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## Conditions for tourist travels to the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>

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### Uwarunkowania wyjazdów turystycznych do województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego w dobie pandemii COVID-19

#### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie poziomu ruchu turystycznego oraz rozwoju turystyki w województwie warmińsko-mazurskim w okresie pandemii COVID-19. W artykule przedstawiono główne czynniki, które wpłynęły na rozwój przyjazdów turystycznych w tym regionie. Zastosowane metody to obserwacje terenowe, analiza literatury, w tym dokumentów strategicznych, analiza danych statystycznych oraz badanie ankietowe. W artykule przeanalizowano uwarunkowania ob-

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szaru do rozwoju turystyki, w tym klimat, infrastrukturę drogową i kolejową oraz szlaki turystyczne i bazę turystyczną. Dodatkowo wskazano funkcjonujące atrakcje turystyczne w województwie oraz ukazano funkcjonującą bazę noclegową i gastronomiczną. Przeprowadzono również ankietę dotyczącą opinii turystów na temat podróży w czasie pandemii COVID-19.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rozwój turystyki, turystyka, jeziora, przestrzeń, planowanie.

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to show what was the level of tourist travels and tourism development in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship during the COVID-19 pandemic times. The article presents the main factors that influenced the development tourist arrivals in this region. The methods used were observations, analysis of literature, analysis of strategic documents and analysis of data collected by a questionnaire. The article analyses the conditions of the area enhancing the development of tourism, including climate, road and rail infrastructure and tourist routes. In addition, tourist attractions in the province were highlighted and reference was made to the existing tourist infrastructure – accommodation and catering facilities. A questionnaire was also carried out pertaining to tourists' opinions about travels during the COVID-19 pandemic time.

**Keywords:** tourism development, tourism, lakes, space, planning

## Introduction

This article is an attempt to characterize tourism development in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship during the COVID-19 pandemic times. It is an empirical analysis based on research conducted with the use of a survey, enriched with photographic material. The aim of the article was to show the conditions of the area of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, with particular emphasis on natural conditions, including the climate of the region. The railway and road infrastructure, the tourist routes, and the accommodation and catering facilities were also analysed. A wide range of tourist routes was shown. The selected region is very interesting in terms of tourism development because it is changing dynamically. The article also shows how the COVID-19 pandemic affected tourist movement in the voivodeship.

The aim of the study was to answer the following questions: What were the conditions of tourism development for this region? What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism movement in this voivodeship?

## Conditions for the development of tourism in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship

The Warmian-Masurian voivodeship is one of the largest areas in Europe with attractive natural features. It is inhabited by 1.4 million people, and its sur-

face area is 24 thousand square kilometres, which makes it the fourth largest voivodeship in Poland (representing 7.7% of the country's territory). The population density is 59 people per square kilometre [22]. It is located in the north-eastern part of the country. The region measures 240 kilometres east to west and 146 kilometres north to south. The capital, which is the largest city of the voivodeship, is Olsztyn, where the voivode and local government authorities are located [43]. In 2020, 490 tourist accommodations facilities were located in the Warmian-Mazurian voivodeship (including 112 hotels, 2 motels, 36 guest-houses, 44 holiday resorts, 38 tourist cottage complexes, 16 campsites, 58 guest rooms and 60 agri-tourism establishments<sup>2</sup>). All bed places for tourists in 2020 counted 40 thousands, out of which 13 thousands were located in hotel establishments [16].

However, it needs to be mentioned that in case of hotel investments, it is necessary to transform the natural environment. This is why it is crucial to choose a method of managing naturally valuable areas and ensure their maximum protection and sustainable development [14]. The idea of sustainable development assumes that the changes meet the needs of modern societies, and will not limit development possibilities for future generations. The parallel development of economy, society and the environment should be kept in mind. The concept of sustainable development was defined by the report of the World Commission for Environment and Development entitled 'Our common future' (Earth Summit Conference) ([www.teraz-srodowisko.pl](http://www.teraz-srodowisko.pl)).

The conditions of an area for the development of tourism means that the given area has a predisposition for tourism development in terms of tourist settlement, tourist attractiveness, appropriate natural values, and transport accessibility [6]. In the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship there is a complex of about 2.500 lakes, they constitute 6% of the entire voivodeship and are its greatest asset. Water reservoirs were created during the Baltic Glaciation.

