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THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY OF RURAL AREAS IN THE WIELKOPOLSKA REGION AS A POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

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Abstract. Rural areas are increasingly recognized as spaces with significant tourism potential, particularly in terms of sustainable development and regional revitalization. This study examines the role of ethnographic diversity as a factor influencing tourism development in rural areas in the Wielkopolska region of Poland. The research aims to identify distinctive cultural features of selected ethnographic groups and assess their potential contribution to tourism and regional development. The study is based on secondary data from Statistics Poland (GUS), the National Heritage Board, and unpublished materials from the Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre. The analytical methods used include descriptive statistics, spatial analysis, and indicator-based assessment of tourism function, using measures such as the Baretje-Defert index and tourist traffic indicators. The results reveal that Wielkopolska's rural areas are characterized by rich ethnographic diversity, encompassing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. However, this potential remains largely underutilized. This is primarily due to limited infrastructure and weak institutional support. Agritourism is identified as the dominant form of tourism, while the broader development of rural tourism is limited. The study concludes that ethnographic diversity constitutes a valuable resource for developing sustainable tourism, but its effective utilization requires improved infrastructure, stronger stakeholder engagement, and strategies that balance economic benefits with preserving cultural authenticity.

Keywords: ethnographic diversity, agritourism, rural tourism, cultural heritage, sustainable development, Wielkopolska region

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas across the world are increasingly perceived as spaces of significant tourism potential, particularly in terms of sustainable development and regional revitalization.

In recent decades, rural tourism has become an important strategy for diversifying local economies and preserving cultural heritage (Gedecho et al., 2025). Environmental factors such as landscape features and traditional hospitality also significantly influence tourism development (Roman and Niedziółka, 2017). Within this framework, ethnographic and cultural diversity, understood as the variety of cultural expressions, traditions, identities, and lifestyles present within rural communities, has emerged as a key resource for tourism development (MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Tang and Xu, 2023; Adams, 2025). However, some studies indicate that "cultural heritage is seen as a backdrop rather than a foreground element of cultural tourism" (Richards, 2026).

Ethnographic diversity encompasses both material components (architecture, crafts, traditional attire) and intangible cultural attributes (language, rituals, customs,

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belief systems). Together, these elements constitute a key dimension of rural distinctiveness and form the cultural resource basis for ethnographic and cultural tourism. In the context of the accelerating cultural homogenization associated with globalization, the preservation and strategic use of such distinctiveness become increasingly important for rural areas seeking to enhance their attractiveness for tourism (Su et al., 2025; Roman and Ignatiuk, 2025). Empirical studies further indicate that endogenous cultural resources impact significantly on the development trajectories of local tourism economies (Balińska, 2016).

Since the 1990s, the literature has documented the growing relevance of the experience economy (Pine II and Gilmore, 2011) and the parallel expansion of experience-based tourism (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011; Martínez de Carnero Calzada, 2025). Roman and Ignatiuk (2025) argue that contemporary tourism demand is increasingly shaped by the pursuit of unique, emotionally engaging, and memorable experiences, which redefine the tourism product beyond traditional service provision. Such experience-oriented value creation strengthens destination competitiveness, enhances perceived quality, and contributes to visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Key determinants are authenticity, personalization, and active participation, which underscore the centrality of experiential factors in current tourism development models.

Yuan (2025) adds that the modern local tourism economy is also driven by innovation, including the adoption of smart tourism solutions, and by the formation of dense cooperation networks among local stakeholders. A persistent challenge for rural destinations is maintaining equilibrium between tourist expectations and residents' well-being, a condition essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and socio-economic stability of tourism development.

The research questions guiding this study were formulated to systematically explore the extent to which ethnographic diversity shapes the tourism potential of rural areas in the Wielkopolska region. They focus on identifying the distinguishing cultural features of local ethnographic groups, assessing how these features may contribute to tourism development, and examining the spatial relationship between ethnographic heritage and the level of tourism across municipalities. By addressing these questions, the study seeks to determine not only the cultural richness of individual ethnographic regions but also the degree to which this diversity is reflected in tourism indicators such as accommodation density or tourist traffic intensity. The research questions also consider the role of local stakeholders in recognizing and utilizing ethnographic resources, as well as the risks associated with cultural commodification. Together, they provide a coherent analytical framework for evaluating how cultural heterogeneity can support sustainable rural development and strengthen the tourism function of the region.

