**

At present the name Podlasie is very frequently identified with the current administrative region, i.e. Podlaskie Voivodeship, established following the administrative reform of 1999 as one of the sixteen provinces. According to 2012 data collected by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) [Area and Population in the Territorial Profile in 2012], the Podlaskie Voivodeship comprises an area of 20,187 km<sup>2</sup> (6.5% area of Poland), and is the sixth largest region of Poland. It is inhabited by the population of approx. 1.2 million. The largest city and the capital of the voivodeship is Białystok, which in terms of size is followed by Suwałki and Łomża (both having the status of district cities). Importantly, the Podlaskie Voivodeship is located along the border with Belarus and Lithuania, and within Poland it borders on the Lubelskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships.

Approximately 1/3 of the area of contemporary administrative unit overlaps with historical Podlasie. Additionally comprised in the voivodeship are Pojaćwieska Suwalszczyzna (Yotvingian Region of Suwałki), Mazowsze – and more specifically area of Łomża and area of Wizna, Polesie and Ruś Czarna (area of Siemiatycze). Regardless of the discrepancy related to the historical region, the Podlaskie Voivodeship existed bearing the same name during 1513-1795 (as Podlaskie Voivodeship during the “First Republic”) and during 1816-1837.

## **Multiculturalism in tourism products on offer in Podlasie**

### **Cultural resources/assets of Podlasie<sup>7</sup>**

In order to characterize the wealth of Podlasie, reflected in the diversity of its cultural resources, we should first clarify the relevant terms. Concepts frequently used in publications related to the subject include the words: “zasoby” (“resources”), “walory” (“assets”) and “atrakcje” (“attractions”), which are treated as either distinctive or equivalent expressions [Kowalczyk 2013]. The authors of the present study agree with A. Kowalczyk [2000], who suggested that the concept “tourism resources” should be understood as a term relating to objectively existing phenomena, while “tourism assets” are a subjective category.

Therefore, in their broader meaning tourism assets are all the factors occurring in a given area and possibly acting as (having the capacity to act as) the reason for tourists’ decision to visit that area. In this sense, an asset is not only a landscape, landmark or healing properties, but also quietness, entertainment options, residents’ hospitality and kindness, efficient catering services, or low cost of vacation and services [Peratiatkowicz 1976 as cited in: Kruczek 2010, p. 8].

Hence for the purposes of this study tourism assets shall be understood as those tourism resources which are clearly distinguished and recognized by a tourist for their ability to meet his or her emotional needs pertaining to the specific situation [Kowalczyk 2012].

Related publications propose a number of possible methods for classifying tourism assets. The most general concept is based on the criterion of origin of such assets, in accordance with which we can distinguish: natural (environmental) assets and anthropogenic (cultural) assets. Alternatively, taking into account the criterion of functions,

<sup>7</sup> The authors agree with A. Kowalczyk [2013] that for some readers these terms may be synonymous

tourism assets can be divided into three groups: recreational assets, sightseeing assets and specialist assets [Kruczek 2010]. Some authors take a different approach, where the above distinction “nature” or “culture” is assumed to be erroneous, because relationship between these two concepts is more effectively expressed by a conjunction; indeed it may happen that for the needs of tourism natural assets may become cultural attractions [Kowalczyk 2013].

It should also be pointed out that, when defining the concepts of “tourism resources” and “assets” we should not forget about the concepts of “tourist attraction” and “tourist attractiveness”. These are secondary to the previously defined concepts as they refer to subjective perception of a specific tourist who decides that, for particular reasons, a given asset (sufficiently interesting and unique) is worth visiting and exploring. Therefore, we should assume that we are dealing with a three-step sequence: tourism resources → tourism assets → tourist attraction (attractiveness as a quality of a specific site or area) [Kowalczyk 2013].

