

## Sustainable Tourism in Small Communities: Opportunities and Challenges in Inowłódz Municipality\*

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\* Presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> IBIMA International Conference, 27-28 November 2024 Granada, Spain

### Abstract

The article analyzes the potential of the Inowłódz Municipality, located in central Poland, to foster sustainable tourism. Today, sustainability is crucial in tourism development at global, regional, and local levels. This study is based on field observations conducted by the authors, questionnaire surveys among local communities and tourists, and a SWOT analysis. These methods were used to assess tourist attractions, identify them as key elements of the area's tourism potential, and evaluate the prospects for developing sustainable tourism in the Inowłódz Municipality. The research showed that the Inowłódz Municipality has high tourism potential. The main factors shaping this potential include rich natural attractions, such as rivers and protected natural areas. In addition to its natural attractions, the municipality offers many human-made attractions, such as historical and military sites and cultural-entertainment events. The Inowłódz Municipality possesses significant tourism potential, but further efforts are required to fully realize this potential by strengthening sustainable tourism practices and creating related tourism products.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, tourist attractions, small communities, Inowłódz, Poland.

### Introduction

Tourism is a driver of socio-economic development, generating income and jobs. However, it also causes problems, particularly due to uncontrolled tourist influx, known as overtourism (Williams 1998). Unregulated mass tourism often leads to environmental issues, like air and water pollution, waste production, and other problems. Additionally, irresponsible tourism can create socio-economic challenges, including conflicts between tourists and residents, increased crime rates, price hikes, and the commercialization of local culture for tourists (Cudny and Dajer 2024).

As tourism increasingly brings both benefits and problems, there is a need for a new approach to tourism development in destination areas. The aim is to reduce the negative impacts while maximizing the benefits. One popular approach is sustainable tourism, which is based on the broader concept of sustainable development promoted by the United Nations and the European Union (Nowacki et al. 2018). Furthermore, sustainable approaches to environmental and socio-economic development are increasingly reflected in national and regional strategies (Sachs 2015).

**Cite this Article as:** Waldemar CUDNY and Zuzanna MIKSA Vol. 2024 (21) "Sustainable Tourism in Small Communities: Opportunities and Challenges in Inowłódz Municipality " Communications of International Proceedings, Vol. 2024 (21), Article ID 4433324, <https://doi.org/10.5171/2024.4433324>

Sustainable tourism is particularly important in small regions rich in natural attractions (Fennel 2003). It is vital for economic growth and environmental conservation. This approach promotes responsible travel practices that minimize the negative effects on ecosystems while supporting local economies (Quaranta et al. 2016). Encouraging eco-friendly behaviors, such as reducing waste, conserving water, and protecting wildlife, helps preserve the natural attractions. It also fosters local community involvement, allowing residents to participate in tourism development while maintaining control over their natural resources. This balance ensures long-term benefits for both the environment and the community. Moreover, sustainable tourism educates visitors on conservation, fostering a global culture of responsible travel (Swarbrooke 1999; Kowalczyk and Derek 2010).

This article analyzes the potential for sustainable tourism development in the small urban-rural municipality of Inowłódz, central Poland. It examines key tourist attractions, especially natural ones, and assesses the current state of tourism and its potential for sustainable development. The research is based on fieldwork, surveys, literature and online sources. The study aims to contribute to the discussion on sustainable tourism in small regions and serve as a foundation for future comparisons and generalizations.

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Attractions and tourism potential***

Tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon where destinations attract visitors through various resources (Williams 1998). Key factors influencing attractiveness include tourist attractions, infrastructure, and transportation accessibility (Ryan 2003). Many studies emphasize the central role of attractions, defining them as elements that draw tourists to a destination (Cohen 1972, Williams 1998, Kowalczyk 2001, Swarbrooke and Page 2002, Kruczek 2011).