The main aim of the study is to highlight the ethnographic diversity of rural areas in the Wielkopolska region and their potential for the future development of tourism. In particular, the study aims to collect and assess the distinctive cultural features of ethnographic regions, such as traditions, customs and local identity, and to examine their potential for stimulating future tourism in rural areas. It also aims to determine the extent to which this cultural diversity can contribute to strengthening the tourism function and supporting the local socio-economic development of rural areas. Analyses show that the development of rural tourism based on the cultural heritage resources of ethnographic areas in Wielkopolska remains weak.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ETHNOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY AND RURAL TOURISM

Ethnographic diversity is closely linked to the broader concept of culture, understood as the "lifestyles, value systems, traditions and beliefs" that define social groups (Tang and Xu, 2023). In rural tourism studies, culture is not a supplementary attribute but a structural component of the tourism product. As the document states, "culture is not merely an additive element but a core component shaping the tourist experience and destination identity," and cultural atmospherics significantly influence how visitors perceive rural destinations (Zhou et al., 2022). This perspective aligns with Kou and Xue's (2024) argument that rural tourism integrates folk customs, traditions, and cultural landscapes, and that "the essence of rural tourism is the cultural experience."

Agritourism provides a clear example of how cultural resources are embedded within rural development processes. Tedioli (2025) demonstrates that agritourism enterprises preserve rural cultural heritage through educational programmes, promoting traditional products,

and maintaining local food and wine traditions. These practices integrate cultural experience into agricultural settings, thereby showing how tourism models rooted in farming simultaneously sustain local identity and generate experiential value for visitors. In this sense, Tedioli's analysis (2025) aligns with broader scholarship on ethnographic and cultural tourism, which emphasises how rural tourism is most effective when local cultural resources are mobilised as living components of the visitor experience.

Anthropological perspectives further highlight tourism as a form of social interaction and mobility that facilitates encounters between different cultural systems (Sun and Luo, 2022). Ethnographic research methods, particularly participant observation and qualitative fieldwork, have been widely used to examine how rural communities negotiate cultural meanings and adapt to tourism-induced change (Xue and Kerstetter, 2019).

A critical premise for rural development is that rural communities are not homogeneous. As the document notes, "internal diversity, based on ethnicity, religion, history, or socio-economic status, creates a complex cultural mosaic that can be both a resource and a challenge in tourism development" (Tang and Xu, 2023). Recognising this heterogeneity is essential for designing inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies (Paiva et al., 2025; Soulard et al., 2024; An and Alarcón, 2020). Research shows that overlooking diversity undermines sustainability and may negatively affect rural destinations (Soulard et al., 2024). Consequently, effective strategies require context-specific and diversified approaches that reflect the heterogeneous nature of rural areas (Ucieklak-Jeż and Bem, 2020; Stanny et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship indicates a substantial intensification of interest in cultural and creative tourism (CCT), particularly in rural and remote areas. One major thematic trajectory concerns the conceptualisation and production of cultural and creative experiences; rural regions increasingly framed as consumption spaces structured around authenticity and nostalgia (Richards et al., 2025). Ethnographic and cultural diversity significantly enhance destination attractiveness (MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003; Tang and Xu, 2023; Adams, 2025; Richards et al., 2025). Cultural elements such as festivals, cuisine, handicrafts, music and folklore enrich rural landscapes and contribute to multidimensional tourism products (Tang and Xu, 2023). Tourists are increasingly motivated by the desire to experience authenticity, learn about different ways of life, and engage with local communities (Ahmadjon, 2025). Authenticity remains a central determinant of tourist motivation and satisfaction (Li and Li, 2022).

Case studies illustrate the developmental potential of ethnographic diversity. In the Republic of Tuva, the coexistence of indigenous traditions, religious practices, and distinctive lifestyles forms the basis for ethnographic tourism (Sambuu, 2020). In Jamaica, diverse cultural identities within rural communities' support tourism while reinforcing local identity and social cohesion (Taylor et al., 2014).

Ethnographic diversity also supports the development of niche tourism products such as agritourism, heritage tourism, and community-based tourism. These forms rely on the active participation of local residents, who act as custodians and interpreters of their cultural heritage. Rural tourism offerings grounded in local knowledge systems and traditions create immersive experiences (Knežević et al., 2025). Community-based tourism, in particular, depends on culturally distinct communities sharing their heritage and ways of life (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2025). Integrating diverse cultural identities and indigenous knowledge contributes to tourism diversification and strengthens heritage-based development pathways (Tang and Xu, 2023).

