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INVESTMENTS ON PROTECTED AREAS ON THE EXAMPLE OF BIEBRZA NATIONAL PARK

*INWESTYCJE NA TERENACH PRZYRODNICZO CENNYCH NA PRZYKŁADZIE
BIEBRZAŃSKIEGO PARKU NARODOWEGO*

Key words: investments, national park, accommodation

Słowa kluczowe: inwestycje, park narodowy, własność gruntów, baza noclegowa

JEL codes: Q10, Q5

Abstract. The study discusses the issue of assessment of investment projects planned in environmentally valuable areas. The study area was Biebrza National Park. The source of data was the available literature on the subject, as well as information contained in the Chronicles of Biebrza National Park of year 2015 and 2016. An interview with the park authorities was also conducted. Analyses were developed and conclusions were drawn with regard to investments in the park area. The types of investment projects implemented were specified, as well as the share of these projects in communes located within the park area in relation to the number of inhabitants. It was found that investment projects implemented in the areas protected as a part of the national park were investments in farm buildings, animal houses and – most of all – residential buildings.

Introduction

Investment projects are the key aspect of development of business entities and functioning of societies. In enterprises, investment activities are focused mainly on tangible assets, financial and intangible assets [Michalak 2007]. Engaging in development projects, from the economic point of view, the investor focuses mainly on their maximum profitability. The situation becomes more complicated, when the investment area is environmentally valuable and subject to various forms of environmental protection. When implementing investment projects in such areas, it is necessary to bear in mind the legal provisions that regulate the mode and forms of protection of the natural environment.

One of such forms of protection are national parks. Molla Mekonnen Alemu [2016] points out that the main objective in development of national parks is environmental protection, analyzing this phenomenon with regard to protection of forests and their significance for the society. According to information provided by the UNEP [2008], clean air, clean water and access to food sources are only some of the aspects of ecosystems that ensure the wellbeing of humanity and thus have to be protected. Good management of protected areas is a tested mechanism for maintenance of “healthy” ecosystems and services that they provide.

In Poland, national parks occupy the area of at least 1000 hectares, characterized by special environmental, scientific, social, cultural and educational value, where nature and landscape values are subject to protection. It is established in order to preserve biological diversity, resources, inanimate nature formations and components and landscape values, to restore the appropriate condition of natural resources and components of nature and to reinstate the transformed natural habitats, plant, animal or fungal habitats [Act on protection of nature, art. 8 section 2]. In practice, it is not possible to undertake any investments, as this kind of activity results in violation of the condition of resources and components of the natural environment.

However, article 15 section 3 of the act states that "The appropriate minister for environmental issues, upon consultation with the director of the national park, may give consent for departures from prohibitions within the area of the national park... if this is justified ... by the need to implement public purpose infrastructural investments, if no alternative solutions are available, under the condition of warranting environmental compensation as defined in art. 3 clause 8 of the act of April 27th, 2001 – Environmental protection law act" [Act of April 16th, 2004 on environmental protection].

The scope of this provision, as it has been indicated by Maciej Bielecki [2010], is very general and unclear. It may mean that in the case of a positive opinion of the park director, prohibition of construction of new or existing facilities will be withdrawn, making it possible to execute new investment projects.

In the case of public purpose investments, it is possible to prove that they contribute to improvement of quality of life of the local inhabitants, as well as tourists. Many researchers find it problematic to reconcile economic purposes and environmental protection. As it has been noted by Lisa Naughton-Treves, Margaret Buck Holland and Katrina Brandon [2005], the global system of protected areas has undergone substantial development in the last 25 years. At the same time, these authors state that parks are highly efficient in protection, and many initiatives are aimed at combining protection with local socioeconomic development. Justyna Zygmunt and Łukasz Mach [2011] have pointed out that in all respects, decision-making and implementation of investment projects should take place in the manner, which allows for achievement of the planned effects in a harmonious manner. Łukasz Popławski [2009] notes that protected areas of Poland are among the most significant facilities of this kind in Europe thanks to their high environmental value. At the same time, he concludes that the objective of their protection is inconsistent with the economic interests of the local communities. Therefore, the issue is significant and it requires constant monitoring.

Research materials and methodology

The objective of the study is to present and assess the process of planning of investment projects in environmentally valuable areas. Biebrza National Park (BPN) was intentionally selected for research purposes as the largest national park in Poland; at the same time, as it has been pointed out by Tadeusz Sidor [2010], it constitutes a very good example of the way of dealing with environmental protection problems. The source of data was the available literature on the subject, as well as information contained in the Chronicles of Biebrza National Park of year 2015 and 2016. An interview with the park authorities was also conducted. The information gathered served as a basis for analysis and conclusions drawn with regard to investments in the park area. The types of investment projects that can be implemented (the number of facilities approved) were specified, as well as the share of these projects in communes located within the park area in relation to the number of inhabitants.

