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# Conditions for Tourist Development in the Tri-border Area of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine

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**Abstract:** The article discusses conditions for the development of tourism within the countries forming the Polish–Belarusian–Ukrainian tri-border zone and the surrounding areas. The research focused on the Brest raion and the city of Brest in Belarus, the Shatsk raion in Ukraine, and Włodawski powiat in Poland, which is in fact directly adjacent to the border. What is more, this article features socio-economic determinants of tourism development, including transport location. Other than that, it also examines the tourist values, facilities, and traffic in said areas. Particular attention was paid to border infrastructure and the possibility of crossing the border as a necessary factor for the development of cross-border tourism.

**Keywords:** tri-border area of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, transborder tourism, Brest raion, Shatsk raion, Włodawski powiat

## 1. Introduction

The intense growth of tourism in Poland in the second decade of the twenty first century (Obodowska, 2017; Roman, 2018) creates an opportunity for the development of less economically developed areas. Said areas constitute peripheral regions, including the ones running along the borders – with particular emphasis on the eastern border, which also serves as the external border of the European Union. It became apparent that the cross-border location does not favour the growth of other local businesses. At the same time, the value of the regional environment could be maintained along with the unique cultural artefacts of the borderland (Więckowski, 2010).

Location at the meeting point of three countries is what draws tourists to borderland regions, and as far as Poland is concerned, there are six such locations. The Polish-Belarusian-Ukrainian tri-border zone is unique owing to the fact that Poland adjoins two non-EU countries. However, European Union's external border created a substantial barrier in developing cross-border tourism in its initial

period. Once the visa-free passage of Poles was introduced to Ukraine, and the visa-free tourist and recreation zone “Brest” was established by Belarus on 1 January 2018, the tourist attractiveness of this part of the borderland rose.

This article analyses conditions for the development of tourism within the tri-border area of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The study pertains to the local administrative units (NUTS 4) directly adjacent to the border, that is the Włodawski powiat in Lubelskie voivodeship, the Shatsk raion in Volyn oblast in Ukraine, and the Brest raion in Brest oblast of Belarus. The city of Brest, which also lies at the Polish border and constitutes a visa-free tourism and recreation zone, has a significant impact on tourist attractiveness. For this reason, it is also included in the research. The time span of the study covers the second decade of the twenty first century, i.e. the years 2010–2018.

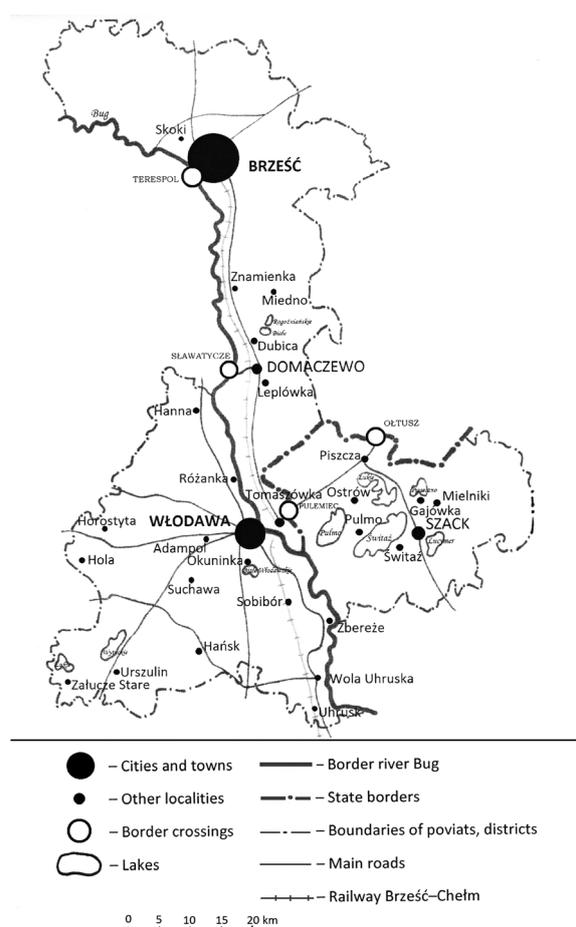
## 2. General characteristics of the studied region

The local administrative units lying at the meeting point of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine comprise peripheral areas of their respective countries. The Shatsk raion, divided into six councils, is the most north-western part of Ukraine. The Brest raion, divided into 11 councils, covers the utmost southwestern part of Belarus – an approximately 5 km wide strip of land in its southern part squeezed between the eastern territory of Poland and the western part of Ukraine. In a sense, it creates an area analogical to the “Worek Turowski” in Poland. The Włodawski powiat, divided into 7 gminas, represents peripheral territories despite its location along the central eastern part of the country.