Integrating ethnographic diversity into tourism development generates multiple socio-economic benefits. Tourism provides alternative income sources, reduces dependence on agriculture, and mitigates rural depopulation. It is widely regarded as a tool for poverty alleviation and economic diversification (Xue and Kerstetter, 2019; Haulle et al., 2024). By stimulating entrepreneurship and employment, tourism boosts household incomes and contributes to local development (Liu et al., 2023). Tourism based on cultural and ethnographic assets also revitalises rural communities, strengthens social cohesion, and enhances economic resilience by linking cultural resources with sustainable development strategies (Lor et al., 2019; Yanan et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2026).

Tourism further stimulates the preservation and revitalisation of cultural heritage. By assigning economic, social and symbolic value to traditions and customs, tourism creates incentives for their preservation and transmission to future generations. This applies to both tangible heritage (architecture, cultural landscapes) and intangible elements such as rituals, crafts and traditional

knowledge systems (Mazzanti, 2002; Murzyn-Kupisz, 2012; Cerisola and Panzera, 2025; Hettiarachchi, 2024; Bulu and Listyorini, 2024). Increased visibility of local traditions fosters community pride and strengthens cultural identity (Thanh and Phanlukthao, 2026). Tourism thus supports intergenerational transmission, particularly in regions undergoing rapid modernization (Tahiri and Kovaçi, 2026; Vuksanović-Macura et al., 2025).

Ethnographic tourism can also reinforce local identity and community cohesion. Engagement with visitors encourages communities to reflect on and reinterpret their heritage, sometimes contributing to broader processes of regional identity formation (Silva and Leal, 2015).

Despite its potential, the integration of ethnographic diversity into tourism presents several challenges. Commodification risks arise when cultural practices are simplified or altered to meet tourist expectations, potentially eroding authenticity (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1988; Shepherd, 2002; Cole, 2007). Power dynamics within communities may lead to the unequal distribution of benefits and to certain groups being marginalised (Tang and Xu, 2023). Conflicts among residents, tourism operators and authorities can further complicate cultural integration (Zhong et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Kruczek et al., 2022). Environmental and spatial pressures, including land-use change and resource strain, may undermine sustainability if not carefully managed (Gedecho et al., 2025).

To harness the potential of ethnographic diversity, tourism development must be grounded in sustainability and community participation. Community-based tourism models, which emphasize local ownership and decision-making, help ensure equitable benefit distribution (Lee and Jan, 2019; Mair, 2025). Effective management requires multi-stakeholder collaboration and continuous dialogue among communities, policymakers and tourism providers to ensure culturally sensitive and context-appropriate development (Tang and Xu, 2023). Interdisciplinary approaches drawing on anthropology, geography, economics and environmental studies can further enhance understanding of rural systems and support evidence-based policymaking (Sun and Luo, 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The empirical foundation of this study is based on a combination of secondary and institutional data sources. Secondary data were obtained from the Local Data Bank of Statistics Poland (GUS), which provided quantitative and spatial information relevant to the assessment of rural development and tourism-related characteristics. Additional information on cultural resources was sourced from the National Heritage Board of Poland, including a dedicated subset of data concerning the intangible cultural heritage of the Wielkopolska region. To complement these publicly available datasets, the study also incorporates unpublished materials supplied by the Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre in Poznań, offering detailed insights into agritourism and rural tourism accommodation in the Wielkopolska region that are not available through public statistical repositories.

The analytical procedures included descriptive statistics, indicator-based assessment, and spatial differentiation analysis. These methods enabled a comprehensive examination of the relationships between rural development, heritage resources, and tourism functions referencing population size or territorial area. Tourism function was quantified using the Baretje-Defert index, the accommodation density index, and three widely applied indicators in tourism geography: tourist traffic density (Defert index), tourist traffic intensity (Schneider index), and the Charvat index. These indicators are frequently employed to assess the level of tourism function development, compare the degree of tourism infrastructure provision across spatial units, and pinpoint variations in the intensity of tourist activity on the regional and local scales (Warszyńska and Jackowski, 1979; Kurek, 2011). In the scientific literature, the tourism function is most commonly examined using indicator-based approaches that capture two complementary dimensions:

1. tourism development resources including the Baretje-Defert index as well as measures of accommodation density and the development of the lodging infrastructure (Defert, 1960; Warszyńska, 1985; Warszyńska and Jackowski, 1979; Chudy-Hyski, 2006; Szromek, 2012), and
2. tourist traffic intensity indicators, such as the Schneider index, the Charvat index, and the Defert index (Defert, 1988; Warszyńska, 1985; Warszyńska and Jackowski, 1979; Szromek, 2012).