Swarbrooke and Page (2002) describe attractions as sites or areas that motivate people to travel from their homes for leisure. Lew (1987) adds that tourist attractions consist of elements that entice travelers away from home, including landscapes, activities, and memorable experiences. Tourist attractions vary, with a basic distinction between natural attractions (e.g., coastlines, mountains, fauna) and human-made ones (e.g., monuments, museums, events). Additional classifications are based on aspects like material dimension (sites and events), range (local to international), management (public or private), and spatial character (point or linear attractions) (Kruczek 2011).

Attractions, combined with infrastructure, accessibility, and factors like economic conditions, local culture, and technology, form a destination's tourist potential. This includes all geographical and human-generated elements that can support tourism. Tourist potential thus encompasses the structural and functional resources necessary for tourism development (Kaczmarek et al. 2010).

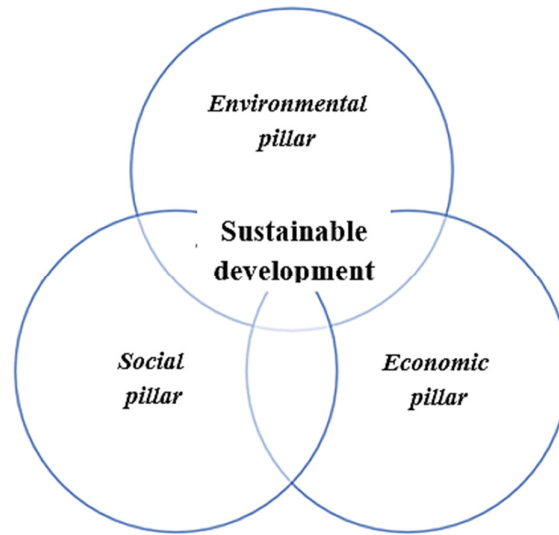
### ***Sustainable development and tourism***

The concept of sustainable development has gained importance in the context of global challenges like climate change, environmental degradation, and socio-economic inequalities (Zmysłony et al. 2020). This concept emerged through the efforts of the Club of Rome and the United Nations (UN). The term "sustainable development" was defined in the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, titled *Our Common Future*. Sustainable development is an approach that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, balancing environmental, social, and economic considerations (Kowalczyk 2010).

The principles of sustainable development were adopted by most countries at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where a declaration was signed to implement twenty-seven sustainable development priorities,

known as the Earth Charter. In 2015, the UN adopted Agenda 2030, a global strategy aimed at achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (Zaręba 2020).

Sustainable development is a comprehensive policy based on three pillars: environmental, social, and economic (Figure 1). Thus, it cannot be limited to environmental goals alone but must also address social and economic objectives at local, regional, and global levels. Actions under the environmental pillar include limiting pollution, reducing CO2 emissions, addressing climate change, and curbing deforestation and soil erosion caused by agriculture. In the social and economic pillars, actions involve preserving local customs and traditions, protecting local communities, promoting inclusivity, and creating development opportunities in smaller regions (Swarbrooke 1999; Soini and Birkeland 2014).



**Figure 1 The three pillars of sustainable development.**

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

The concept of sustainable tourism is related to sustainable development. Sustainable tourism—also referred to as responsible or rational tourism—is based on three pillars: environmental, social, and economic (Cudny and Dajer 2024). It stems from the idea of sustainable development and is gaining increasing popularity due to the intense, negative changes introduced to the environment and culture by the developing tourism sector. Sustainable Tourism is a way of practicing tourism that involves "respecting the cultural, social, and natural values of the area in which tourists are staying, respecting and protecting natural and cultural resources, respecting the identity, traditions, and lifestyle of local communities, while simultaneously utilizing the economic opportunities that tourism brings for the economic development of the region" (Kowalczyk 2010, p. 9).