The studied area covers overall 3705.2 km<sup>2</sup> (including Brest). The smallest unit directly adjacent to the border crossroads is the Shatsk raion (759 km<sup>2</sup>), which is two times smaller compared to the biggest one, i.e. Brest raion (Potencjał turystyczny w Euroregionie Bug w 2014 r., 2016). The distribution of population is similar in all of the selected areas. Over 44% of the population inhabit the Brest raion, approximately 38% live in Włodawski powiat, and only 17% reside in the Shatsk raion (Euroregion Bug w liczbach..., 2017). In total, the area is inhabited by a population of *circa* 100 thousand persons, yet it should be mentioned that this figure has shown a dropping tendency in recent years. Depopulation has affected the Włodawski powiat in particular, since the population count in the years 2010–2018 decreased by *circa* 3.5 thousand (Bank Danych Lokalnych GUS, www.stat.gov.pl). Unfavourable demographic trends are also characteristic of the Shatsk raion (www.ukrstat.gov.ua). Only the Belarusian part of the borderland notes a population growth in the studied period (over 3 thousand). The Brest raion exhibits positive demographic trends with a population of over 300 thousand inhabitants (www.bres.belstat.gov.by).

The local administrative units on the border crossroads are low populated and poorly urbanised. The average population density in the entire region oscillates between 22 and 32 persons per 1 km<sup>2</sup>. The inhabitants of the Polish and Ukrainian rural areas constitute

two thirds of the total population, dominating in the Brest raion (97%). The municipal network in the vicinity of the border crossroads encompasses the towns of Włodawa (13.3 thousand) in Poland, Shatsk (5.3 thousand) in Ukraine, and Domachava (1.180) in Belarus (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Research area (author's own study)

The settlement network reflects the large share of forests, marshes, bogs and lakes in the entire studied area, which also affects the nature of its economy. As for agriculture, it dominates in every bordering region, and industrial activity is of substantially lesser importance. Municipal centres provide services for agricultural settlements in the hinterlands of the tri-border area.

The peripheral nature of the region is also reflected in the transport network, since no major national transport routes run through the territory. The city of Brest is an exception (Sidorovich and Sidorovich,

2012), as it lies by the main road M1/E-30 and the railway line E20, which form a part

of the Pan-European Transport Corridor II (Berlin–Warsaw–Minsk–Moscow).

### 3. Tourist value

#### 3.1. Natural environment assets

The Polish-Belarus-Ukraine border area features an abundance of natural environment assets originating from its location. In the physical and geographical terms, it embraces the macro-region Western Polesie, which is called Lubelskie Polesie in Poland, Volyns'ke Polissya in Ukraine, and Pribuzskoye Polesie in Belarus (Kondracki, 1998). The Łęczyńsko-Włodawska Plain, also known as Łęczyńsko-Włodawska Lakeland, is the main mesoregion of Włodawski powiat embracing its southern part. In the middle lies the Włodawski Hummock, which borders the Sosnowicka Hollow in the north. Furthermore, the areas in Belarus and Ukraine constitute the Polesie Brest mesoregion (Kondracki, 1998).

The majority of the cross-border region is situated in the Bug River basin, which also

serves as a bordering river in the studied area between Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. The Bug River, one of the largest unregulated rivers in Europe with its valley forming an important ecological corridor, is recognised as a Special Protection Area in the Natura 2000 network.

The landscape amenities of the Bug River create a potential for leisure tourism. The conditions there allow for organising canoeing trips and practicing angling. In practice, these opportunities currently refer only to the Polish side, which provides free access to the river. As for Belarus and Ukraine, their border regimes restrict direct access to the countries' borders.

The Polish-Belarus-Ukraine cross-border landscape is dominated by lakelands and forests. The most valuable ones are protected by law (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Key forms of protecting the nature in the cross-border area of Poland–Belarus–Ukraine in 2014 (authors' own study based on: Potencjał turystyczny w euroregionie Bug w 2014 r., 2016)

Form of protection	Powiat/Raion	Area (ha)	Year of establishment
<b>National Parks</b>			
Poleski National Park	Włodawski powiat	9.760	1990
Shatsky National Park	Shatsk raion	48.977	1984
<b>Landscape Parks</b>			
Poleski Landscape Park	Włodawski powiat	5.113	1983
Sobiborski Landscape Park	Włodawski powiat	10.000	1983
<b>Nature reserves of national rank</b>			
Pribuzskoye Polesie	Brest raion	7.950	2003

Włodawski powiat features Poleski National Park along with landscape parks Poleski and Sobiborski. Poleski National Park encompasses the most valuable nature areas of Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland, an echo of the most southward and eastward tip of the European tundra and wooded tundra ([www.poleskipn.pl](http://www.poleskipn.pl)). Raised bogs, poor fens, and fens with dwarf pines, birches, meadows and forests prevail in this territory. What is more, there are also 4 overgrowing lakes in the area. Fauna is represented by a wide variety of birds, including

approximately 180 protected species. Other types of animals include numerous mammals as well as amphibians and reptiles, with the biggest habitat of the European pond terrapins (Izdebski and Grądziel, 1981). The area of the Poleski National Park has been adapted to the needs of tourist traffic by plotting out several nature-educational trails. A natural history museum was established in the village of Stare Załucze.

The Poleski Landscape Park comprises six separate enclaves bordering with the national

park. It covers the 500-hectar large Wytyckie Lake, as well as bogs, meadows and fields. The Sobiborski Landscape Park is distinguished by its diversity of habitats and landscapes. A major portion of the Park is occupied by the Sobiborskie Forests. Moreover, it encompasses wilderness areas with bogs, sandy areas with dunes, and forests with lakes of exceptional nature value, which constitute nature reserves.