While characterizing Podlasie as a multicultural region the authors assume they are describing selected cultural assets, i.e. elements of tangible and intangible heritage, which may draw visitors to the area today comprised within the territory of the voivodeship. The selection is based both on previous studies (literature related to the subject) and on the opinions of the authors, who have explored the region of Podlasie a number of times. The spatial aspect is of equal importance – in order to determine the areas which are most characteristic for multiculturalism the presented examples pertain to various locations within the region. Some of the assets have already been recognized as tourist attractions of a given place or even the entire region of Podlasie, yet the authors aim at reviewing the objective attests, and leave this subjective assessment to the readers.

Ethnic and religious diversity of Podlasie is expressed by numerous architectural landmarks, including artefacts of religious and rural architecture and can also be seen in sites of great historical importance. The value of landmarks results from their material, outer form as much as from the overall context in which they emerged. Hence, landmarks in Podlasie are extremely valuable and interesting not only for their monumental qualities, but also because they are products of a multitude of diverse cultures, religions and civilizations. What is more, the Podlaskie Voivodeship is known for a wealth of traditional customs and rituals, characteristic for folklore of cultural borderlands [Regionalny Program... 2011].

### **Example 1 – Sejny Region**

Sejny Region is located along the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus, and its part within the Polish territory is most frequently associated with the District of Sejny. Originally it was home for Yotvingians (Sudovians) who inhabited the territory spreading between the rivers of Biebrza, Neman and Šešupė, and the Great Lakes of Mazury until 1283, when the capital of the country, the stronghold of Cresmen, presumably located at the Castle Hill in Szurpiły was conquered by the Teutonic Knights who then relocated the population to Sambia. Evidence related to Yotvingian settlements in this area was shown by archeological, historical, linguistic and ethnographic studies conducted during 1950-1990, e.g. at the sites once occupied by gords, in Szurpiły and Jegliniec [Suwalszczyzna i Podlasie, 2006]. Later the area was populated with Mazovians, Lithuanians, Jews and Old Believers. The wealth of traditions and cultures created by this mixture of nations can still be detected, e.g. in names of villages and towns, or in local dishes [Kutela 2009] and because of this the area is referred to as a borderland of nations and cultures. The multitude of landmarks of religious and rural architecture as well as the still cultivated customs and rituals are the reasons why the Sejny Regions is more and more frequently visited by tourists.

Today the Sejny Region is often called Small Lithuania, because the Lithuanian minority<sup>8</sup> is quite sizeable here (e.g. in the Commune of Puńsk Lithuanians account for 80%

<sup>8</sup> Lithuanians living here descended from settlers who started moving to these areas in the 1400s.

of the population). Similarly, Puńsk (Lithuanian: Punkskas) is called the “Lithuanian capital of Poland”, and in fact in the streets of Puńsk Lithuanian language is heard more often than Polish. Tourists are particularly willing to come here on 15 August – the religious feast of the Lady of the Herbs is combined here with the Festival of Bread, Milk and Honey. People, many of them dressed in folk costumes, go to church carrying flowers, herbs and ears of grains, and after the mass, celebrated in Lithuanian, a fair opens. Visitors can buy local foods (bread, cakes, particularly *sękacz*, various kinds of cheese, honey and processed meats), as well as goods made of wood and clay, baskets, embroidered tablecloths, etc.



**Photo 2 and Photo 3 - Festival of Bread, Milk and Honey in Puńsk**

*Source: photo by Małgorzata Durydiwka (August 2006)*

The greatest attraction of the Festival of Bread, Milk and Honey is connected with the tradition of baking bread. Presentations of bread making, cheese production and showing the process of baking the local specialty called “*mrowisko*” (anthill cake) can be watched in Silaine, on Sejwy Lake. Visitors can take a britzka ride to get there, and on that occasion they can also visit the Yotvingian-Prussian settlement in Oszkinie or the Ethnographic Museum in Puńsk. Notably, in July and August the open-air exposition hosts the Festival of Barn Theatres [Miszkiel 2012], referring to an old form of Lithuanian theatre whose origins go back to the 1800s [Największe atrakcje..., 2010].