Zaręba (2010) described sustainable tourism as any form of tourism development, management, or activity that preserves the ecological, social, and economic integrity of a given area while maintaining its natural and cultural tourism resources in an unchanged state. As noted by Kowalczyk and Derek (2010), sustainable tourism does not have a universally accepted definition. However, it is understood as a type of tourism that respects the cultural, social, and natural values. Sustainable tourism involves protecting natural and cultural resources and respecting the identity and lifestyle of the local community. Moreover, the economic opportunities provided by tourism are utilized in its sustainable form to support the economic development of the region.

The responsible development of tourism in small communities is related to the three fundamental pillars of sustainability (Cudny and Dajer 2024). From an environmental point of view, the sustainable tourism in small areas leads to responsible management of natural attractions. By utilizing local resources, sustainable tourism reduces the carbon footprint associated with transportation and the import of goods. It promotes environmental

education and awareness among visitors and residents, fostering better stewardship of natural assets. Responsible tourism development can also result in the restoration and maintenance of natural landscapes. Ultimately, these practices ensure the long-term viability of the community's natural environment for future generations (Campos et al. 2022).

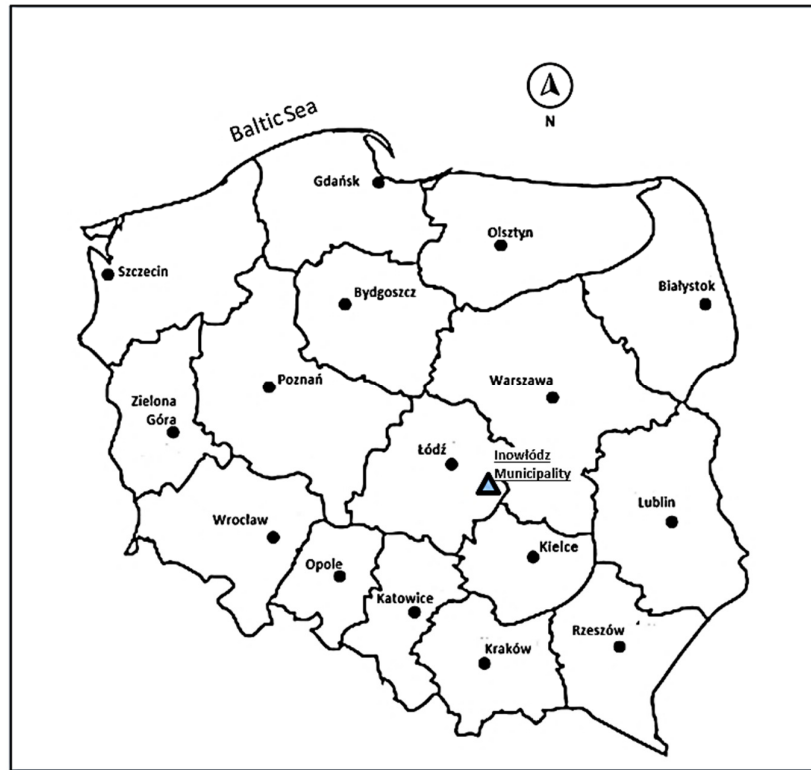
Sustainable tourism also encourages the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions by showcasing local culture and practices to visitors. It fosters local community empowerment by involving residents in tourism planning. This inclusive approach strengthens social cohesion, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between locals and tourists. Responsible tourism can lead to the restoration and maintenance of historical sites, preserving important cultural landmarks (Małek 2003).

Economically, sustainable tourism stimulates the local economy by creating jobs and supporting local businesses in small, often underdeveloped regions (Rogerson 2018). It enhances infrastructure and public services that benefit both tourists and residents. Utilizing local resources not only reduces costs associated with importing goods but also supports local producers and suppliers (Quaranta et al. 2016). The economic boost from tourism can improve the standard of living for community members and provide funding for further community development. By focusing on sustainability, the local economic benefits for smaller destinations are more likely to be long-term and resilient (Binns and Nel 2002).