This voivodeship is the third largest by the share of protected areas (46.7%) and has particularly distinguished natural values. In addition, 31.4% of the voivodeship's area is covered by forests, which also include 8 landscape parks [13], 67 protected landscape areas, 2.180 natural monuments and 102 reserves [18].

Basic climate-creating factors are heat and air circulation [22]. Poland is characterized by a temperate climate with the greatest variability in weather (Kaczorowska, 1958). There are two types of climate in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship: maritime from the north-west, and continental from the east, but generally the voivodeship has a moderate transitional climate, which is characterized in this region by mild winters and cool summers. Meteorological studies carried out over 30 years in Olsztyn show that the warmest days are in July and August [26].

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics for accommodation facilities with more than 10 beds.

## Transport infrastructure

Road infrastructure is an important part of the transport network. Transport plays an important role in the flow of goods and is of high importance in the socio-economic development of the country and the region and tourism development [2]. It can also play a huge role for the tourism of the region itself because it significantly influences the investment attractiveness of a given region [22]. It is also important to develop the road network to improve safety. For years, many investment programmes have been created to improve travel conditions in Poland [12].

The region is rich in road infrastructure; several national roads pass through the voivodeship (No 7, No 16, No 51 and No 65), enabling fast and safe travel between cities [28]. The most important link is the national road No 7, which is 780 kilometres long. The road is part of the international European route E77 [29] that runs through Russia to Hungary. In December 2017, the road in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship section was completed, thanks to which the section running through the area is classified as an expressway; however, construction on the Masovian section of the voivodeship is still ongoing. When the work is complete, the communication network in Poland will have improved significantly. Thanks to this route, Poland will be better connected with the countries of southern Europe. The completed fragment of the route is shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Access to the S7 motorway towards Warsaw in the town of Ostróda

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

Investments in road infrastructure increase driving safety, improve transport connections with smaller towns and have a positive effect on increasing the movement of tourists. Since 2010, 1.400 kilometres of hard surface public roads have been constructed. In December 2020, a project for another investment was approved – the construction of the S16 national road. Thirteen kilometres of the Borki Wielkie-Mrągowo section, out of the planned 230 kilometres, have been completed. This will significantly facilitate communication between the largest tourist destinations of Masuria and improve transit times for the local population. It will also be part of the European transit route from Greece to Lithuania. However, despite the commencement of construction works, the road is still very controversial. The biggest problem is that the motorway will cross the Land of Great Lakes, and the noise may scare tourists away [32]. Due to the high tourist movement in this area, such a motorway would significantly relieve public roads and increase travel safety, which would improve road conditions in this region.

The Warmian-Masurian voivodeship has a railway network that falls under the IŻ Olsztyn railway line network [30]. It allows access to selected towns, and connections with the largest cities in Poland [30]. Despite the fact that the railway network exists, it is not the best means of transport in the region, as trains only reach selected places. In 2018, plans were made to resume travel on several railway lines, which would significantly improve intercity communication and attract more tourists, especially those who are unable to travel by car.



**Fig. 2.** Railway platform in Ostróda

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

## Tourist routes in Warmian-Masurian voivodeship

The voivodeship is rich in various types of tourist routes, including car, bicycle, hiking and horse trails. In total, in 2020, they were 2.459 kilometres long (including 1.740 km of lowland trails, 145.7 km for cycling and 17 km for horse riding trails) [16]. There are also thematic routes leading through historical places, often related to the biographies of important figures. The route is 600 kilometres long and runs past many significant monuments. Other trails include the Copernicus Trail of 232 kilometres, which leads through towns related to the life of the astronomer, and the Gothic Castles Trail, 642 kilometres long, which runs through Warmia, Masuria, Powiśle and Kashubia. There is also the Elbląg Canal Trail, 280 kilometres long, which is a permanent tourist attraction [1]. The R64 cross-border route, 187 kilometres long, 95 of which are in the province of Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, circles the Vistula Lagoon, leading through the Vistula Spit to Braniewo (Bzowski, 2017). Another well-known international route is the R1, which is 86 kilometres long within the voivodeship and covers 675 kilometres in Poland altogether [38].