An important destination for cultural travellers, Sejny is primarily known for the former Dominican monastery complex, the town’s most valuable landmark. Yet, Sejny is also a significant centre of Lithuanian minority, which is confirmed e.g. by the fact that the Consulate of Lithuania is located there. Yet, visitors are more drawn to the Lithuanian Home and its restaurant serving Lithuanian dishes (e.g. Sejny-style dumplings with lentils, Lithuanian-style chilled soup, broth with *kolduny*, *cepelinai*, or “anthill” cake)<sup>9</sup>. Landmarks bearing witness to the strong links of Sejny with Lithuania include the statue of Antanas Baranuskas (Antoni Baranowski), the bishop of Sejny and an outstanding Lithuanian poet of Romanticism, opponent of tsarism, who also designed a program for the revival of Lithuania.

Before WWII Sejny was also an important centre of Jewish minority. Related landmarks include the White Synagogue from 1857, and the Home of Talmud, or Yeshiva from the mid-1800s, known as the Hebrew Gymnasium of Tuwie Pinkas Szapiro [Suwalszczyzna i Podlasie, 2006]. Currently these buildings are home to the “Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations” Centre. Children involved in its activities collected local stories from people living in the town, and these were recorded as the Sejny Chronicles.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the revived culinary traditions along the Polish-Lithuanian border are the reason why, “/.../it is a good idea to stop at agritourist farms, quite numerous here, where the village cooks are skilled in making excellent *cepelinai*, dumplings with lentils, *kakor* or *blini*. Many housewives make famous *sękacz* cakes or bread on *calamus*” [Największe atrakcje..., 2010].



A scale model of the old multinational Sejny was built, based on that information. The Borderland Centre is currently the main driving force of cultural life in the town. It also initiated efforts aimed at renovation of the larch-wood manor house in Krasnogruda, where Czesław Miłosz spent vacation before WWII [Największe atrakcje..., 2010] and where he wrote several poems later included in his volume entitled *Trzy zimy* (Three Winters) (1935). Similarly, *Dolina Issy* (The Issa Valley) and *Rodzinna Europa* (Native Realm) include references to the time he spent in Krasnogruda [Suwalszczyzna i Podlasie, 2006].

The Region of Sejny is extremely interesting in terms of its cultural attributes, yet it still inadequately used for tourism-related purposes. This was shown e.g. by a study conducted by K.A. Kutela [2009] which proved that the residents themselves assessed the tourist traffic in this area as insufficient.

### **Example 2 – Region of Knyszyńska Forest**

The Knyszyńska Forest is unique in the fact that despite its location in the moderate climate zone, it comprises pine and spruce forests similar to those encountered in the southern Taiga. The Knyszyńska Forest Landscape Reserve is designed to protect not only the natural but also the cultural assets, and these are definitely worth seeing.

Supraśl is unquestionably a gateway to the Knyszyńska Forest and the newest spa resort in Podlasie (2001). At the entrance to the town, from the direction of Białystok, travellers are greeted by the Orthodox monastery with the brick tserkov of the Annunciation of Virgin Mary. Originally, during its 500-year long history, the monastery belonged to Basilian Monks who, according to a legend, came to this quiet remote place from Gródek, a noisy town in those days. They let a wooden cross float down the current of the Supraśl, and when it stopped in a river bend they picked that place for their new home (today the town of Supraśl). The highlight of the monastery is the aforementioned tserkov – the only Gothic Byzantine fortified tserkov in Poland (two structures of this type can be seen in Belarus). These rarely encountered features are a consequence of the location along the border of two cultures: West European and Ruthenian-Byzantine. Thus, the Byzantine-style layout is typical for Ruthenian tserkovs, and the Gothic lancet windows, vaults, and parts of the walls enclosing four towers in the corners of the tserkov (the defensive feature) are evidently European traits.