## **Methods, materials and characteristics of the research area**

The article's analysis is based on field observations, a questionnaire survey, and a SWOT analysis. Field observations involved documenting natural and human-made attractions and assessing tourism infrastructure. An intercept survey was conducted with tourists and residents from July to September 2023, using a convenience sampling approach. Despite its non-representative nature, the survey provided valuable insights with 90 completed responses. A SWOT analysis was also performed to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for sustainable tourism development in Inowłódz. Additionally, desk research was conducted by analyzing existing data.

The analyzed municipality of Inowłódz is in central Poland, in the Łódź Voivodeship (Figure 2). It is an urban-rural municipality, with its seat in the town of Inowłódz. Its area covers 98.04 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 3,780 people. The municipality has experienced a natural population decline for years. The natural growth rates are negative, and migration balance does not compensate for the growing demographic gap (<https://bip.inowlodz.pl/>). The main watercourse in the municipality is the Pilica River, a left tributary of the Vistula. The municipality is predominantly lowland and flat. A significant advantage of the municipality is its favorable location relative to major urban centers: Łódź, Piotrków Trybunalski, Rawa Mazowiecka. The drive to Poland's capital city Warsaw takes about 1.5 hours by car, and to Łódź over an hour (<https://www.inowlodz.pl/>).



**Figure 2. Location of Inowłódz Municipality on the map of administrative regions of Poland.**

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

### **Main tourist attractions of Inowłódz Municipality**

Inowłódz region is rich in natural tourist resources. While its natural attractions are predominant, cultural landmarks also contribute to tourism. The area is abundant in forested regions, with nearly 60% of its surface covered by forests. The largest areas are pine forests, which are part of the former Pilica Forest. These forested areas attract tourists seeking relaxation, as well as those interested in hiking and cycling tourism. Another main attraction is the Pilica River (Photo 1). The municipality is also home to smaller rivers, such as Gać, Słomianka, and Cetenka. In their valleys, nine small water reservoirs have been created for retention and tourism purposes. In 1983, the "Pilica and Drzewiczki Valley Protected Landscape Area" was established, covering 63 hectares, including an 80 km stretch of the Pilica Valley with nature reserves like "Tomczyce" and "Sokół." This area is a vital habitat for rare bird species and has earned European recognition for bird conservation efforts. Canoeing tourism is also developing in the Pilica Valley, often considered a form of sustainable tourism (<https://mazowsze.szlaki.pttk.pl/>; <https://www.inowlodz.pl/>).



**Photo 1. The Pilica River.**

*Source: Authors' photo.*

Another key attraction is the Spalski Landscape Park, established in 1995, with ca. 131 km<sup>2</sup> partially within Inowłódz Municipality. It features forests, water bodies, and numerous protected plant and animal species. The park includes several nature reserves:

- Spała Nature Reserve, created in 1958 to protect 200-year-old oak-pine-hornbeam forests.
- Konewka Nature Reserve established in 1978 and protecting ancient oak forests, with trees aged 160 to 260 years.
- Żądłowice Nature Reserve established in 1968 known for diverse landscapes and unique habitat patterns within the wide Pilica Valley.

Inowłódz Municipality also contains protected areas under the EU's Natura 2000 program, including the Lower Pilica Valley and Spalskie Forests, aiming to preserve important flora and fauna. The described protected nature areas are a space for exploration for nature enthusiasts, as well as a destination for hiking tourism along designated trails (<https://www.inowlodz.pl/>).

The anthropogenic tourist attractions of the Inowłódz municipality are spread across various areas but are mostly concentrated in the main towns, Inowłódz and Spała. These attractions include historical monuments, sacred sites, and small architectural structures like chapels and statues. The Castle in Inowłódz is the main historical landmark, built of sandstone in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Photo 2). It was surrounded by a wide moat connected to the Pilica River, filled with water. The castle's unique feature is its tower made of rough stone, the only one of its kind in Poland, built to protect the castle. The Church of St. Giles in Inowłódz, dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is one of Poland's oldest Romanesque churches. It was founded by Duke Władysław Herman as a votive offering for the birth of his son Bolesław. The town center also features a 19th-century synagogue and a Jewish cemetery with 53 tombstones (Mokras Grabowska and Rzeńca 2007)