There are also naturally formed connection systems of water reservoirs called the Great Masurian Lakes. For lovers of water sports, these are a huge tourist attraction. The water route that encourages sailors from all over the country and abroad to relax in the beautiful landscape of Warmia-Masuria the most is The Great Masurian Lakes Trail, which is 132 kilometres long and is considered the most attractive in the entire country and Europe. Travelling along this route, you can admire many monuments, including the historic swing bridge and the castle in Węgorzewo. An interesting experience is the opportunity to observe the diversity and specific development of municipalities located on the indicated lakes [3]. Another noteworthy trail is the 96-kilometre long canoe route running along the Krutynia River, considered to be the most beautiful canoeing trail in Europe. The route of the trail runs through several lakes connected by smaller rivers. The surrounding development of the coastline is also attractive. You can admire churches, palaces, country cottages, taverns, hydroelectric power plants and locks, as well as other architectural monuments [20].

Creating a safe infrastructure for bicycle tourists is an important element in the development of sustainable transport, improving the comfort and safety of cyclists and promoting the development of bicycle tourism. Warmia-Masuria has a wide range of routes that are attractive to tourists. In the Ostróda powiat, you can travel on 18 different bicycle routes that lead to the nearest towns [34]. The photo of a bicycle trail in Ostróda (Fig. 3) shows a bicycle path and a pavement for pedestrians separated by a green belt. This is a very safe solution, preventing pedestrians from colliding with cyclists and vice versa. The development of the green areas of Ostróda takes into account the natural and climatic aspects

of the city in order to protect the natural environment and create a high-quality living space.



**Fig. 3.** Beginning of the bicycle path in Ostróda

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

A 300-kilometre trail called the ‘Masurian Bicycle Loop’ is planned for 2023, supervised by the Association of Great Masurian Lakes 2020. The project will encircle Śniardwy Lake and will comprise ten observation towers along the route to admire the Masurian landscape, 18 bicycle service points, and recreational shelters with services, including toilets and bicycle racks. These are to ensure the comfort of cyclists [35].

The longest bicycle trail in Poland, Green Velo,<sup>3</sup> runs through the region. The route goes through 17 towns and villages; these are: Elbląg, Tolkmicko, Frombork, Braniewo, Pieniężno, Górowo Iławeckie, Lidzbark Warmiński, Bartoszyce, Sępólno, Korsze, Barciany, Srokowo, Węgorzewo, Banie Mazurskie, Gołdap, Stańczyki, Żytkiejmy [40].

## The development of tourism infrastructure in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship

2.3 million people came to the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in 2020 as part of domestic tourism [16]. It is the 6<sup>th</sup> most visited voivodeship in Poland. In 2020, in the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the occupancy rate of bed places

<sup>3</sup> The Green Velo trail is 2.071 kilometres long, which makes it the longest in Poland ([www.green-velo.pl](http://www.green-velo.pl)).

in facilities with 10 or more bed-places in Poland was much lower than the year before and amounted to 26.8% (in 2019 – 40.6%). The Warmian-Masurian voivodeship was one of the four voivodeships where the indicator was higher than the national average. Analyzing the values of the tourist intensity ratio according to Schneider and Charvat, values higher than the average for Poland were characteristic for the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship – 61 and 167 respectively (for each 100 inhabitants there were 61 tourists and 167 overnight stays) [16].

The concept of sustainable tourism development assumes an effective development path, ecological solutions and social participation. This is to guarantee that a given region will preserve rich natural and cultural resources of the area for future generations [5]. Warmia-Masuria has a wide range of tourist attractions related to active tourism. The areas famous for lakes constitute a significant tourist attraction and are considered a favourable environment for the development of tourism and recreation. Many regions use this fact to promote their image [7]. However, as far as the attractiveness of individual tourist resorts is concerned, it is not evenly distributed. Tourism in some lake areas is restricted due to the current ban on the use of internal combustion engines. Any recreation generating noise, such as jet skis or scooters, is prohibited. This is regulated by the Environmental Protection Act. One such an area is Narie Lake located in the Łława Lake District. It is a great place for tourists who want to rest in peace and quiet. The ban allows for the elimination of frequently occurring water conflicts that arise between lake users, for example, between canoeists and motorboat users. Water sports practised in such lakes are much safer. Fishing is a popular tourist attraction in the region. The development of the lake shores is conducive to water recreation, and the inhabitants have built little piers to be able to fish, swim in the water or go boating; hence Narie Lake enjoys a developed shoreline that stretches for 50 kilometres (Fig. 4).