The methodological design was guided by a set of research questions formulated to explore the extent to which ethnographic diversity shapes the tourism potential of rural areas in the Wielkopolska region. Specifically, the study asks:

1. How ethnographic diversity differentiates rural municipalities in terms of cultural resources relevant for tourism development;
2. How the cultural features of individual ethnographic groups contribute to tourism potential;
3. What spatial relationships exist between the distribution of ethnographic groups and the level of tourism development;
4. How tourism function indicators vary across municipalities inhabited by distinct ethnographic groups; and
5. To what extent local stakeholders recognize and utilize ethnographic heritage in shaping tourism offerings.

These research questions provide a coherent analytical framework for assessing how cultural heterogeneity may contribute to tourism development and rural socio-economic resilience.

RESULTS

Ethnographic groups in the Wielkopolska region

The Wielkopolska region, located in western Poland, is widely recognized for its historical significance as the cradle of the Polish state. Beyond its political and historical importance, the province also displays considerable ethnographic diversity, particularly in its rural areas (Brencz, 1996). This diversity reflects centuries of cultural exchange, socio-economic change, and localized traditions, making it an important component of regional identity and development potential. Various ethnographic groups maintain distinctive dialects, customs, architecture, and folk arts, contributing to a rich cultural mosaic. It should be underlined that language is a defining feature of Wielkopolska's ethnographic groups. Regional dialects preserve archaic forms of Polish and reflect the historical layering of local populations (Bartmiński, 2009).

Religious rituals also demonstrate the ethnographic distinctiveness of Wielkopolska groups. While most groups practise Roman Catholicism, local traditions often integrate pre-Christian or folk elements. Celebrations of saints' feast days, processions, and blessing ceremonies are highly localized and serve to reinforce community cohesion while preserving cultural memory (Kłodziński, 2010).

Material culture, including folk crafts, pottery, embroidery and timber architecture, provides tangible evidence of these groups' identities. These cultural expressions have been preserved through open-air museums, local festivals, and community-based initiatives. Studying these ethnographic groups provides insight into regional identity, historical continuity, and potential for sustainable cultural and experience tourism (Burszta, 1960; 1964; 1967; 1998a).

The ethnographic diversity of Wielkopolska results from centuries of settlement patterns, migrations, and historical events. Indigenous groups, such as the Wielkopolski peasants, were influenced by regional environmental conditions and agrarian traditions. External settlers, including German-speaking communities during Prussian rule, introduced new practices and cultural elements, which were gradually integrated into local traditions (Davies, 2005; Bukraba-Rylska, 2013).

These historical processes created a patchwork of ethnographic identities, each associated with specific villages or subregions. Differences manifest in language, material culture, rituals and folk arts, which continue to shape local identity and community cohesion.

Ethnographic diversity in rural Wielkopolska is expressed in both tangible culture, such as traditional architecture and settlement patterns, and intangible practices, including language, customs, and rituals. Traditional rural architecture remains highly visible, with distinctive timber-framed homesteads and village layouts that reflect local building techniques as well as historical influences from neighbouring regions, especially during the period of Prussian governance (Burszta, 1998a). These forms not only illustrate the material culture of rural society but also reveal historical patterns of land division, family organization, and adaptive responses to environmental constraints (Burszta, 1960; 1964; 1967).

Intangible cultural practices continue to shape everyday life in many villages. Seasonal celebrations, such as *dożynki* (harvest festivals), religious processions and local fairs, remain central to community identity and social cohesion. Such traditions are often rooted in agrarian calendars and reflect a deep engagement with the rhythms of nature (Bukraba-Rylska, 2013). Folklore groups, regional song and dance ensembles, and community rituals act as living repositories of cultural memory, contributing both to collective belonging and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Language also contributes to ethnographic distinctiveness. While standard Polish predominates in most public and educational contexts, regional speech

features persist, particularly among older residents. These linguistic traits function as carriers of local identity and reflect long-standing patterns of communication shaped by history and geography (Bartmiński, 2009). Similarly, traditional cuisine, rooted in locally produced agricultural products such as potatoes, dairy, and cereals, remains a meaningful expression of regional culture and continuity.