Environmentally valuable areas of Biebrza National Park

Biebrza National Park (BPN) was established on the basis of the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of September 9th, 1993, as the eighteenth national park in Poland. At present, BPN is the largest of the 23 national parks of Poland and one of the largest in Europe. The purpose of the park is to protect the extensive peat bogs of Biebrza Valley and a small fragment of Sokólskie Hills. The park buffer zone encompasses small parts of the following mesoregions, adjacent to Biebrza Valley: Sokólskie Hills, Wysoczyzna Białostocka, Wysoczyzna Kolneńska and the Upper Narew River Valley. Within the area of the Park, there are eight enclaves, which have been separated from the Park area, which constitute mainly the mineral islands of Biebrza Valley, which are used for cultivation, meadows and as residential areas. Advantages of the Park

include the broad valley of the naturally meandering Biebrza river with the largest complex of peat bogs in Poland, known as Biebrza Marshes. In the area characterized by the unique mosaic of wetland zones, as well as extensive agriculture, rare species of plants, birds and animals, which are threatened and disappearing in Poland and in Europe. Biebrza National Park is also characterized by vast landscapes, ecosystems and habitats, which have been irrevocably destroyed elsewhere due to melioration and drying of swamps and peat bogs. Biebrza Marshes are considered to be one of the most important sanctuaries of wetland birds in the country and in Central Europe. As an extraordinarily valuable wetland area, in 1995, Biebrza National Park was entered on the list of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of international significance, in particular, as a habitat of waterfowl. Andrzej Grygoruk [2009] has underlined that the international significance of environmental values of Biebrza Valley has also been proven by the fact that it has been recognized as a bird habitat of European significance according to the BirdLife International classification. In year 2004, Biebrza Valley was included in the Natura 2000 network. The area of BPN is located entirely in Podlaskie province, within five administrative districts (poviats): Augustów, Grajewo, Łomża, Mońki, Sokółka. In year 2016, Biebrza National Park administered the land of the State Treasury of the area of 35 242.54 hectares. The remaining park area of 23 980.36 hectares constituted private property [Chronicles of Biebrza National Park 2016]. Figure 1 presents the structure of ownership of the area of BPN.

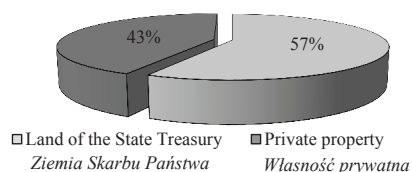


Figure 1. Structure of ownership of Biebrza National Park in year 2016 [%]

Rysunek 1. Struktura własności w Biebrzańskim Parku Narodowym w 2016 roku

Source: own study based on [BPN 2016]

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie [BPN 2016]

The area of Biebrza National Park has been divided into three protection categories: strict, active and landscape protection. Strict protection is characterized by complete and permanent withdrawal from direct human interference into the condition of ecosystems, formations and components of the environment and in the course of natural processes. In the Park, the area of 7494 hectares managed by Biebrza National Park is under strict protection. 26 145 hectares of land managed by BPN is under active protection – when necessary, protective measures are exercised to restore the natural condition of the ecosystem and components of the environment or to preserve natural habitats, as well as plant, animal and fungal habitats. The remaining land belonging to BPN

and land of other owners, including private property, is under landscape protection to ensure preservation of the characteristics of the Biebrza valley landscape [BNP 2016]. For the park, one of the most important factors that constitute a threat to existence of many ecosystems and their natural advantages, is withdrawal of extensive use of swamp meadows and cattle grazing by the local population. The fact that Poland is a member state of the European Union makes it possible to use the environmental protection instruments for this purpose. This applies, among others, to the network of areas of “Natura 2000” and the Agricultural and Environmental Programs being implemented [Dudziuk 2009].

The buffer zone is inhabited by the population of about 27 000, living in 118 villages and towns. There are 2 cities located on the banks of Biebrza River: Lipsk and Goniądz, and 4 large villages: Sztabin, Osowiec, Dolistowo Stare and Nowe, Burzyn. One of the purposes of the national park is to control and limit transformation of natural and semi-natural ecosystems and to protect the landscape values, which are subject to increasing anthropogenic pressure due to intensification of agriculture and recreational facilities [Act on environmental protection...]. This objective is achieved mainly through active participation in spatial management activities of the communes at the stage of approval of local spatial development plans or decisions on the conditions of development.