In the Shatsk raion, the Shatsky National Park is a valuable natural site. This territory, which is more than fivefold the size of the Poleski National Park, enjoys legal protection but demonstrates a higher degree of anthropogenic transformations. Half of its surface is covered by forests with a prevalence of pine trees. For tourists, the greatest attractions include lakes occupying *circa* 6.6 thousand hectares in total. Bogs cover a smaller surface (4% of the territory) transformed into meadows in consequence of melioration (7%). Nearly one quarter of the Shatsky National Park is exploited by man (villages, arable land, roads).

The area under protection exhibits a rich fauna and flora. The fauna is dominated by birds counting *circa* 240 species. There is also a wide variety of fish and mammals ([www.poleskipn.pl](http://www.poleskipn.pl)).

The highest measures of nature protection apply to the nationally ranked Pribuzskoye Polesie in the Brest raion. It covers the Bug River valley and the adjacent southern part of the region. Over 60% of the land is wooded by various types of forests. The rich flora includes *circa* 60 rare species. Bogs and natural water basins comprising 7 larger lakes and 300 old riverbeds of the Bug River are vital to this area. The abundant and diversified fauna within the preserve is represented by numerous species of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, as well as invertebrates ([www.poleskipn.pl](http://www.poleskipn.pl)). One may also find ecological paths, bicycle routes and ecological education centres within both the Pribuzskoye Polesie preserve and the Shatsky National Natural Park described above.

The most valuable nature protection area of the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine borderland became part of the tripartite West Polesie Transboundary Biosphere Reserve designated by UNESCO in 2012. These areas along with various protected forms of nature that have not been touched upon in the paper, but are found

in the region, create a rich basis for the development of nature (e.g. birdwatching), as well as recreational and leisure tourism. Additionally, there are other unprotected assets of the region, e.g. wide-spread forests.

When analysing the natural assets of the studied region, one should pay close attention to the lakes present in each of these three countries, especially the ones within protected areas. The tourist attractions they may offer (swimming, water sports, angling) are easily accessible thanks to the clear passage to the water shores, firm lake bottom and clean waters.

As far as the Włodawski powiat is concerned, its water basins belong to the group of lakes within Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland. Furthermore, the Białe Włodawskie lake, which is also the largest in the vicinity, demonstrates the most favourable tourist assets (Krukowska, 2007). These include: sandy beaches, a firm sandy lake bottom, clear water, picturesque pine forests on the southern and eastern shores, a relatively large surface, and good transport access. Owing to these very characteristics, both the water basin and the location called Okuninka became the powiat's main recreational and leisure spot for tourists. The other lakes within the area do not manifest as many features favouring tourism, apart from angling and fishing (e.g. Wytyckie lake).

Lakes are an eminent natural asset of the Shatsky National Natural Park, as well as the Shatsk raion itself (Artemenko, 2011). In terms of size and suitability of natural conditions to the development of tourism, they clearly stand out from other lakes in the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine borderland. Shatsky Lakeland features 24 natural water basins, along with the exceptional lake Svitiaz, which is also the deepest one in Ukraine. Said water basin is nearly 25 times the size of lake Białe Włodawskie. Similarly to the Lake Beloe, Lake Svitiaz offers a sandy lake bottom, clear water, as well as considerable depth, and provides good access to the shores. Consequently, it contributed to the development of recreational and leisure facilities within the surrounding area. As for Lake Piaseczno, one may relax in a nearby resort.

The lowest number of lakes is found in the Brest raion. Its water basins of several hundred ha remain the least studied in terms of the entire analysed borderland region. The

lakes used for tourism are above all Beloe and Rogoznyanskoye, which belong to the so-called Brest lake group (Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic, 2014). Tourist facilities have been developed mainly at the lake Beloe,

### 3.2. Anthropogenic features

The Poland-Belarus-Ukraine borderland is a melting pot of various cultures, which have been forming the identity of this place for centuries. The traces of their heritage contribute to today's anthropogenic features of the region.

Lying the closest to the tri-border, Włodawa constitutes the biggest town in the studied area (excluding Brest). In fact, it was already granted municipal rights in the sixteenth century. The city flourished by virtue of the Polish, Russian and Jewish population, so at present it is called a town of three cultures. The multicultural heritage is indicated by numerous baroque temples (Fig. 2) – the Church of St. Louis, the Order of Saint Paul the First Hermit, the Museum – Synagogue Complex, and the classicistic

and, apart from recreational and leisure centres, the area hosts a few sanatorium facilities. The southern part of the Brest raion is characteristic of its tourist destination at the lake Syelyakhi that is intermixed with a pine forest.

Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (initially a Uniate Church). “Czworobok”, a baroque complex of long-standing stalls serves as a unique architectural site in the central part of the town market. Tourists seem to be also attracted by the water gauge in the Bug River, known from radio broadcasts. The border junction of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine is found approximately seven kilometres south of the town. The nationwide uniqueness of Włodawa is marked by its location on the border shared with two countries outside the European Union, and the fact that it is the only town lying by a river.

Another place that draws tourists to the Włodawski powiat is the village of Hanna, which



**Figure 2.** Anthropogenic features (Church of St. Louis in Włodawa, Synagogues in Włodawa, Brest Hero Fortress, Cosmonautics Museum in Tomaschowka. Photo: R. Anisiewicz)

features a once Greek Orthodox, now Roman Catholic Church with valuable artefacts. Furthermore, there is a complex of wooden buildings (cottages, cabins and farmsteads) and a Religious and Historic Centre nearby.