The historical context of Wielkopolska, especially during the partitions of Poland, played a formative role in shaping its ethnographic landscape. Under Prussian rule, rural areas underwent structural changes in land tenure, agricultural practices, and settlement organization. These influences were gradually assimilated into local cultural patterns, producing unique combinations of indigenous and introduced elements (Davies, 2005). As a result, rural Wielkopolska exhibits a hybrid cultural profile that differentiates it from neighbouring regions.

In contemporary settings, efforts to preserve ethnographic heritage have intensified. Museums, cultural centres, and local governments are actively engaged in documenting traditions, safeguarding architectural monuments, and promoting regional festivals. These initiatives are particularly vital as processes such as globalization and rural depopulation continue to challenge the sustainability of traditional lifestyles (Kłodziński, 2010).

Ethnographic diversity also presents opportunities for rural tourism. Cultural tourism and agrotourism provide visitors with authentic experiences of local life, including participation in traditional festivals, craft workshops, and culinary events. Such tourism development can diversify rural economies while encouraging the conservation of cultural resources. According to Lane (2009), integrating cultural heritage into tourism supports sustainable regional development when managed inclusively and respectfully.

However, the commercialization of culture for tourism purposes must be approached with caution. There is a risk of commodification, wherein traditions become staged or simplified, leading to a loss of authenticity. Moreover, commercialization can transform cultural heritage into marketable products, resulting in staged authenticity and the erosion of cultural integrity (MacCannell, 1976; Tileagă, 2025). Tourism can lead to cultural commodification, where traditions are reshaped to meet tourist expectations. Tourism may also cause cultural practices to become simplified, staged or distorted, undermining their original meaning and authenticity (Shepherd, 2002). Sustainable approaches should prioritize community engagement, emphasize cultural integrity, and ensure that economic benefits are shared equitably among residents.

As previously noted, the Wielkopolska region encompasses a remarkable diversity of ethnographic groups, each contributing unique elements to the region's cultural mosaic, including the Biskupians, Chazacy, Pałuczanie, Krajniacy, Bukówianie, Babimojszczanie, Bambrzy, Tośtoki, Mazurzy Wieleńscy, and Szamotulanie. Each group maintains unique dialects, crafts, architecture, rituals, and folk arts. Their preservation is essential for cultural continuity, regional identity and sustainable rural development. By leveraging these traditions responsibly, the region can support tourism, enhance local economies and foster intergenerational knowledge transmission. Linguistic variation further reinforces this distinctiveness. Regional dialects preserve archaic forms of Polish and reflect the historical layering of local populations (Bartmiński, 2009). Material culture, including folk crafts, pottery, embroidery and timber architecture, provides tangible evidence of these groups' identities. These cultural expressions have been preserved through open-air museums, local festivals and community-based initiatives (Burszta, 1960; 1964; 1967). Their heritage represents a valuable resource for cultural tourism, education and regional development. Preserving these traditions is essential for sustaining local identity and intergenerational knowledge transmission in rural communities.

The Wielkopolska region is home to at least 10 ethnographic groups characterized by a strong sense of local identity, including:

1. **Biskupians** (inhabitants of Biskupizna; a distinct Polish ethnographic group from southern Wielkopolska, centred around the town of Krobia and 12–13 villages in the Gostyń county that make up the region known as Biskupizna);
2. **Chazacy / Hazacy / Hazaki / Leśniacy / Leśniki / Lasaki** (residents of Hazy / Chazy; an ethnographic group living in southern Wielkopolska, primarily in the Rawicz region, between the rivers Orla and Dąbroczna);
3. **Pałuczanie** (the traditional inhabitants / residents of Pałuki, a small but culturally distinct region stretching across areas near Żnin, Szubin, Wągrowiec, and Chodzież, reaching up to the River Noteć in the north);