Undertaking of investments in national park areas – research results

Limiting of threats to protected areas - in this case, the areas of Biebrza National Park – is achieved by diversified activity. The main form protection for the park is the necessity to get approval and opinions of the park employees of the investments planned by the local population within the boundaries and buffer zones of the park. Analysis of investment initiatives is conducted from the perspective of their potential impact on the park and areas of Natura 2000, as well as from the perspective of landscape protection. In addition, the park employees issue opinions with regard to planning and legal documents concerning protection of the natural environment and the landscape, which may exert influence on the Park landscape, and they approve removal of trees and bushes in areas under landscape protection, except for cases, in which decisions concerning removal is not required, specified in art. 83 f of the act of April 16th, 2004 on environmental protection [Journal of Laws of 2016, 2134, uniform text as amended]. Employees of the park also engage in promotion of traditional forms of use of agricultural land in the park and in the buffer zone, taking into account execution of the environmental packages within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy programmes [BNP 2015].

The inhabitants of Biebrza National Park must obtain the consent for every investment project planned. Figure 2 presents the number of approvals concerning investments proposed by the inhabitants in years 2015 and 2016. The data made available is presented for individual quarters and investment types. In the period of two years analyzed, 171 facilities were approved in total. Among these, 16.4% were animal houses, mainly barns, 25.1% – farm buildings, 37.4% – residential buildings, and the remaining 21.1% – “other” buildings, such as garden houses, garages, umbrella roofs or silos. There are also many accommodation facilities, available within the area or near the BPN. The database currently consists of 50 hotels, boarding houses, private accommodation and agritourism facilities. Figure 3 presents exact numerical data on the accommodation offered in individual communes. The map indicates that there are tourist facilities within the park area. Some of them are also located in the surrounding area. 42% of all accommodation facilities are located in Goniądz commune, 16% – in Jaźwiły commune, 8% in Rajgród, and 6 to 2% of all accommodation facilities are located in the remaining communes.

The area of Biebrza National Park is divided among fourteen communes and five poviats. Cooperation of BPN with the local authorities is aimed at supporting socioeconomic development of communes and solving of issues associated with environmental protection, tourist services, protection of cultural and historical heritage, as well as involvement of the local community in the environmental protection processes of the park.

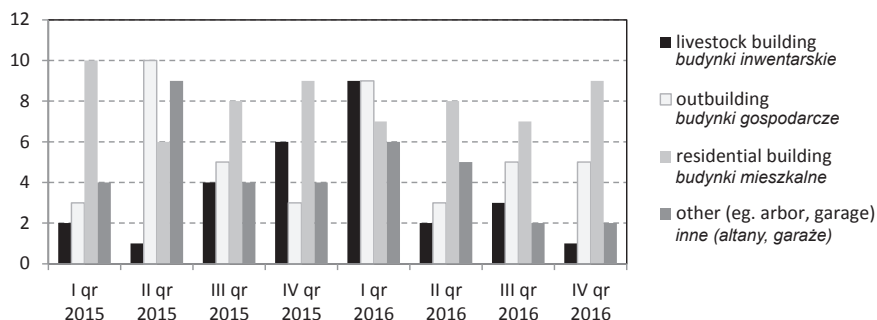


Figure 2. The number of approved construction facilities in years 2015-2016
 Rysunek 2. Liczba zatwierdzonych obiektów budowlanych w latach 2015-2016
 Source: own study based on [BNP 2015, 2016]

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie [BNP 2015, 2016]