Hola, a village in the western part of the Włodawski powiat, boasts the Chełm and Podlasie Region Open Air Museum, as well as a historic wooden Orthodox Church founded in 1702. Several buildings with objects of agricultural use can also be found in the vicinity.

In regards to historic temples of various denominations, they are situated in other powiat locations as well. Some of the more interesting sites are Horostyta and Uhrusk with their Orthodox Churches, as well as Hańsk and Suchawa, which exhibit numerous temples converted into Roman Catholic churches. In fact, the Roman Catholic churches in Uhrusk, Orchówek and Różanka are of historic interest as well. Secular buildings include the hunting palace of the Zamoyski family, which was built in Adampol between 1923 and 1927.

In addition, Włodawski powiat encompasses the area of the former German death camp for Jews established in May 1942 in Sobibór. By October 1943, approximately 180 thousand Jews from Poland, Austria, the Netherlands, the Soviet Union and other countries were deprived of their lives by Germans in this camp only. It transpires that the camp in Sobibór is the only one that was closed down after a successful uprising of its prisoners. The afforestation of the area was supposed to cover up the traces of the crime. In recent years, this place has served as an archaeological site. The historical studies resulted in collecting artefacts, which are to be exhibited in a museum that is due to open its doors in 2020.

On another note, multicultural heritage may be cherished by means of various events organised within the Włodawski powiat. The most popular ones include a folklore fair in Hola and the Festival of Three Cultures in Włodawa (held annually since 1995). Said festival presents the multicultural past of the town and its Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish inhabitants. Another well-known event is the Holeński Fair (since 1996) which involves Orthodox religious ceremonies dedicated to St. Anthony Peczerski. When it comes to sport events, one can take part in the Sobiborski Run that is organised

every year since 2000 to commemorate the victims of the German death camp in Sobibór.

Moreover, the Eastern Bicycle Route Green Velo promotes tourist assets regarding the area along the borderland and locations such as Hanna, Różanka, Włodawa, and Sobibór. The bicycle path infrastructure along with cyclist service points and information posts make it easier for cyclists to access said areas and further contribute to the development of borderland tourism.

The largest city in the vicinity of the three borders meeting point is Brest, which lies in Belarus. Its first settlements date back to the tenth century. The turning point in the history of Brest, which was granted municipal rights at the end of the fourteenth century, was the construction of a fortress in the late 1830s and early 1840s. It was built in the place of the old town, which was relocated ca. 3 km to the east. The fortress is most famous for its heroic defence in WWII, first in 1939 and then again in 1941. It now looks directly onto the Brest Hero Fortress war memorial, which serves as the main tourist destination of the city (Fig. 2).

Brest's nineteenth-century city centre is a mosaic of architectural styles. It features buildings in the style of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Polish modernism of the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet post-war social realism, as well as modern architecture. The sightseeing spots include the historic railway station, a number of museums (e.g. the Archaeological Museum "Berestie"), a few Orthodox churches, and the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Cross Exaltation. The wide range of tourist attractions is completed by boat cruises on the Mukhavets River (*Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic* 2014).

A stay in Tomashovka (ca. one thousand inhabitants), which is situated in the southwest tip of Belarus, over the Bug River and opposite Włodawa, can be a tourist attraction of the Brest raion itself. On another note, the Włodawa railway station and small industrial businesses contributed to the settlement's development at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even though the border was already delineated and economic ties with the town on the western shore of the Bug River were severed, the original name of the railway station remained the same

and the station is still one of the largest buildings in the area. Besides, Tomashovka hosts a cemetery of nearly 1350 German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian soldiers from World War I and the Cosmonautics Museum which is one of a kind in Belarus (Fig. 2). The origin of said museum is related to the first Belarusian cosmonaut Pyotr Klimuk, who was born and raised in nearby Komarovka, and flew into space with Mirosław Hermaszewski. The improvement of tourist infrastructure of the hotel, restaurant, and the sport and recreation complex Zwiezdnyj prompted the development of tourism in Tomashovka as well.

All locations within the Brest raion present historic wooden housing and sacral objects. In this case, Domachava with its wooden Orthodox church in neo-Russian style dating back to 1905 and a late classicist church pose a good example, not to mention Myedna, where the Orthodox church is said to be strongly influenced by the architectural style characteristic of Polesie (Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic, 2014).

#### 4. Tourist facilities and traffic

Tourist facilities constitute one of the fundamental conditions for the development of tourism. This includes accommodation, catering, and supplementary facilities, such as transport infrastructure, swimming pools, bathing sites, as well as equipment rentals (<https://powiatwlodawski.pl>; Kurek and Mika, 2018). Comparison in terms of tourist accommodation within the analysed cross-border area poses certain difficulties, since the availability of statistical data varies for every local administrative unit (NUTS 4) in the

The less populated and smaller Ukrainian part of the studied borderland has a more modest anthropogenic advantage compared to the Polish and Belarusian parts. It is also important to mention that historic wooden structures are predominant in the majority of places at the lakeside location. As a matter of fact, Shatsk is the only town in the Shatsk raion, and it was granted town rights as late as in 1957. Its appearance reflects a summertime settlement with historic Poleski houses. The Byzantine Orthodox church made of bricks is the most valuable area in the vicinity.