**Photo 2. The Castle in Inowłódz.**

*Source: Authors' photo.*

Spała offers several cultural attractions, including the wooden Church of Our Lady Queen of the Polish Crown, built in 1923. Another key site is the Spała water tower, constructed in the late 19th century to supply water to his residential complex. The town also features the Chapel of St. John of Nepomuk and the House of Memory and Martyrdom of Polish Foresters and Woodworkers, established in 1983 to honor foresters who fought in World War II. Another attraction is the railway shelter and bunkers in nearby Konewka, dating back to World War II.

Inowłódz municipality also hosts intangible cultural attractions, such as events like Hubertus Spalski (in Spała), one of Poland's largest outdoor hunting and equestrian events, the Spała Antiques and Folk Crafts Fair, and Inowłódz Municipality Days. A major national event is the Presidential Harvest Festival, first held in 1927 by President Ignacy Mościcki and revived in 2000. Traditionally held in Spała, the festival was relocated to Warsaw in 2023 (<https://www.inowlodz.pl/>).

## **Results of the questionnaire survey**

A total of 90 surveys were conducted in the studied municipality between July and September 2023. The survey questions focused on tourist attractions, tourism infrastructure, and sustainable tourism issues. Most respondents were aged 18-25 (15.56% of those surveyed) and 25-30 (13.33%). The group predominantly consisted of individuals with higher education (38.88%) and secondary education (25.56%). Respondents from the municipality accounted for 45.56%, while visitors made up 54.44%.

Respondents were first asked for an overall assessment of the tourism potential of the Inowłódz municipality. 42.23% of respondents considered the tourism potential to be high, while 11.11% rated it as very high. 12.22% of respondents rated it as low, no responses indicated very low potential. Meanwhile, 34.44% rated the potential as medium. Overall, the assessment of tourism potential by the surveyed respondents was positive, with more than 50% indicating a high or very high level.

The next question asked respondents to assess the most important elements of the tourism potential. They were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5, factors like natural tourist attractions, man-made attractions, tourism infrastructure, transportation accessibility, the activities of local authorities, the activities of other institutions, and local customs and traditions. The highest average rating—4.67 points—was given to natural tourist attractions. Local customs and traditions ranked second with 4.34 points. The activities of local authorities (3.77) and other institutions (3.49) were rated poorly, expressing criticism of the lack of promotional efforts and the weak focus on sustainable tourism development. The lowest-rated aspect was the transportation accessibility (3.16). In individual interviews, respondents pointed to insufficient access to local tourist attractions and the inadequate number of parking spaces.

Another question concerned the type of tourism that dominates in the municipality. Leisure tourism received the most responses (57.78%). Sightseeing tourism came second (31.11%), followed by active tourism (11.11%). Respondents noted that kayaking tourism on the Pilica River, as well as leisure tourism in forested areas, and active tourism (bike, hiking) on trails in the landscape park, are developing well in the region.

Next respondents were asked to assess the level of sustainable tourism development in the municipality. Most believed that the level was medium (38.89%). "High" came in second (33.33%), followed by "low" (17.78%). Only one person (1.11%) thought that sustainable tourism was developing to a very low. 8.89% of respondents indicated that sustainable tourism was developing to a very high level.

The following question focused on selecting the effects of sustainable tourism development. A Likert scale was used in this question, allowing respondents to express their opinions on the effects, such as reducing negative impacts on the natural environment, local culture, and community, preserving local and regional culture, customs, and products, supporting local businesses, and creating new jobs (Table 1).