Unfortunately, the present building is a post-war reconstruction. Although the original tserkov had survived the earlier turmoil of history, in 1944 it was blown up by the Nazis for reasons which have never been explicitly clarified. Currently, the difficult and time-consuming efforts focus on furnishing its interiors. The premises of the tserkov and the monastery are administered by the Orthodox Monks of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The tserkov can be visited during specified hours (up to 4 pm, later: the so-called “silence in the monastery”); the monks show the site to groups of tourists only after prior phone arrangements [<http://www.monaster-suprasl.pl>, 4.05.2013].

The former Palace of Archimandrites (Abbots) today is home to the Museum of Icons – a branch of the Museum of Podlasie. Here visitors can explore the culture of Orthodox Christianity (so frequently encountered in Podlasie), and much more. The buildings were restored after the war and from 1973 visitors could admire the first exposition of frescoes, yet it was not until 2006 that the museum located here opened for the public. The museum’s collection is displayed as a permanent exposition entitled “Icon. The Image and the Word. Between the ephemeral and the eternal”. The holdings of the museum comprise approx. five hundred icons and many of them have been acquired through the Customs Office in Białystok, which confiscated them from smugglers [Raport statystyczny ruchu turystycznego... 2010].

Interestingly, the exposition of icons in the Museum in Supraśl, unlike conventional static presentations (where exhibits and short information are displayed on walls),

takes advantage of multimedia technologies. As a result, during guided tours narration is combined with auditory and visual elements. *“The atmosphere and the arrangement of the exposition transfer the viewer into a mysterious space which triggers emotions and penetrates the deepest spirituality. The unique impressions experienced during the tour of the museum are magnified by the omnipresent music, a plainchant, designed for the contemplation of holy images”* [<http://www.muzeum.bialystok.pl/suprasl/>, 27.04.2013].

Particularly during the high season the museum attracts many tourists. Statistical data show that the tourist information at the Museum of Icons in 2010 was visited by 61,821 tourists [Raport statystyczny ruchu turystycznego... 2010]. The permanent exposition can be entered every 30 minutes, only by groups of up to 25-30 people, accompanied by a guide. These rules were introduced by the administration of the museum to facilitate touring, particularly in the rooms which are too small for larger crowds. In the museum's underground there is also a well-stocked shop where visitors can buy souvenirs and publications related to Podlasie.

It can be expected that, in the coming months and years, tourists arriving at the monastery and Museum of Icons in Supraśl will witness significant changes. As a result of construction and restoration works carried out at present (thanks to a subsidy of over 8 million PLN obtained from the EU) the facility will receive a lecture and exposition complex, with archives, library, reading room and multimedia auditorium which can seat 200 people [<http://www.poranny.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20130313/REGION08/130309673>, 4.05.2013]. The best justification for such investment can be seen not only in the large number of visitors to the monastery and the Museum of Icons, but also in the fact that Supraśl is increasingly recognizable. Indeed, it was the votes from tourists and residents rather than a major promotional campaign that made it possible for the town to receive a diploma – certificate of distinction in the poll entitled *“Polska jest najfajniejsza”* (Poland is awesome) organized by National Geographic [<http://gosc.pl/doc/987813.Supraśl-Monastyr-i-muzeum-ikon-nagrodzone>, 4.05.2013].



**Photo 4 - Tserkov of the Annunciation of Virgin Mary – example of combined eastern and western architecture**

*Source: photo by Małgorzata Durydiwka (May 2009)*

Yet, multiculturalism of Supraśl may be discovered not only in the monastery but also throughout the entire town. After duty fees had been imposed on goods exported from Congress Poland to Russia, numerous textile factories emerged in Podlasie, and more specifically in Supraśl. As a result the tiny settlement with a population of 100 in the early 1800s, grew rapidly and in the middle of the same century had over three thousand residents employed mainly in textile industry [<http://www.polskaniezwykla.pl/web/place/3796,suprasl-podlaska-ziemia-obiecana.html>, 20.04.2013]. Owners of plants existing in Supraśl had such foreign-sounding names as Bucholtz, Aunert, Alt, Reich and Jansen. Unfortunately the history of textile factories

ended during WWII in 1944, yet the urban area still holds remnants of the industrial period,

related to e.g. settlers from Western Europe. These include buildings of two factories, wooden weavers' houses, Catholic and Protestant churches, palace of the Bucholtz family (today holding Secondary School of Fine Arts), and tomb chapels of the Zachert and Buchholtz families at the Protestant cemetery. Therefore Supraśl is quite appropriately called "a miniature of Łódź", a piece of the Promised Land in Podlasie<sup>10</sup> [<http://www.polskaniezwykla.pl/web/place/3796,suprasl-podlaska-ziemia-obiecana.html>, 20.04.2013].