Svitiaz is the second in size settlement of the Shatsk raion (1.8 thousand inhabitants). This multi-street variant of a linear village lies by Svitiiaz Lake. It hosts the brick Orthodox church built in the Petersburg style. Among other locations of tourist value one may also find bigger linear villages: Pul'mo, Pishcha and Ostrivia, which – apart from interesting housing – boast historic Orthodox churches (Trzy Polesia, 2010).

discussed countries. The differences may be observed even among publications issued by the same agency (GUS – Statistics Poland). For this reason, all data quoted in this article referring to tourist accommodation facilities and their occupancy in 2010 and 2015 (Table 2) must be considered as having no more than an indicative value. One should bear in mind that it is difficult to determine the changes occurring over time based on such data. What is worth looking at, however, is the geographic distribution.

**Table 2.** Occupancy of tourist accommodation facilities in the Poland–Belarus–Ukraine borderland in 2010–2015 (author's own study based on: Euroregion Bug w liczbach w latach 2010–2015, 2017)

Specification	Włodawski powiat	Brest	Brest raion	Shatsk raion
<b>Total number of facilities</b>				
2010	46	18	16	32
2015	37	21	21	41
<b>Total number of beds</b>				
2010	2.737	2.015	2.324	2.677
2015	2.295	2.180	1.953	2.727

<b>Total number of persons staying overnight (thousands)</b>				
2010	20.9	140.8	30.5	18.0
2015	32.2	134.2	30.7	18.0
<b>International visitors among tourists staying overnight (thousands)</b>				
2010	0.2	61.8	6.4	0.6
2015	1.1	64.1	6.9	0.1
<b>Total number of nights stayed (thousands)</b>				
2010	101.4	384.0	290.0	153.8
2015	102.5	326.8	205.0	123.0
<b>Number of nights stayed by international visitors (thousands)</b>				
2010	0.4	.	.	2.9
2015	1.2	114.9	56.9	0.5

#### 4.1. Tourist facilities

Over the period considered, the accommodation infrastructure per borderline oscillated between 16 and 46 facilities with 10 beds and more. Furthermore, the Polish and Ukrainian parts had ca. twice as many such facilities as the Belarusian part. Then again, the comparison of the total number of beds available to tourists indicates relatively lower discrepancies among the regions in question. The number varied between ca. 2 thousand and 2.7 thousand beds, although the figures were higher in Włodawski powiat and Shatsk raion. The apparent disparities clearly reflect the accommodation structure, which—as for these two regions—is concentrated in attractive lake districts, hence a larger number of smaller facilities. Yet in the case of Belarus, the less numerous accommodation facilities include a number of larger units, e.g. hotels in Brest.

Detailed information about the current (2016–2018) development of tourist infrastructure in the particular regions was compiled from a variety of available sources.

According to the data from Statistics Poland (Bank Danych Lokalnych GUS [www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl)), the accommodation infrastructure in Włodawski powiat consisted of 51 facilities with a total of 2,990 beds in 2018. As the data excludes any facility with less than 10 beds, the total number of beds is higher and has been growing since 2015. Almost 80% of the powiat's accommodation is concentrated in rural gmina Włodawa, in the village of Okuninka on Białe Włodawskie Lake. A major part of the facilities is seasonal (82%), almost half of them being holiday centres. A less numerous group of facil-

ities includes chalets, hotels, as well as training and leisure centres. These are supplemented by all types of private accommodation. Approximately 10% of the accommodation resources are located in Włodawa. This includes one year-round hotel and 4 seasonal facilities, with a total of 299 beds. It should also be noted that very few facilities were built in other gminas within this powiat.

Additionally, Włodawski powiat has a well-developed system of agro-touristic farms. As an illustration, there were ca. 55 of said farms in the year 2018 (<https://powiatwlodawski.pl>). Most of them (35) are located in border gminas on the Bug River, i.e. Hanna, Włodawa, Wola Uhruska. On the same note, approximately 20 farms were established in gmina Urszulin in Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland.

Large accommodation facilities situated in the powiat usually have their own catering services. The summer season in Okuninka is a very special time of year, since numerous and diverse catering outlets are then active, and the village itself serves as a centre for various tourist services that offers, among others, bathing sites or water sports equipment rentals. Other elements of tourist infrastructure comprise tourist hiking trails and bicycle routes located in various parts of the powiat (including the Eastern Bicycle Route Green Velo), as well as horseback riding trails, sport fishing sites, ecological paths in the Poleski National Park, and natural forest paths in the Włodawa and Sobibór Forest Districts, recently fitted with new informational and recreational infrastructure. There are also

a few year-round facilities that operate in Włodawa.

When analysing tourist development in Brest raion in the context of tri-border area tourism, special attention was paid to its southern part, namely the Znamenka, Domachava, and Tomashovka<sup>1</sup> councils. The highest concentration of beds in this area can be found around Lake Beloe and Lake Rogoznyanskoye, ca. 10 kilometres north-east of the road border crossing in Sławatycze–Domachava and nearly 40 kilometres south of Brest.