Considering the example of coastal towns, in order for a given area to become attractive for tourists, it must undergo several transformations. Usually, such changes take place in fishing villages because a suitable pier, a beach to facilitate the mooring of boats, and a bathing area are already in place. Over time, a promenade is built, along with catering facilities and accommodation facilities (Durydiwka, Duda-Gromada, 2014). This pattern was repeated in the village of Kretowiny, which is located on Narie Lake. There is a tourist and entertainment centre here, providing accommodation (camping, summer houses, guesthouses and hotels); gastronomic facilities serving regional dishes; and water equipment rentals (canoes, boats, diving equipment). The promenade that stretches around the bay enhances long walks. For tourists, there is also a pier for mooring boats and a beach with a designated bathing area. The land development on Narie Lake is shown in figure 5.





**Fig. 4.** The shoreline at Narie Lake

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.



**Fig. 5.** Pier and beach with a designated bathing area in Kretowiny, with a promenade along the shoreline

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

The largest urban centres in Warmia are Elbląg and Olsztyn. Elbląg attracts tourists not only with its beautiful old town but also with the Elbląg Canal, known throughout Europe, while Olsztyn is the capital of the voivodeship. There are

towns located in the Masurian Lake District that are very famous tourist centres, such as Pisz, Giżycko, Mrągowo and Mikołajki. They enjoy the most developed recreational tourism, including water tourism, of the area. The most popular sport that attracts tourists is sailing. Every year in Giżycko, there are regattas lasting 24 hours, the route running through the Land of Great Lakes.

Another region that attracts tourists is the Iława-Ostróda Lake District, its largest centres being Ostróda and Iława. The largest share of tourism in this area is domestic tourism (84%) [3]. From 2012 to 2019, tourist traffic increased. Tourism in Poland is developing at the highest level (Eurostat). In 2013, the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship recorded a huge increase in interest in the region compared with 2009; however, short-term tourism dominates here. The most numerous groups of foreign tourists, 47%, are German citizens [23].

### **Tourist accommodation base in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship**

Since 2012, the interest in tourism in Poland has increased dramatically. The number of nights spent in tourist resorts in 2012–2019 increased by 49%, which is one of the largest increases in Europe (Eurostat). In 2018, all European countries reported statistics on tourist movement, and Poland recorded the 5<sup>th</sup> largest number of night stays. In Poland, the recorded increase results from the expanding hotel base and the communication network. In 2013, 173,000 foreign tourists came to the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship [3]. Compared with 2010, a 19.1% increase was recorded. On the other hand, the number of Poles who used accommodation services in the region in the same year was 878,800, a 15% increase compared with 2010. In contrast with the seaside voivodeships, the accommodation base in Warmia-Masuria is not sufficiently developed despite its natural and anthropogenic diversity. This is due to:

- 1) an underdeveloped communication network in the region for many years;
- 2) the presence of naturally valuable areas that limit the development of infrastructure [18].

The most popular accommodation facilities among tourists are 4 and 5-star hotels; the popularity of other options depends on their standard. However, taking into account the exceptional year 2020 and the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rate of occupancy of beds in all voivodeships was significantly lower than in 2019. The largest declines in the use of tourism bed places occurred in the following voivodeships: Mazovian 22.7%, Lesser Poland 17.3%, Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeship 15.8%, and Silesia 14.7%. In 2020, the greatest interest was recorded in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, where the decrease in the use of bed places amounted to 4.3% [44].

The movement of tourists in the region varies depending on the powiat (a smaller administrative district). The use of accommodation facilities when comparing the Olecko powiat to the Gołdap powiat is lower by 36.9 percentage points [3]. Increasingly, municipalities want to be the most competitive, which is why a lot of emphasis is placed on building all-year round facilities. Investments such as Hotel Gołębiewski, Hotel Mikołajki, Hotel Robert's Port, Hotel Mazurski Dworek, Hotel Amax, Na Skarpie, operating all year round, contribute to the growth of the movement of tourists out of season [17].