Cultural heritage in Supraśl is not only contained in landmarks but also in activities conducted here and now, for instance by Wierszalin Theatre, which from 2006 has a status of cultural institution and as such has been supported by the regional government and by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. It was founded in 1991 by Piotr Tomaszuk, the director, and Tadeusz Słobodzianek as well as a group of actors working with them. Indeed it was *„the fascination with the cultural heritage of the borderland at the outskirts of European civilization that gave shape to both the distinctive aesthetics of the theatre and its world view. The essence of this theatre is its simplicity, the performances are immersed in music and singing; and the wooden sculptures, figures and masks perform together with actors”* [<http://www.wierszalin.pl/index.php?stronaOTeatrze>, 4.05.2013]. The name of the theatre refers to a place in Podlasie (village of Stara Grzybowski), where a self-appointed prophet named Ilja along with a group of religious fanatics established a new capital of the world. The repertoire of the theatre is continuously expanded, and Wierszalin gains more and more recognition performing all over the world and promoting multicultural Podlasie.

In the eastern part of the Knyszyńska Forest Landscape Reserve, closer to the border with Belarus, there is the Tatarian Route, which in recent years has been attracting more and more visitors. It comprises the long trail of 54 kilometres, leading from Sokółka to Kruszyniany and a short trail of 19 kilometres from Kruszyniany to the village of Waliły-Stacja. The Tatarian Route links sites connected with the history of Tatars, i.e. Polish Muslims, descending from families once living in Poland and Lithuania. In the most important places along the route, i.e. in Bohoniki and Kruszyniany we can still see Poland's oldest wooden mosques and the so-called "mizars" (Muslim cemeteries) with graves of the faithful. Each of these can be accessed by tourists. The Imam who is in charge of the mosque in Bohoniki comes here from Białystok (residents of the village also have the keys), and in Kruszyniany the custodian of the mosque is Dżemil Gębicki, a Tatar, who presents interesting facts related to the history of the mosque and background information related to the arrival and life of his ancestors in the borderland. Those travelling along the route also visit Sokółka and the regional museum, where they can see the largest collection related to the earliest Polish Tatars.

At present tourists visiting the Tatarian Route go there not only to learn about the history of Tatars, but are also attracted by the opportunity to literally get the flavour of their culture. *Tatarska jurta* agritourist farm has operated for a few years in the vicinity of the mosque in Kruszyniany. Its owner Dżenetta Bogdanowicz and her family cultivate the traditions of Tatarian cuisine. Visitors can try out Tatarian dishes, and learn about other aspects of Tatars' culture and traditions. *Tatarska jurta* is a rapidly growing enterprise and the owner hosted e.g. a visit of Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne. Tatar-related themes also appeared in one of the Polish TV series (*„Barwy szczęścia”*), and because of this a film crew paid a visit to Kruszyniany. Similarly, in the vicinity of the mosque in Bohoniki it is also possible to get the taste of Tatarian cuisine (in the pilgrim's home).

<sup>10</sup> from translator: Łódź – the largest Polish centre of textile industry; Ziemia Obiecana (The Promised Land) a novel by Władysław Reymont – its plot is located in Łódź



**Photo 5 – Mosque in Kruszyniany along the Tatarian Route**

*Source: photo by. Małgorzata Durydiwka (May 2009)*

The Tatarian Route is a constructive response to the growing interest in the “Polish Orient” and the exotic features of Eastern Poland, which can be seen in recent years. Yet, it should be emphasized that the settlements, dating from the time Tatar peoples arrived here, today are located in the territories of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus. Therefore it has been suggested that a newly created tourist route should comprise sites in these three countries. This would be a challenging but at the same time interesting endeavour aimed at presenting the stages of Tatar colonization, similarities and differences in cultures and traditions cultivated by Tatars living in these areas [<http://www.szlaktatarski.pl>, 5.05.2013].