The development of said area started in 1970 with the construction of “Berestie” sanatorium on Lake Rogoznyanskoye, together with a settlement for the sanatorium staff. At present, there are 430 beds in this facility, and the aim of the therapeutic activities offered to visitors is to treat diseases of the following systems: cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, respiratory, genitourinary, and peripheral nervous system. The treatment involves mineral waters and the beneficial effects of forest microclimate. The convenient location near the border and attractive prices of services are the drivers for future growth of health tourism in the “Brest” Tourism and Recreation Zone. Even now in 2019 the facility is more and more often used by visitors from Poland. However, the relatively short visa-free period (10 days) might be considered an obstacle, since it may be too short for one to partake spa treatment.

The tourist infrastructure of Lake Beloe also includes several holiday centres, which feature an estimated total of 600 beds (Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic, 2014). All of these facilities have their own catering services, some of them also have sports and leisure infrastructure, e.g. tennis courts, rowing stations. Accommodation is also provided by two camp sites on both Lake Beloe and Lake Rogoznyanskoye.

In 2011, “Pribuzskoye Polesie” Biosphere Reserve was established in the building of a former school not far from Lake Beloe (ca. 7 km to the south), in the place called Leplovka. The facility serves as tourist information centre, which offers 15 beds, as well as tourist equipment rental services, e.g. bicycles and

kayaks (Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic, 2014).

In like manner, the accommodation infrastructure is concentrated in the southernmost part the raion, near the border. It includes the aforementioned hotel along with the sports and leisure centre in Tomashovka, and the cosy “Selyakhi” leisure centre located ca. 6 km farther away in a pine forest on the lake of the same name. Next to a 24 bed older building, 6 new wooden chalets were built a few years ago. To complement the offering, there is a camp site, a catering centre, a Russian banya, sports grounds and tourist equipment rental.

In recent years, the accommodation of Brest raion has been supplemented by new agritourism farms. In 2016 there were 61 in the entire raion, 13 of which operated in its southern part, near the border. The largest number (9) were established near Brest in Znamenka council, 4 in Domachava and only one in Tomashovka ([www.brest.brest-region.gov.by](http://www.brest.brest-region.gov.by)).

The capital of the raion, the city of Brest, has a well-developed tourist infrastructure, typical of a large urban centre. Its accommodation infrastructure consists of 20 larger facilities, mainly hotels of varying standards, as well as hostels and motels with a total of ca. 2 thousand beds at disposal (Szlak rowerowy Śladami nadbużańskich tajemnic, 2014). Additionally, guest houses and rooms for rent are increasingly more prevalent in the area, which allows tourists to stay the night in different parts of the city. Catering services have also improved, including numerous restaurants, bars and cafés (Sidorovich and Sidorovich, 2012). There are also multiple sports facilities within the city, i.a. numerous swimming pools, a rowing canal, two ski routes and a skiing centre, as well as bicycle rentals and repair shops. Tourists can also participate in cultural events offered by the city.

Tourism in Shatsk raion develops mainly in the vicinity of lakes Svitiaz and PISOCHNE. Hosting 420 beds, “Lisova Pisnya” sanatorium is one of the largest facilities there. It was built in 1967 in Gaivka on Lake PISOCHNE, and, similarly to “Berestie” sanatorium, the treatment is supported by the local microclimate and its

<sup>1</sup> Information about the accommodation structure in Belarus in 2018–2019 is quoted after the official websites of Brest raion ([www.brest.brest-region.gov.by](http://www.brest.brest-region.gov.by)) and the city of Brest ([www.city-brest.gov.by](http://www.city-brest.gov.by)).

beneficial effects. The conditions treated here include cardiovascular, respiratory, gastric, and skin diseases (psoriasis), as well as diseases of the genitourinary system (gynaecology) and the peripheral nervous system. "Shatsky Ozero" guesthouse, located on the southern bank of Lake Svitiáz, is a major leisure resort in the town of Svitiáz, which features 486 beds ([www.shaadm.gov.ua](http://www.shaadm.gov.ua)).

Since the beginning of the twenty first century, Shatsky Lakeland has been going through intense growth in terms of accommodation infrastructure ([www.shatsk.info](http://www.shatsk.info)). New accommodation sites are built mainly in Shatsk and Svitiáz. However, the areas around Lake

Pisochne are less developed, with new facilities being built in Melnyky and Gaivka. New infrastructure concerns small facilities in particular, i.e. chalets for rent, villas or tourist centres. The buildings are cosily equipped and often made of wood, their architecture integrated with either the lake or forest surroundings. The raion's accommodation infrastructure is complemented by five camping sites.

Tourist development of Shatsk Lakeland, like the other two regions of the tri-border zone, is accompanied by catering and other tourist services, such as bicycle and water sports equipment rentals, bathing sites, ice fishing, as well as sport fishing, which is very popular in this area.

## 4.2. Tourist traffic

Occupancy of the existing accommodation facilities is the main measure of tourist traffic. When comparing the number of persons using overnight accommodation in the three studied regions (excluding Brest) in 2010 and 2015, which amounts to ca. 20–30 thousand persons, it appears that tourists are becoming increasingly interested in the borderland areas located in Poland and Belarus rather than in Ukraine (Table 2). The city of Brest notes even higher numbers, which may originate from the extraordinary charm of a major urban centre.