**Table 1. The dominant opinions of respondents regarding the most important effects of sustainable tourism development.**

| <b>Effects of sustainable tourism</b>  | <b>The response most frequently chosen by respondents</b> |
|--|---|
| Reduction of the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment                              | I strongly agree (95,56%)                                 |
| Limiting the negative impacts of tourism on the local culture and community                          | I strongly agree (63,33%)                                 |
| Supporting and preserving local and regional culture, traditions, and products from being forgotten. | I rather agree (47,78%)                                   |
| Supporting and developing local businesses   | I strongly agree (41,11%)                                 |
| Creating new jobs in the municipality  | I strongly agree (43,33%)                                 |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

None of the effects received "strongly disagree" or "somewhat disagree" ratings, indicating that respondents recognized the need for sustainable tourism development. The option "strongly agree" received the most responses for four out of the five effects of sustainable tourism development. The strongest agreement was noted for the effect of reducing the negative impact of tourism on the environment through sustainable practices (Table 1).

The next question asked whether the municipality should have a plan for the development and promotion of sustainable tourism. Over 75% of respondents answered "yes," while only one person disagreed, and 23.33% were undecided. The most common justification was that such a plan would help preserve natural and cultural heritage for future generations.

In the following question, respondents were asked to suggest actions to increase the sustainability of tourism in Inowłódz. The most frequently mentioned were reducing pollution from tourism (14.44%) and creating new jobs to support socio-economic sustainability (13.33%). Other popular suggestions included supporting local businesses, promoting cultural and natural heritage, organizing clean-up initiatives, and raising ecological awareness.

## **SWOT analysis for sustainable tourism in Inowłódz Municipality**

The final assessment of Inowłódz's tourist attractions, potential and sustainability was conducted using a SWOT analysis (Figure 3). SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. While strengths



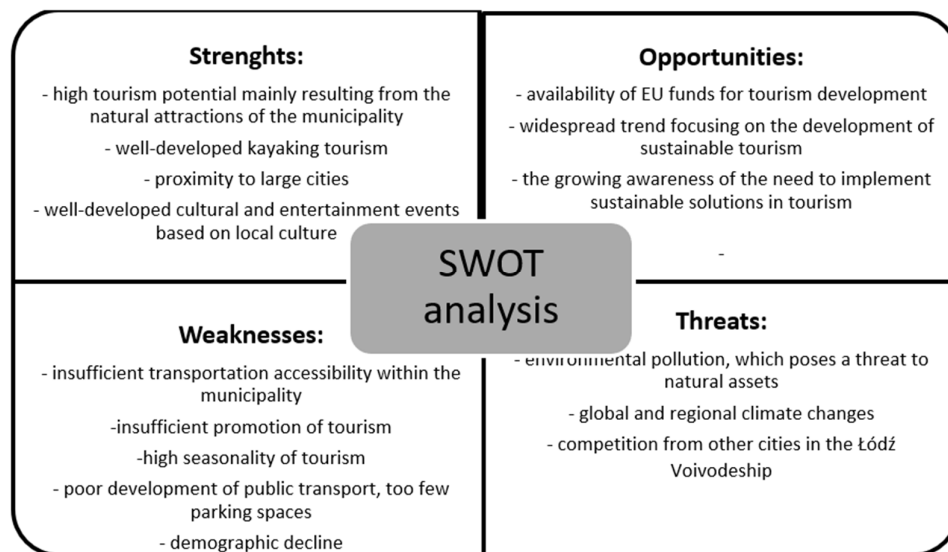
and weaknesses are internal factors, opportunities and threats are external (Kaczmarek et al 2010). Among Inowłódz's strengths is its high tourism potential, primarily due to its natural attractions, and complementary man-made features. Moreover, Inowłódz is known for its popular cultural events, which attract visitors. The region's rich natural resources and numerous protected areas give it significant potential for sustainable tourism development. Another strength is the well-developed kayaking tourism, considered a sustainable activity. Additionally, the municipality's proximity to large cities like Łódź and Warsaw enhances accessibility for urban tourists.