With regard to the above multicultural heritage sites in the area of Knyszyńska Forest it should be pointed out that it is mostly the Tatarian Route that is selected as a destination by both individual tourists and organized groups (e.g. taking one-day trip from Warsaw). Supraśl is also increasingly popular, yet it seems that tourists come to this charming town mainly to visit the Museum of Icons. Therefore, it would be a worthwhile idea to initiate activities aimed at promotion of other cultural assets described above, i.e. textile industry and the related multicultural history of the place, which is also a spa town. If compared with the Tatarian Route, Supraśl seems to present more opportunities for designing e.g. tourism packets based on accommodation facilities available in or near the town for individual tourists (private rooms, agritourist farms) and for groups (e.g. Knieja Hotel with spa and wellness facilities, in Supraśl).

### **Example 3 – Region of Białowieża Forest**

The Białowieża Forest is one of the most valuable natural environments in Europe. This is our continent’s only primeval woodland with a large variety of rare and endangered species, the only natural habitat of the European Bison (wisent) as well as a place which after

years of efforts saw successful restoration of that species. The Białowieża Forest is also extremely important in terms of its cultural value, as a monument of history where hunting trips were held by Lithuanian dukes, Polish kings and Russian emperors. It is also the world's oldest protected environment. Indeed, being royal hunting area from the early 15th century the forest was protected against excessive usage [Rąkowski 2010].

Memories of royal visits are retained in ancient trees and remote places which may have held hunting lodges (e.g. Old Białowieża). Interesting landmarks can also be seen in the village of Białowieża, e.g. an obelisk commemorating a hunting trip of King Augustus III as well as relics of an old palace (today, mainly used by the management of the Białowieża National Park).

Particularly noteworthy are also the assets of the cultural landscape in the rural areas within the Białowieża Forest. A few dozen villages and hamlets located in the immediate surroundings of the woodland and in the forest clearings constitute an extremely valuable complex of human settlements, a true rarity in Poland and Europe. Villages, harmoniously embedded within the forest landscape, have retained their historical layouts. Nearly all buildings are made of wood, many of them feature beautiful ornaments inspired by Russian art, and comprise genuine rooms and facilities once used for traditional occupations performed by local residents. Even though private museums and small outdoors expositions operate in some villages (e.g. *Sioło Budy* in Budy), yet there is no major facility or museum which would present cultural assets of this part of Podlasie (some aspects of operations related to the forest are presented in the Nature and Forest Museum of the Białowieża National Park). Additionally, a number of private galleries operating within the region of the Białowieża Forest present e.g. goods produced by local craftsmen and artists.

The particularly interesting villages with intricately embellished wooden houses are Trześcianka, Soce and Puchły, located in the vicinity of the Białowieża Forest and jointly called the Land of Open Window Shutters. Elements covered with rich ornaments and painted with bright colours include shutters, wind beams, corners as well as facades and gable ends. This style of ornaments is not to be found in any other region of Poland and it is similar to finishing adornments typically used in Russian rural architecture [[http://www.ciekawepodlasie.pl/szlaki\\_podlasia/3,Kraina\\_otwartych\\_okiennic.htm](http://www.ciekawepodlasie.pl/szlaki_podlasia/3,Kraina_otwartych_okiennic.htm), 4.05.2013].