4. **Krajniacy / Krajniaki** (residents of Krajna; an ethnographic group originating from the historical borderland region called Krajna, located between Wielkopolska, Kashubia, and Bory Tucholskie);
5. **Bukówianie** (residents of a village Bukówiec Górny, a village in the rural commune Włoszakowice located in west-central Poland, within Leszno County);
6. **Babimojszczanie** (residents of Babimojszczyzna; Babimost is a town situated in western Poland, and Babimojszczyzna is a historical and ethnographic region on the border between the present-day Wielkopolskie and Lubuskie Provinces);
7. **Bambrzy / Bambry** (Poles of German descent; descendants of settlers from the Bamberg (Franconia), who were brought in by the authorities of Poznań between 1719 and 1753 to settle the abandoned villages destroyed during the Northern War and the subsequent plague epidemic; most of them live in the Poznań agglomeration area);
8. **Tośtoki** (a local ethnographic subgroup from central Wielkopolska, specifically the villages located in the floodplains of the Warta River near Nowe Miasto nad Wartą, e.g. Czeszewo, Orzechowo, Pięczkowo, Krzykosy, Witowo, Lubrze);
9. **Mazurzy Wieleńscy** (a local ethnographic group living in the Puszcza Notecka (Noteć Forest) region of northern Wielkopolska, mainly around Wieleń and Krzyż Wielkopolski, as well as in the village of Chojno near Sieraków);
10. **Szamotulanie** (residents and cultural ethnographic community of Ziemia Szamotulska (Szamotuły Land), a historical region in north-western Wielkopolska, centred around the town of Szamotuły).

Table 1 presents an overview of rural and urban-rural municipalities in the Wielkopolska region that are traditionally inhabited by various ethnographic groups. It lists 10 ethnographic regions, each paired with the

Table 1. Rural and urban-rural municipalities in the Wielkopolska region inhabited by ethnographic groups (2023)

No	Ethnographic region	Municipalities	Districts (number of municipalities)	Towns and villages
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Biskupizna	Krobia (urban-rural), Piaski (rural), Gostyń (urban-rural)	gostyński (3)	Bukownica, Chumiętki, Domachowo, Grabianowo, Krobia, Posadowo, Potarzyca, Stara Krobia, Sułkowice, Wymysłowo, Żychlewo, Rębowo, Sikorzyn
2.	Chazy	Pakosław (rural), Rawicz (urban-rural), Jutrosin (urban-rural)	rawicki (3)	Chojno, Drogi (część Sworowa), Golejewko, Golejewo, Kubeczki, Niedźwiadki, Ostrobudki, Podborowo, Sworowo, Łąkta, Słupia Kapitulna, Stwolno, Ugoda, Wydawy, Zawady, Zielona Wieś, Ostoje, Szkaradowo
3.	Pałuki	Gołańcz (urban-rural), Wągrowiec (rural), Margonin (urban-rural), Szamocin (urban-rural)	wągrowiecki (2), chodzieski (2)	Gołańcz, Wągrowiec, Margonin, Szamocin
4.	Krajna	Białośliwie (rural), Kaczory (urban-rural), Łobżenica (urban-rural), Miasteczko Krajeńskie (urban-rural), Szydłowo (rural), Ujście (urban-rural), Wyrzysk (urban-rural), Wysoka (urban-rural), Jastrowie (urban-rural), Krajenka (urban-rural), Lipka (rural), Okonek (urban-rural), Tarnówka (rural), Zakrzewo (rural), Złotów (rural)	pilski (8), złotowski (7)	Białośliwie, Kaczory, Łobżenica, Miasteczko Krajeńskie, Szydłowo, Ujście, Wyrzysk, Wysoka, Jastrowie, Krajenka, Lipka, Okonek, Tarnówka, Zakrzewo, Złotów
5.	Bukówiec Górny	Włoszakowice (rural)	leszczyński (1)	Bukówiec Górny

Table 1 – cont.

1	2	3	4	5
6.	the area inhabited by Tośtoki	Krzykosy (rural), Miłosław (urban-rural)	średzki (1), wrzesiński (1)	Pięczkowo, Krzykosy, Witowo, Lubrze, Czeszewo, Orzechowo
7.	Babimojszczyzna	Babimost (urban-rural), Kargowa (urban-rural), Zbąszynek (urban-rural)	zielonogórski (2), świebodziński (1)	Babimost, Kargowa, Nowe Kramsko, Podmokle Wielki, Dąbrówka Wielkopolska
8.	the area inhabited by Bambrzy	M. Poznań (urban)	M. Poznań, poznański	Luboń, dzielnic i osiedla Poznania: Dębiec, Bonin, Rataje, Żegrze, Wilda, Jeżyce, Winiary, Górczyn
9.	the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy	Czarnków (rural), Drawsko (rural), Lubasz (rural), Trzcianka (urban-rural), Wieleń (urban-rural), Wronki (urban-rural)	czarnkowsko-trzcianecki (5), szamotulski (1)	Ciszkowo, Chełst, Drawsko, Kamiennik, Kwiejce Nowe, Marylin, Pęckowo, Piłka, Klempicz, Krucz, Kruteczek, Biała, Gulcz, Hamrzysko, mężyk, Miały, .Rosko, Wrzeszczyna, Zawada, Chojno (Chojno-Wieś), Rzecin
10.	Ziemia Szamotulska (Szamotuły Land)	Szamotuły (urban-rural) Wronki (urban-rural), Pniewy (urban-rural), Duszniki (rural), Kaźmierz (rural), Ostroróg (urban-rural), Obrzycko (rural)	szamotulski (7)	Szamotuły, Wronki, Pniewy, Duszniki, Kaźmierz, Ostroróg, Obrzycko
11.	x	x	41	x