However, the municipality faces several weaknesses. These include limited internal transportation, which restricts accessibility of some attractions, and insufficient promotional efforts, leading to low recognition as a tourist destination. There is also a shortage of accommodations, which may discourage longer stays. Seasonal tourism, primarily during the summer, creates infrastructure strain due to uneven demand. The lack of well-developed sustainable public transport and parking spaces further discourages tourists from visiting attractions. Additionally, demographic decline and an aging population may lead to a labor shortage in tourism.

Opportunities for Inowłódz include access to EU funds for tourism development, which could be used for infrastructure improvements and promotion. The global trend toward sustainable tourism and increasing public awareness of the need for sustainable environmental and socio-economic practices, also presents a favorable opportunity.

Despite these opportunities, there are threats that could hinder tourism development. Environmental pollution poses a risk to the natural attractions. Climate change, with extreme weather events such as heavy rains and floods, could affect both natural and built environments. Additionally, competition from other municipalities in the Łódź Voivodeship investing in tourism could challenge Inowłódz's growth.

In conclusion, the SWOT analysis shows that Inowłódz has numerous strengths that can attract tourists and support sustainable tourism development. However, weaknesses like limited transportation, poor promotion, a shortage of accommodations, and tourism seasonality need to be addressed. The municipality's sustainable tourism potential remains underutilized and requires strategic planning for future growth (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. SWOT analysis for the sustainable tourism development in Inowłódz Commune.**  
Source: Authors' elaboration.

## Mission vision and goals for sustainable tourism development

Tourism in Inowłódz has strong potential to become more sustainable and responsible, which could be supported by developing a mission and vision. A mission sets strategic goals and guides actions, while a vision offers an outlook for the municipality. The authors suggest that Inowłódz's mission should focus on creating conditions for sustainable tourism that benefits tourists, residents, and the natural and cultural environment, aligning with sustainable development principles. The vision should aim to build a sustainable, open, safe, and welcoming region that fosters pride in its natural attractions and historical heritage, co-created by its residents. The municipality should prioritize environmental protection, increase ecological awareness, and support the environment and local culture through responsible tourism development.

As noted by respondents in the survey, Inowłódz should develop a sustainable tourism plan that benefits the environment, residents, and tourists. The proposed goals outlined below (Figure 4) are intended to contribute to the discussion but do not represent a comprehensive development plan.

The first goal is to increase ecological awareness among the local community and tourists. This would promote responsible attitudes toward the natural environment and support UN sustainable development goals, such as climate action and the protection of life on land and in water. Efforts would include organizing informational meetings on sustainability principles, creating informational boards and websites, launching pro-environmental campaigns. Educating local businesses about eco-friendly technologies for tourism services would be essential. These actions align with various pillars of sustainable development—environmental, social, and economic—while contributing to climate action, species protection, and better education.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Goals whose implementation should facilitate the development of sustainable tourism | Increasing ecological awareness among the local community and tourists visiting the municipality                  |
|   | Expanding tourism infrastructure and improving its sustainability and quality                                     |
|   | Responsible promotion of local culture by introducing sustainable tourism products                                |
|   | Creating conditions for greater pro-ecological involvement and better integration of the municipality's residents |
|   | Responsible use of new technologies in tourism management   |

**Figure 4. Proposed goals for the development of sustainable tourism in the studied municipality of Inowłódz.**

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

The next goal for sustainable tourism in Inowłódz is to improve the sustainability and quality of its tourism infrastructure. One key area for improvement is expanding facilities that support kayaking, a popular activity in the municipality. The development of bike trails is important since cycling tourism is another sustainable and popular way to explore the region. Furthermore, promoting low-emission public transport and increasing parking availability would encourage tourists to stay longer and make accessing attractions easier. These initiatives contribute to environmental, social, and economic sustainability, supporting goals such as good health and well-being, responsible consumption and production, and climate action.