Two of the numerous tserkovs in the proximity of the Białowieża Forest are particularly noteworthy. The first one is the brick tserkov of St. Nicholas in Białowieża dating from the times of the Empire. Its unique features include the iconostasis made of Chinese porcelain and brought from St. Petersburg at special request made by Emperor Alexander II. There is no other landmark like this in Poland, and only two tserkovs in Europe have similar furnishings. The other highlight among the tserkovs in this area is a contemporary structure, completed in 1981. The tserkov (cathedral) of the Holy Trinity in Hajnówka attracts tourists with its modernist silhouette and the beauty of its finishings. Apart from that, each year in May visitors are drawn to Hajnówka by the International Festival of Orthodox Church Music. Year after year (from the very first event held in May 1982) participants of the festival include a growing number of groups from all over the world. This unique spiritual and musical feast, lasting for a few days in the year, is preserved in many recordings and albums and it is based on the most powerful instrument, the only one which is used in Orthodox Church, i.e. the human voice<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> In accordance with the traditions of Orthodox Church no music instruments are used during religious celebrations; liturgy celebrated in tserkovs may only be accompanied by choral singing.





**Photo. 6 – Inside the tserkov in Hajnówka**

Source: photo by. Piotr Kociszewski (May 2013)

As a conclusion, it should be emphasized that because of the above cultural assets, the Region of Białowieża Forest is interesting not only for its natural qualities. Therefore, it would be a good idea to design and promote such forms of tourism which will make it possible to explore them. The tight-knit complexes of wooden buildings, so characteristic for this part of Podlasie, are unique in Europe and something we can be proud of [Rąkowski 2010]. Moreover, due to the rapid changes occurring in rural landscapes, this kind of space may easily disappear, in part or completely, and be replaced with modern structures which may not fit into the cultural landscape of the Białowieża Forest.

#### **Example 4 – The Valley of the Narew River**

The Valley of the Narew stands out for its natural qualities, and is one of the best preserved river valleys in Poland. Because of its unique attributes and as an extremely rare example of anastomosing system, the Narew is quite appropriately called “Polish Amazonia”. *“With the whole network of linking and branching river beds, the mosaic system of overflow areas, and terrestrial and wetland habitats, this aquatic labyrinth is truly captivating and affects everyone who is sensitive to the beauty of nature so that they are absolutely enchanted with the wonders of the universe of the Narew”* [Roszkowski 2007, p. 68].

Without deprecating its natural assets, we should remember that for centuries the Narew River was also an artery of central importance for the life of numerous interconnecting cultures. An excellent example of a multicultural heritage site is Tykocin, an enchanting small town on the banks of the Narew. Nearly 600 years old, it is the oldest and most impressive urban complex of historic Podlasie.

Tykocin was established as an independent municipality in the 1400s, within the historic borderland between Mazovia and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, primarily as a result of Polish colonization from eastern Mazovia. Today, watching its slightly sleepy character it is hard to believe that *“the town filled in many pages in the history of Poland. Its streets saw ceremonial corteges of the world’s mightiest sovereigns, as well as armies marching towards the arena of the theatre of war”* [Roszkowski 2007, p. 9].



Notably, numerous people of particular importance in the history of Poland were linked with Tykocin, e.g. King Sigismund Augustus, Stefan Czarniecki, and the Branicki family of the Griffin Clan, and most importantly Jan Klemens Branicki, who greatly contributed to developing the concept for the town's spatial layout and because of this even today Tykocin is, quite appropriately called the jewel of Baroque.

Tykocin is often recognized as the town of two cultures, because for many centuries, in addition to Catholics it was inhabited by followers of Judaism. Jewish people first settled in the town along the Narew in 1522. Soon they gained prominence in local trade and in selected crafts. From the 18th century until the outbreak of World War II they constituted nearly half of the town's population, and as a result, for Jewish community Tykocin had a higher status than that of a local centre. Their centuries-long presence came to an end in August 1941 when the town became half empty after the Nazis executed their Jewish prisoners in the forest near the village of Łopuchowo.