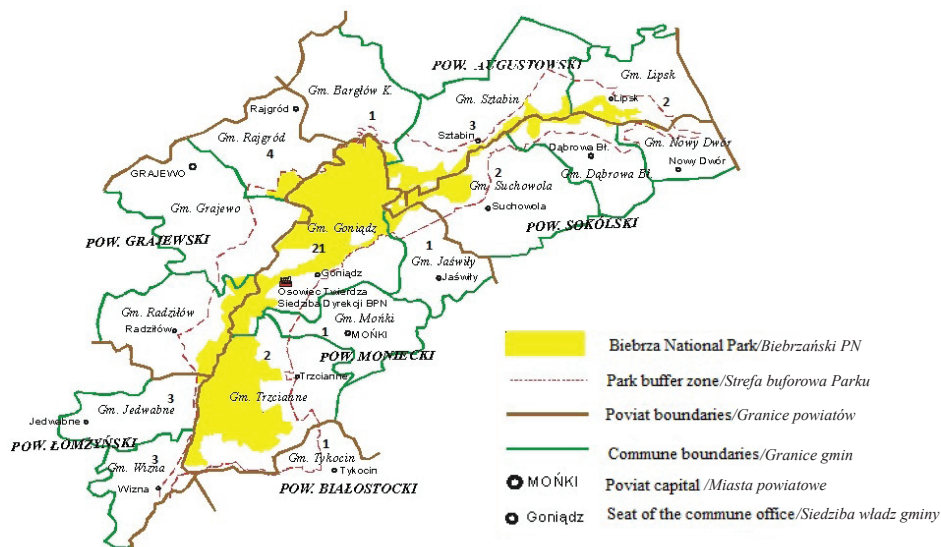


Figure 3. Administrative structure of Biebrza National Park including the accommodation facilities
Rysunek 3. Struktura administracyjna Biebrzańskiego Parku Narodowego wraz z obiektami noclegowymi
 Source: own study based [Kwiatkowski 2002]

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie [Kwiatkowski 2002]

In order to specify the scale of the investment decisions made, we identified communes with the highest number of investments (approvals issued) per capita. Calculations were made on the basis of the number of investment approvals issued by BPN in a given year per capita (fig. 4). This is not a precise method of measuring investment activity of the inhabitants; nevertheless, to some extent it allows for identification of those communes, in which the number of investments is the highest. In absolute values, it would not be possible to indicate such communes as they may differ significantly in terms of their population. On the basis of the results presented, it can be stated that the share of approvals issued varied in different years. Their share per capita was the highest in the commune of Sztabin, and in 2016 - in the commune of Trzcianne.

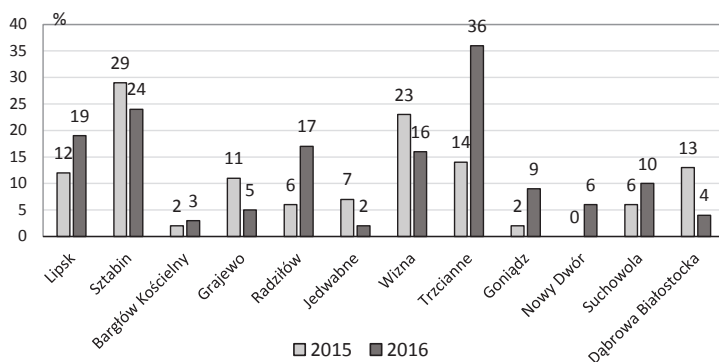


Figure 4. Investment activity of inhabitants in the communes of the area of Biebrza National Park
Rysunek 4. Aktywność inwestycyjna mieszkańców w gminach obszaru Biebrzańskiego Parku Narodowego
 Source: own study based on [BNP 2015, 2016]

Źródło obliczenia własne na podstawie [BNP 2015, 2016]

Conclusions

Research has shown that there is demand for investment in the area of Biebrza National Park, and agricultural activity is conducted in the park as well. This can be concluded on the basis of the type of approvals issued for investments in the park. The main type of investment projects implemented in communes located within the areas protected as a part of the national park were investments in farm buildings, animal houses and - most of all - residential buildings. Investment projects conducted in Biebrza National Park also included construction of garden houses, garages, umbrella roofs and silos. These investments were associated mainly with residential buildings, as well as farm buildings. It can be stated that there is potential for development of agricultural production within the area of the national park.

There are tourist facilities in the park, for which no investment approvals have been indicated. The scope of research was also limited by lack of available information concerning investment projects prior to year 2015, which would facilitate long-term analysis and identification of changes that took place after year 1993, when the National Park was established in the area of Biebrza Valley. Due to this difficulty, the discussion of the topic is not exhaustive and requires further detailed research.

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Streszczenie

Podjęto zagadnienie oceny podejmowania działań inwestycyjnych na terenach przyrodniczo cennych. Obszar badawczy obejmował tereny Biebrzańskiego Parku Narodowego. Źródłem danych była dostępna literatura przedmiotu, a także informacje zawarte w Kronikach Narodowego Parku Biebrzańskiego z lat 2015 i 2016. Przeprowadzono także wywiad z władzami parku. Sporządzono analizy i sformułowano wnioski w zakresie podejmowania inwestycji na obszarze parku. Ustalono jakie rodzaje inwestycji były realizowane oraz określono udział prowadzonych inwestycji w gminach na terenie parku w stosunku do liczby mieszkańców. Stwierdzono, że głównymi rodzajami inwestycji prowadzonymi na gruntach objętych ochroną parku narodowego były inwestycje w budynki gospodarcze, inwentarskie, a przede wszystkim w domy mieszkalne.

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