Hotel Gołębiewski evokes controversy among local inhabitants. The facility can accommodate more than 1,300 people [45] and offers its guests a wide range of attractions, including water equipment rental, bike rental, golf, horse riding club, arcades, swimming pools, spa, own souvenir shop, etc., which is detrimental to local businesses offering similar services. Moreover, the size and appearance of the building disturbs the architectural character of the region. Constructions of this type should not be built along the coastline. The investment spoils the cohesion of the development and the attractiveness of the region, cutting off free access to the coastline. In the accommodation offer, the rental of summer houses and campsites is also very popular. This type of building development does not interfere with the landscape, unlike larger hotels. The cottages are charming and offer greater privacy. They enable a greater share of time to be spent outdoors, with gardens giving visitors the possibility to grill food, and to take pets with them on holiday. The layout of the summer houses and the campsite is shown in Figure 6.



**Fig. 6.** Holiday homes at Narie Lake

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

The photo shows single-storey tourist buildings and summer cottages, against the background of the forest; this does not disturb the landscape structure. This type of forest management is common in the area.



**Fig. 7.** The Vertigo camping site on Narie Lake

Source: Photo by Małgorzata Bogusławska.

Figure 7 shows the Vertigo campsite, which is located in the middle of the forest, with an internal street marked out to facilitate access to the designated accommodation place.

## **The gastronomic base in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship**

An important element of any trip is consuming local cuisine specialties and more often it is becoming a factor that determines the satisfaction rating of a visit to a given region [15]. According to A. Jęczmyk [9], one of the dynamically developing forms of this activity is culinary tourism, which consists in the search for products and dishes characteristic of specific tourist destinations [9]. Tourists visiting Warmia-Masuria are eager to get to know the local cuisine. It is a significant element of tourism experience here. The research carried out by the World Tourism Organization in 2012 indicates that, in recent years, culinary tourism has been one of the segments showing the greatest development in the global tourism economy (Jęczmyk, Kasprzak, 2017). As for the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship, in the years 2009–2013 the number of restaurants increased by as much as 38.5% [3].

The Warmia-Masuria region was the first in Poland to apply for membership in the European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage. This is an association of farmers, processors and restaurateurs from individual European member regions. They include 135 enterprises offering regional food ([www.dziedzictwokuilinarne.pl](http://www.dziedzictwokuilinarne.pl)). The Warmia-Masuria region favours the development of gastronomy due to its natural conditions, which allow for the cultivation of many species of fish, mushrooms and plants; this encourages tourists to taste local dishes. The cuisine of Warmia-Masuria combines the flavours of Old Polish, German and Borderlands cuisine traditions[40]. In Mikołajki, a project of a restaurant specializing in regional cuisine was created: Recreating the economic heritage of the Warmia-Masuria region by opening a restaurant/inn in the centre of Mikołajki, specializing in regional cuisine [42]. Only regional dishes would be served there. In addition, during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, local food outlets were supported by a government agency offering an additional subsidy for small enterprises. However, catering facilities are dependent on tourism. The peak of the tourist season is July–August, which accounts for 60 days a year; June and September are months in which tourists' interest is reduced, due to the school year timetable[6]. The presence of all-year-round facilities does not significantly translate into bigger traffic in restaurants, because hotels offer self-catering.

In Mikołajki, Olsztyn and Elbląg, each city's website offers tourists a list of catering facilities. Table 1 shows the number of all-year round and seasonal facilities.

**Tab. 1.** The number of restaurant facilities in selected tourist cities of the voivodeship in 2021

SPECIFICATION	Elbląg	Mikołajki	Olsztyn
objects in total	84	52	54
restaurants and bars	68	42	47
cafés and ice cream parlours	15	6	7
year-round premises	—	4	—
number of residents	119 308	8 286	173 178

Source: own study based on registered gastronomic points on the websites of selected towns in 2021 ([www.mikolajki.eu/dla-turysty/restauracje-bary-](http://www.mikolajki.eu/dla-turysty/restauracje-bary-); [www.turystyka.elblag.eu/s/13/gastro-nomia](http://www.turystyka.elblag.eu/s/13/gastro-nomia); [www.visit.olsztyn.eu](http://www.visit.olsztyn.eu)).