Jews lived in the western part of Tykocin – the quarter of Kaczorowo, where even today in the central area we can see the so-called Great Synagogue of Tykocin dating from 1642. This was the second largest synagogue in Poland, in terms of size preceded only by the Old Synagogue in the neighbourhood of Kazimierz, in Kraków. It withstood the times of war and today is home to a branch of the Museum of Podlasie in Białystok. Inside, in addition to a rich collection of Jewish artefacts, one can see elements of the original furnishings, wall paintings as well as the Bimah ready for the rabbi to take the stand. An integral part of the museum is also the adjoining Home of Talmud, where in addition to the permanent features we can see temporary exhibitions.

Notably, today the underground of the former Home of Talmud holds Tejsza Restaurant specializing in Jewish cuisine. Its name was not a random choice – in Yiddish the word refers to “goat” which for Jews in Podlasie was a symbol of affluence. Specialties on the menu in Tejsza include such Jewish dishes as tsimmes, kugel, kreplach, etc. Even though its entrance is slightly concealed, the restaurant is very popular with visitors coming from Poland and from abroad.



**Photo 7 –Tejsza Restaurant in Tykocin**

*Source: photo by Małgorzata Durydiwka (May 2009)*

Spiritual legacy of the Jewish people, for centuries living in the neighbourhood of Kaczorów, was of great importance for the orthodox community in Europe. Indeed, it was Tykocin that the renowned Tiktin family of rabbis came from [Roszkowski 2007].

Today, even though its Jewish population is no longer there, a tour of Kaczorowo provides an opportunity to experience the atmosphere of the Jewish world which used to be an inherent part of the towns in the borderland. Thanks to this Tykocin is a particularly suitable place to understand the way in which Poles and Jews used to live side by side. Therefore, this journey allows an insight into the unknown world of the past. Yet it is important that these multicultural trips are supported by entities responsible for tourism in the region. It is necessary, however, to enhance the options on offer so that Tykocin becomes tourists' destination rather than just a place visited in transit. To start with it would be a good idea to create such features designed for tourists as e.g. signs leading to specific parts of the town or a thematic route related to the multicultural aspects.

The four examples of cultural or even multicultural assets, and their attractiveness for tourism, are related to isolated parts within the entire area of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Due to the complexity and specific qualities of the subject it is impossible to discuss the whole region. Therefore the authors selected examples from various areas and related to diverse cultures, religions and nationalities. Obviously, it would be a worthwhile idea to discuss the capital of the voivodeship, i.e. Białystok, which is a perfect example of a city comprising many cultures, religions and nationalities, yet this is a topic for a separate study.

## In Place of Conclusions

In addition to the assets described above, people living in Podlasie are its integral part: native inhabitants of the region, descendants of settlers, rooted in various nationalities, cultures and religions. They cannot possibly be a part of a tourism product which frequently is an impulse for commercial use. It is necessary to meet them, talk with them and get acquainted with them, because – as it was said by J. Angiel [2012]:

*„Podlasie is a pool of fine genes  
not only of ancient varieties of apples,  
or multitude of herbs.  
Look at the people who live here  
they are a reservoir of local patriotism  
and of the art of living <together>,  
even though so <differently> at times...”*

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## Wielokulturowość Podlasia i możliwości jej wykorzystania w turystyce

**Słowa kluczowe:** wielokulturowość, Podlasie, turystyka, turystyka kulturowa

### Streszczenie:

Wielokulturowość, rozumiana jako współwystępowanie wielu kultur, może znacznie zwiększyć atrakcyjność turystyczną określonego obszaru, a tym samym stać się impulsem dla wykreowania funkcji turystycznej i wypromowania obszaru dla szeroko rozumianej turystyki kulturowej. Podlasie, jako współczesny region administracyjny, jest obszarem nie tylko cennym przyrodniczo, ale także unikalnym w skali kraju ze względu na wielowiekowe ścieranie się różnych kultur. W przestrzeni województwa znaleźć można wiele miejsc świadczących o wielokulturowości, zarówno etnicznej jak i religijnej. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest zaprezentowanie niektórych z nich oraz pokazanie potencjału Podlasia dla rozwoju różnych form turystyki kulturowej.