Source: author's own elaboration based on the interactive map: https://zaliczgmine.pl/communes/map (accessed: 20 September 2025).

municipalities they occupy, the districts those municipalities belong to, and representative towns and villages where these groups have historically resided. It highlights both well-known groups, such as Biskupians, Pałuczanie, Krajniacy, and Bambrzy, as well as smaller, localized communities like Chazy, Bukówianie, and Tośtoki. Table 1 also shows the geographical spread of each group across specific counties (powiaty), illustrating how ethnographic cultures in Wielkopolska correspond to distinct microregions and settlement patterns.

Two of the above ethnographic groups were excluded from the analysis in this study, namely, the residents of Babimojszczyzna and Bambrzy. Babimojszczanie are excluded because most of the ethnographic region is located outside the Wielkopolska region, in Lubuskie Province, and Bambry because they live mainly in urban areas of Poznań and its surroundings. The other ethnographic groups live either in rural areas or in small towns in Wielkopolska Province.

The ethnographic landscape of the Wielkopolska region

Scholarly engagement with the ethnographic landscape of Wielkopolska has produced a substantial body of literature documenting the region's culturally diverse microgroups and their traditions. The seminal threevolume monograph *Kultura ludowa Wielkopolski*, edited by Józef Burszta (1960; 1964; 1967), remains the seminal work in this field, offering a comprehensive analysis of local folklore, ritual life and material culture across multiple subregions. Contemporary research initiatives have expanded these earlier efforts; for example, the *Atlas etnograficzny Wielkopolski* (Brzezińska et al., 2015; Brzezińska et al., 2020) provides updated cartographic and interpretive insights into linguistic variation, customary practices, and heritage transmission within rural communities. More specialized studies, such as Palacz's (2015) or Bobrowska and Budzik's examination of Szamotuły's culture, including dance traditions, further illuminate the distinctive expressive forms that shape local identities. Echaust (2015) provides a detailed monographic overview of Wągrowiec County, examining its geographical characteristics, historical evolution, and contemporary socio-economic structure. His analysis also discusses the county's settlement network, demographic patterns, and dominant economic activities, with particular emphasis on agriculture, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the growing role of local services, along with the region's cultural and natural assets, including distinctive landscape features, protected

areas, and heritage sites that contribute to the county's identity and development potential.

In addition, digitized archival materials from the Burszta collection supply valuable primary sources that enrich current understandings of continuity and change in Wielkopolskan folk culture. Collectively, these publications form a robust scholarly framework for analyzing the cultural specificity and internal diversity of ethnographic groups in the region.

Ethnographic diversity in Wielkopolska represents a valuable but still underused resource for rural tourism. Cultural tourism initiatives, such as visiting traditional villages, attending folk festivals, and participating in craft workshops, allow for authentic experiences of local life. Such initiatives contribute to local economies while fostering the preservation of cultural heritage (Lane, 2009). However, sustainable development is essential and must be the main objective of tourism development. Over-commercialization risks reducing traditions to mere tourist spectacles, which may compromise authenticity. Community engagement, equitable benefit-sharing, and preservation of cultural integrity are critical to ensuring that tourism contributes positively to both the local economy and cultural heritage.