Based on Table 1, it could be determined that tourist movement has an impact on the gastronomic policy of cities. Mikołajki, despite the small number of inhabitants (8.286 people in 2017), has a similar gastronomic offer to Olsztyn, which is a city that is twenty times larger. The difference, however, is that most restaurants, bars, cafés and ice cream parlours operate during the tourist sea-

son, and the facilities are closed in winter. As large cities, Elbląg and Olsztyn do not have to worry about the lack of customers outside the summer season and can operate all year round. The unemployment rate in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship is very high, i.e. 9.1%, while the unemployment rate in the whole country is 5.2%. This makes the voivodeship not very attractive to live in and results in increasing migrations to larger cities and a drop in the number of inhabitants. However, in 2018–2019, the number of catering establishments increased. In addition, a significant increase in revenue from catering activities can be noted between 2010 and 2019 (Table 2).

**Tab. 2.** Number of catering facilities in the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in 2010, 2015, 2018–2019\*

Specify	2010	2015	2018	2019
Number of catering establishments	444	492	443	558
including restaurants	162	216	170	209
Sales from catering activities (current prices) in thousand zloty	279535	418932.2	503984.2	590415.5
including catering production	217842	315824.5	410408.0	486628.2

\* Data refer to enterprises employing over 9 people.

Source: *Rocznik Statystyczny Województwa Warmińsko-Mazurskiego*.

## Survey results about tourism behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic times

The survey was mainly based on closed questions with the possibility for respondents to give their own answers. There were a few open questions aimed at better understanding the reasons why they chose specific destinations, as well as their opinions. With a survey, it is easy to compare and find a link between the responses using charts. The period of the pandemic was exceptional for tourism; many accommodation facilities could not even function under the sanitary regime, or they could provide accommodation only to selected groups of people – sportspeople, journalists, spa patients. This resulted in a decreased interest in tourism.

120 questionnaires were analysed, and anyone who expressed an interest in the discussed topic could participate in the study. The survey was placed on two groups on the Facebook social media. One of them was a group of the Warsaw district, Rembertów, which includes the inhabitants of the capital and the surrounding area. The group has 11,000 members. The second place was a the-

matic group connecting cheap travel enthusiasts (Group – Cheap Travel) with a reach of 680,000 members. The mere collection of responses took four days, during which we managed to collect surveys from 120 respondents.

The first important aspect was to check how many of the respondents decided to take a holiday last year (2020). To the question ‘Have you gone on holiday over the last year?’, two-thirds of the respondents answered positively out of 120 people, and the rest indicated they did not go on holiday. The reasons why the respondents did not decide to go on holiday were interesting. As many as 33 respondents did not travel anywhere in 2020. Several categories of the most frequent reasons were identified (Table 3).

**Tab. 3.** Reasons why the respondents did not go on holiday in 2020

CATEGORY	% answers*
I was afraid of the coronavirus infection	45
lack of funds	36
no time	15
I was not interested in any of the available options	12
pregnancy / small child	9

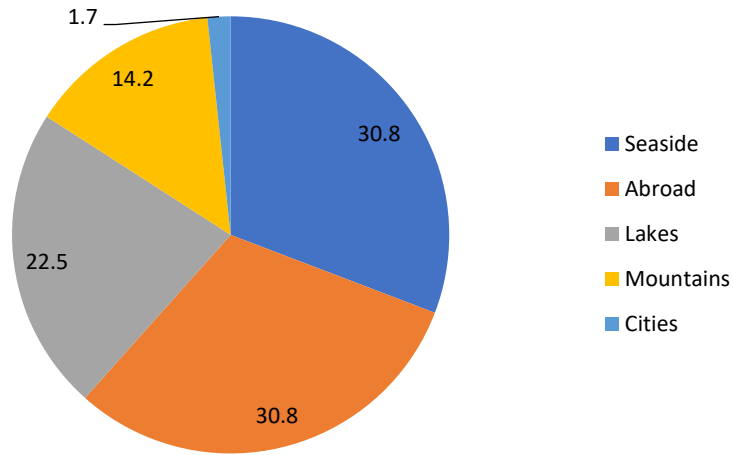
\* Some respondents gave more than one reason.