Another goal is the responsible promotion of local culture by offering sustainable cultural tourism products. This would enhance education about Inowłódz's heritage and foster a deeper understanding of local customs. Promoting cultural events on a larger scale would also support the region's socio-economic growth through

tourism. The municipality is already known for its events. Raising the profile of these events could boost the municipality's visibility and strengthen its offerings based on local products and traditions. These actions align with the social and economic pillars of sustainable development, contributing to responsible consumption, sustainable communities, and reducing inequalities.

Another goal is to create opportunities for greater ecological engagement and better integration among residents. Improving the availability and quality of local transportation is necessary. Offering more options for active leisure, like nature-based activities, could strengthen community bonds and foster more responsible attitudes toward the environment. Organizing eco-friendly campaigns, like clean-up efforts and promoting green technologies in homes and businesses, would support sustainable city and community development.

Next goal is the responsible use of new technologies in tourism. With the widespread use of smartphones, the development of apps, virtual tours, and QR codes can make it easier for visitors to explore the region. Technology can be used to monitor the environmental impact of tourism enabling better decision-making for environmental protection. Digital platforms can promote eco-friendly travel options, like low-emission transport, and encourage tourists to choose sustainable accommodations. These technologies help connect travelers with local initiatives, fostering sustainable community development. Implementing IT tools for educating tourists about ecology would promote responsible behavior during travel. Sustainable development goals addressed by these actions include climate action, protection of plant and animal species, improved education, and responsible consumption and production.

## **Conclusions**

This article analyzes the potential for sustainable tourism development in the small municipality of Inowłódz, Poland. It examines key tourist attractions and assesses the current state of tourism and its potential for sustainable development. The study aims to contribute to the discussion on sustainable tourism in small regions and serve as a basis for further comparisons and generalizations.

The study confirmed that sustainable tourism allows protection of the environment (Kowalczyk 2010) and cultural heritage (Małek 2003) in small tourism destinations and enhances their chances for responsible economic growth (Binns and Nel 2002; Quaranta et al. 2016). The research shows that the municipality of Inowłódz has high tourism potential, supported by observations and opinions from questionnaire surveys. The main factors shaping this potential include rich natural attractions like the Pilica River, various species of plants and animals, and protected areas within the municipality. These protected areas include the Spalski Landscape Park, numerous nature reserves (such as Spała and Konewka), as well as Natura 2000 sites and natural monuments. The presence of these natural features enables sustainable tourism forms such as kayaking, hiking, cycling, and nature-based tourism, where the motivation is to connect with nature or minimally altered environments. Such responsible types of tourism help protect the environment and lower pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Campos et al. 2022).

In addition to natural attractions, the municipality offers human-made attractions like historical and military sites and cultural-entertainment events. These facilitate the development of heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and sightseeing, which are regarded as forms of sustainable travel. These elements are considered strengths of Inowłódz that could enhance the municipality's sustainable cultural offerings, as confirmed in other publications (see Małek 2003; Cudny and Dajer 2024).

The municipality's weaknesses include poorly rated institutional activities and insufficient promotion. Other issues are high seasonality in tourism, limited availability of accommodation, and a demographic decline in the area. To address these challenges, the municipality should ensure that leisure tourism does not result in negative environmental impacts and should promote active tourism, such as kayaking and cycling, which is considered more sustainable and responsible (Włodarczyk and Cudny 2022).

The municipality has opportunities for tourism development, such as the use of EU funds and the possibility of interregional cooperation. However, the biggest threats include environmental pollution, an unstable labor market in the tourism industry, and competition from other towns in the Łódź Voivodeship.

To fully harness the municipality's high potential and increase the role of sustainable tourism, the municipality should implement a comprehensive sustainable tourism development plan (Cudny and Dajer 2024). This plan should raise public awareness about environmental protection, implement ecological solutions, promote sustainable tourism infrastructure—including transportation and IT solutions—and responsibly promote local culture in tourism development. By taking these actions, the municipality can strengthen sustainable tourism forms and create related tourism products. Once achieved, this will improve the natural environment as well as the quality of life for the local community.

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