The characteristics of tourist traffic can be defined more accurately by including the total number of overnight stays. Calculation of average length of stay in a given region indicates that the people visiting the tourist areas of Brest and Shatsk raions enjoy their stay for a longer period (ca. 7–9 days on average), whereas the visitors of Włodawski powiat are more likely to lodge a room for a more limited

time (c.a. 3-5 days). Longer stays in Belarusian and Ukrainian parts of the tri-border area may occur owing to their sanatoria, where the average treatment tends to last longer than an average tourist visit. Shorter stays in Włodawski powiat most likely reflect the weekend popularity of Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland, which applies especially to Okuninka—tens of thousands of tourists visit this village on hot summer weekends.

An interesting aspect of tourist traffic from the point of view of cross-border tourism is the number of foreign tourists who stayed overnight in the discussed period (Table 2). For example, in both Włodawski powiat and Shatsk raion this number was fairly low. On the other hand, foreign visitors constituted a much larger group (ca. 20% of all tourists) in the Brest raion, which could stem from the fact that Russians, including the ones who transit through Belarus, are likely to visit this city as well.

## 5. Border infrastructure

The possibility of crossing the border is fundamental for the development of tourism in cross-border regions in formal, legal and technical terms, i.e. infrastructure.

Following the accession of Poland to the European Union in 2004 and the Schengen Agreement in 2007, crossing of the country's eastern border became restricted by the introduction of visa duty. Such barrier on the

Ukrainian border underwent gradual changes on both sides. Since 2017, one can say that the withdrawal of visa duty for Ukrainians travelling to Poland as tourists rendered the barrier non-existent.

The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border is different with a visa duty that is applicable to both countries. Nevertheless, since 2015, Belarus has been introducing relaxations

of tourist travel measures. Initially, the visa-free entrance to Belarus concerned the Białowieża Forest only. Starting October 2016, this restricted cross-border traffic encompassed Grodno and Augustów Canal as well. Finally, visa-free access to the entire country was facilitated on 12 February 2017, provided that the tourists arrive by plane, via Minsk National Airport. The duration of stay was then limited to 5 days.

Important changes, especially for the southern Polish-Belarusian border, were introduced on 1 January 2018 with the establishment of the visa-free “Brest” Tourism and Recreation Zone. Said zone incorporates the city of Brest and Brest raion, Zhabinka, Kamenets, and Pruzhany raions, as well as Svislach in the Grodno Oblast. The city of Grodno and the Grodno Oblast form the recreational park “Augustów Canal”. It also transpires that the passage between these two zones requires visas. Subsequently, the length of stay in the visa-free traffic was extended to 10 days (and if travelling by plane via Minsk National Airport – 30 days). In order to enter the country, one should acquire a confirmation of purchase of at least two tourist services in a certified Belarusian travel agency. Tourist visa-free traffic in Belarus is offered to the citizens of at least 76 countries, including Poland. However, Belarusian citizens still need visas to visit Poland.

Though the agreement for border crossing is only unilateral, the changes that have been taking place until today are an important step in the development of tourism in the Poland-Belarus-Ukraine borderland. Moreover, they may stimulate an increase in the tourist traffic when it comes to its Belarusian part. Then again, while taking a several-day-long trip to Belarus, the tourists may also grow attracted to the Polish borderland, including Włodawski powiat.

The growth of cross-border tourism in the studied powiat is in fact hindered by the lack of border crossings. Włodawski powiat is the only borderland powiat in Poland that has no direct access to its neighbouring countries. The closest border crossing to Belarus is in Sławatycze, which is approximately 30 km north of Włodawa. Even in Dorohusk, which is farther away (over 50 km south) from the powiat capital, there is a road and rail border crossing to Ukraine. As for the Belarus-Ukraine border,

it hosts a road border crossing Tomashowka–Pulemets 4 km east of Włodawa.

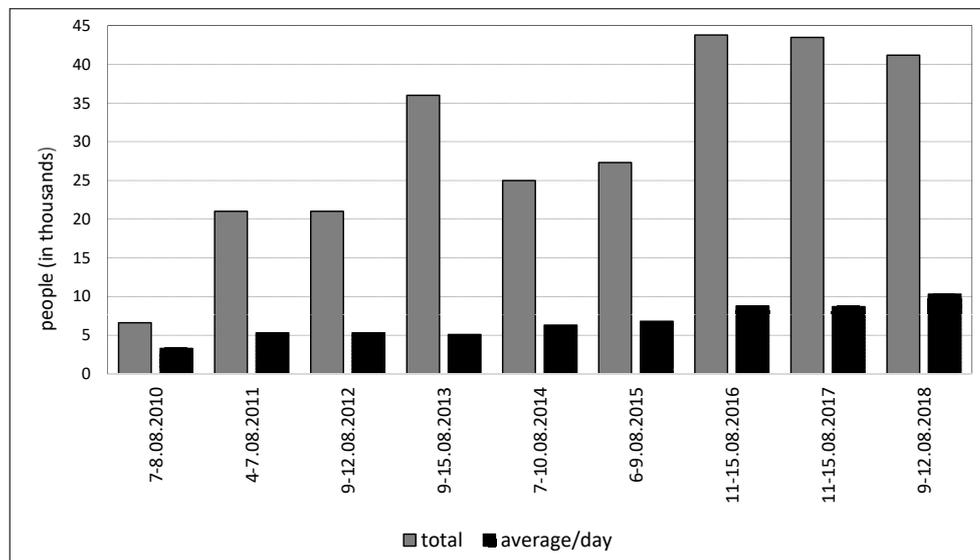
The nature of the borderline poses the main obstacle in opening a border crossing in Włodawski powiat, since the section in question runs along the Bug River and thus requires a costly construction of a bridge. Unfortunately, the bridges that once existed on the Bug River, i.e. the road crossing in Włodawa and rail crossing near Orchówek, were destroyed during World War II and have never been rebuilt again (Anisiewicz, 2018). The efforts undertaken by local authorities to invest in said border crossings in Włodawa have not borne fruit since the 1990s.