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

It turned out that the most common reason preventing respondents from deciding to take a holiday was the fear of COVID-19; as many as 45% of the respondents chose this answer. Another factor that frequently emerged (36%) was the lack of funding. 15% of the respondents did not leave due to lack of time, and 12% due to lack of interest. The least frequently chosen answer (9%) was pregnancy or having a small child.

The level of interest in the Polish seaside and in locations outside Poland is the same. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents would go to these places. The next most likely destinations declared were towns situated by lakes. About a quarter of the people indicated that they would like to spend their holiday at the lake. 14.2% of the respondents chose mountain villages. Cities were the least frequently chosen destination.

Tourists choosing specific destinations had an opportunity to answer an open question to indicate what had guided them in their selection process. The most popular responses have been grouped and presented in Table 4.



**Fig. 8.** Destinations that respondents would choose in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic (in %)

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

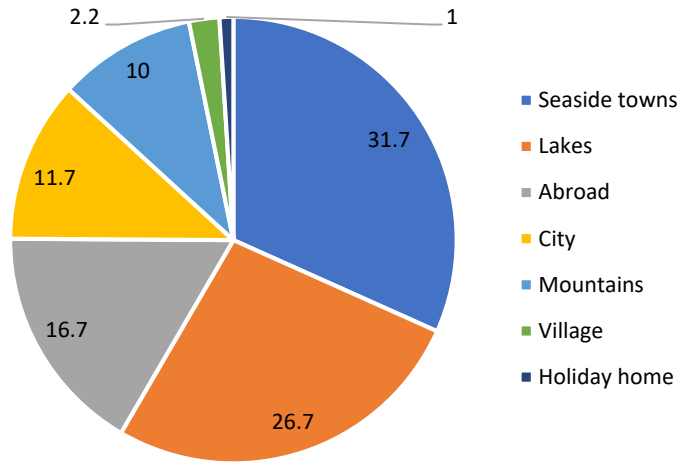
**Tab. 4.** Factors influencing the choice of a destination by the respondents

CATEGORY	% answers
liking the place	37
peace	14
active leisure time	14
because of the weather	9
other	9
fear of COVID-19 infection	8
landscape	6
because of the price	3

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

Most often, the respondents indicated that they chose a specific place because of their own preferences. The second equally most important aspect was to find a calm place and to spend time actively. Both answers received 14%. Other important reasons for their choices were the weather, the fear of COVID-19 and the landscape values. The lowest number of respondents answered that they chose an option because of the price. Destinations chosen by the respondents were an important thread in the survey. In the questionnaire the respondents could choose the places I proposed, as well as suggest their own answers (Fig. 9).

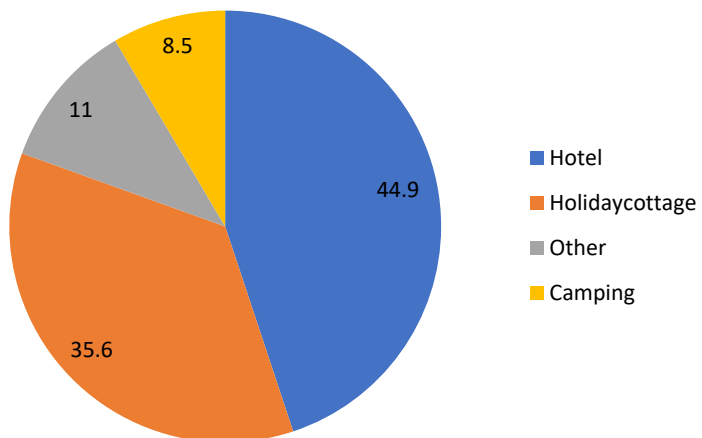




**Fig. 9.** Tourist destinations where respondents spent their holidays in 2020 (in %)

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

Among people who went on holiday in 2020, the most frequently chosen destination were seaside towns chosen by nearly one-third of the respondents. The lakes were the second most attractive destination. Over a quarter of the respondents spent their holidays at the lakes. 16.7% of the respondents decided to go abroad. Similar interest (slightly over 20% in total) was shown in destinations such as cities and the mountains. The least frequently declared holiday destinations were villages and holiday homes.