The initiative for developing a road crossing in Zbereże (Poland) and Adamchuky (Ukraine) is gradually disappearing mainly due to the lack of interest of the Ukrainian authorities. Construction of a passage between Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie and Shatsk lakelands would have a meaningful impact on the growth of tourism in both regions. What is more, the aim of the European Days of Good Neighbourliness organised by the local authorities of gmina Wola Uhruska, Włodawski powiat and Shatsk raion over the years 2010–2019 was to promote this very concept. This August, there was a pontoon bridge built that was to serve the inhabitants and tourists as a means to cross the border either on foot or by bicycle for a few days (Fig. 3). The ones crossing the border had the possibility of visiting nearby places and spending several days there. The tourists from Poland who were resting by Białe Włodawskie Lake had the opportunity to see Lake Svitiaz and the rest of Shatsky Lakeland as well. The extent of interest in this area is best demonstrated by figures regarding daily border crossings; one can observe a growing trend during the last few years (Fig. 4).

The lack of crossings on the borders shared by Poland, Belarus and Ukraine makes the development of cross border tourism difficult but not impossible in this tri-border area. For instance, the aforementioned border crossings in Dorohusk-Yahodyn (Ukraine) and Sławatycze-Domachava (Belarus) may serve this purpose. One can also enter the visa-free “Brest” Tourism and Recreation Zone by dint of a road and rail crossing Terespol–Brest. Unfortunately, crossing the Belarus-Ukraine border



**Figure 3.** Zbereże–Adamchuky border crossing in August 2019 (Author: R. Anisiewicz)



**Figure 4.** Crossing of the border in Zbereże–Adamchuky over the period 2010–2019 (author’s own study based on: [www.nadbuzanski.strazgraniczna.pl](http://www.nadbuzanski.strazgraniczna.pl))

in Tomashovka is not allowed when travelling with a document that is valid for this zone. For

this reason, access to both neighbouring countries is restricted for Polish tourists.

## 6. Conclusions

The tri-border area of Poland, Belarus and Ukraine features an abundance of tourist

assets, which influence the growth of various kinds of tourism. The treasured natural assets

include lakes, richly forested areas, non-urban landscapes, forms of environmental protection, as well as multicultural aspects of the region, which facilitate the development of leisure tourism combined with physical activities (e.g. water sports, cycling, Nordic walking).

The low tourist traffic in the studied borderland area may serve as an alternative to the most popular and often crowded traditional tourist destinations in Poland. The recently noted improvement of lodging infrastructure in the facilities of the borderland – such as cycling trails, water sports centres, and horseback riding trails – favour further development.

The region's uniqueness stems from its location on the border of the European Union and two non-EU countries, which are directly adjacent to it. In its initial phase, the new EU border impeded the development of cross border tourism in this area by virtue of visa duty imposed by both sides. The lifting of visa requirement for Poles travelling to Ukraine and the establishment of the visa-free "Brest" Tourism and Recreation Zone of 2018 substantially eased access to these countries, as far as Polish citizens are concerned. At the same time, said events enriched the tourist offer of the Polish part of the borderland, since it now provides an opportunity to visit two other countries.

When it comes to Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, cross-border tourism is restricted

by a shortage of border crossings within the tri-border area, i.e. Włodawski powiat. Border crossings could facilitate travelling between locations boasting a particular concentration of assets and tourist facilities in all the regions. The present situation forces tourists to use border crossings situated dozens of kilometres from the powiat's tourist centre, and considerably extends the time required to reach appealing locations in the neighbouring countries.

Another obstacle for tourist traffic is represented by the unpredictable and sometimes several-hours-long border crossing procedures, not to mention the lack of possibilities to cross the border on foot or by bicycle. A barrier preventing Polish tourist from travelling to Belarus from Ukraine is the visa-free border crossing between these two countries in Tomashovka–Pulemets. Such a border crossing would facilitate tourist traffic between them and shorten both the distance and time required to arrive at Shatsky Lakeland from Włodawski powiat, which is at present possible through the often crowded crossing located in Dorohusk.

Even though the development of the necessary cross border infrastructure in Włodawski powiat is not feasible due to political and economic reasons, further amenities for tourists crossing borders would contribute to the future growth of tourism in the borderland shared by Poland, Belarus and Ukraine.

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