**Fig. 10.** The choice of accommodation type by the respondents (in %)

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

Hotels – 45% – were definitely the most willingly chosen option by the respondents, but 35.6% of them chose holiday homes as attractive places to relax (Fig. 10). Camping was the least attractive option. The participants of the study also indicated their interest in non-standard forms of accommodation, such as Airbnb, sleeping on a sailing boat, or in private lodgings (apartments). These single responses made up 11% of the total.

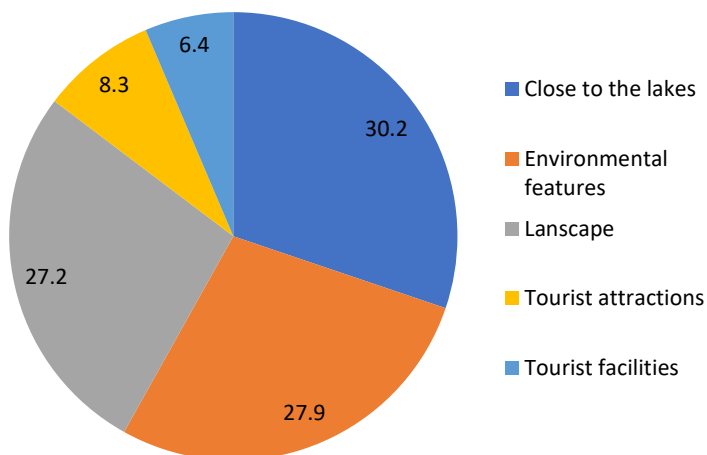
Another important aspect was the assessment of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in terms of tourism. The respondents were asked the following question: Have you ever gone to Masuria and were you satisfied? They could choose 3 answers (Table 5).

**Tab. 5.** Results of the survey on satisfaction with visits to the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship

Reply	% of all responses
Respondents who were satisfied with their stay in Warmia-Masuria	84
Respondents who were not satisfied with their stay in Warmia-Masuria	6
Respondents who have never visited Warmia-Masuria	9

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

The respondents indicated that most of them have visited Warmia-Masuria. Over three-quarters of the respondents said they liked it. A small proportion of tourists (6%) were disappointed with their stay. The respondents could choose what they liked best in the region and what they did not like (Fig. 11).



**Fig. 11.** Presentation of the tourist attractiveness factors of the region (in %)

Source: study based on own research – sample of 120 questionnaires.

The most attractive factor for the region was the proximity of lakes, which was marked by almost one-third of the study participants. Similar results were obtained for natural values (27.9%) and the landscape (27.2%). The smallest number of the respondents indicated that they liked the tourist attractions offered by the region or the tourist facilities. Both answers received less than 10% of the responses.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The aim of the article was to show the conditions of the development for the tourism sector in the area of the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship. The communes located by the lakes have been transformed through investment in the development of the region. This contributed to the improvement of the living conditions of the towns' inhabitants, as well as increased tourist movement. The accommodation base is constantly developing and adjusting its offer to the needs of tourists. New restaurants are being built to familiarize travellers with regional cuisine, which is generally influenced by the interest of visitors. Tourist routes are constantly being expanded for people who want to visit the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship. New sightseeing routes are being created that will allow visitors to get acquainted with the history and culture of the region. To make the region more accessible, the authorities were mobilized to quickly build the S7 route, which goes through the entire voivodeship, allowing convenient transport. New road investments are underway, which will significantly improve regional transport. The conducted survey showed an interest in lake tourism similar to coastal tourism. In addition, the respondents chose this region as a suitable place to spend their holidays due to its attractive natural values, the presence of forests, the proximity of the lakes and the desire to spend holidays in peace and isolation from others. Many people indicated the destination as suitable for holidaying during the pandemic, due to isolation, distance and separate housing, which reduced the risk of infection with the virus. The respondents could also indicate what type of land development they prefer during their stay. In addition, looking at the rest of the voivodeships, it was Warmia-Masuria that recorded the smallest decrease in tourist interest compared with other voivodeships during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main conditions for tourism development during the COVID-19 pandemic times were quick accessibility of the region by car from the neighbouring voivodeships and the region's environmental features, which were highly appreciated by tourists during the pandemic times. The feeling of isolation was also important for tourists. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism movement in this voivodeships was huge, how-

ever, the region was among the voivodeships that recorded one of the best results in statistics of tourist movement in the COVID-19 pandemic times.

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#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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