Table 2 presents an overview of selected ethnographic groups and their distinctive cultural traits, highlighting the richness and diversity of rural cultural heritage. The listed groups, including Biskupianie, Chazacy (Hazacy), Pałuczanie, and Krajniacy, as well as smaller communities such as Tośtoki or Bukówianie, are characterized by unique combinations of material and intangible cultural elements. These include traditional timber-frame architecture, richly decorated wooden houses, regional dialects, folk costumes, and a variety of artistic expressions such as music, dance, storytelling, and crafts like weaving, embroidery and pottery. Additionally, many groups maintain ritualized agricultural practices and seasonal festivals, which reflect strong connections to rural lifestyles and historical traditions. The table also illustrates how ethnographic diversity is expressed through both shared and region-specific features. For example, while folk music, festivals and traditional dress appear across multiple groups, each community preserves its own distinct variations shaped by historical influences, geographic location, and cultural interactions, such as the blending of Wielkopolska and Pomeranian elements among the Krajniacy. Overall, the data emphasize the significant cultural potential

Table 2. Overview of selected ethnographic groups and their distinctive cultural traits

No	Ethnographic groups	Distinctive Cultural Traits
1.	Biskupianie	Timber-frame architecture, folk costumes, harvest festivals, traditional songs and dances (Burszta, 1960; 1964; 1967; Brzezińska and Machowska, 2016)
2.	Chazacy / Hazacy	Archaic dialect, weaving and embroidery crafts, ritualized agricultural ceremonies (Burszta, 1998a; Pelczyk, 1998)
3.	Pałuczanie	Decorated wooden houses, oral storytelling, folk songs and legends, traditional agricultural practices (Bukraba-Rylska, 2013; Echaust, 2015)
4.	Krajniacy	Blend of Wielkopolska and Pomeranian traits, woodworking, pottery, regional dialect (Davies, 2005; Kołatka, 2020; Lewicka-Ritter, 2021)
5.	Bukówianie (population of the village in the municipality of Włoszakowice)	Folk costumes, household ornamentation, ritual processions, music (https://bukowiecgorny.pl/, Malepszak, 2007; Co wieś, to inna pieśń…, 2014)
6.	Tośtoki	Unique dialect, agricultural rituals, folk songs and dances (Burszta, 1998a)
7.	Mazurzy Wieleńscy	Mazurian origin, rural settlement patterns, folk costume, mixed agricultural practices (Bukraba-Rylska, 2013)
8.	residents of Szamotuły land	Vibrant folk music, decorated timber houses, seasonal festivals, oral history preservation (Burszta, 1960; 1964; 1967; Palacz, 2015)

Source: own elaboration based on references and website: http://etnowielkopolska.pl/

embedded in these rural ethnographic groups, which can serve as a valuable resource for cultural preservation and tourism development.

The rural areas of the Wielkopolska region are characterized by rich ethnographic diversity, encompassing historical architecture, enduring customs, linguistic traits, and culinary traditions. This diversity is both a reflection of the region's historical legacy and a dynamic component of its contemporary cultural identity. With careful preservation and responsible development, ethnographic heritage can contribute meaningfully to sustainable rural futures, particularly as more and more elements of this heritage are being included on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ratified by Poland, requires States Parties to carry out an inventory of the expressions of this heritage found within their territories, in accordance with the Convention's recommendations and standards. The National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage is of an informative nature and fulfils this requirement by documenting our country's living intangible heritage. In 2025 there were 124 entries on the list, 12 of which related to the intangible cultural heritage of the Wielkopolska region (Table 3).

The intangible cultural heritage of the Wielkopolska region represents a diverse spectrum of practices, rituals and craftsmanship that collectively illustrate the historical depth and socio-cultural identity of local communities. Items such as the celebrations in honour of St. Roch in Mikstat, the bagpipe traditions, or the wedding customs from Szamotuły demonstrate the region's strong continuity of ritual and musical practices, in which community participation plays a central role. These forms of heritage not only preserve symbolic meanings and social norms transmitted across generations but also maintain living artistic skills, including music performance, ceremonial conduct, and oral traditions. Their inclusion on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage underlines both their cultural significance and the need for safeguarding measures that sustain intergenerational transmission amid changing socio-economic conditions.

Equally important are the craftsmanship and artisanal traditions, such as basketry in Poland, the "snutka"

Table 3. The intangible heritage of the Wielkopolska region in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

No	Year of inclusion on the list	The intangible heritage of Wielkopolska region
1.	2015	Celebrations in honour of St. Roch with the blessing of animals (Uroczystości odpustowe ku czci Św. Rocha z obrzędem błogosławieństwa zwierząt w Mikstacie)
2.	2016	Cultural traditions of the Biskupizna region (Tradycje kulturowe Biskupizny)
3.	2017	Bagpipes traditions in Wielkopolska region (Tradycje dudziarskie w Wielkopolsce)
4.	2017	Wedding traditions from Szamotuły and the surrounding area (Tradycje weselne z Szamotuł i okolic)
5.	2018	Bamber's cultural traditions in Poznań (Tradycje kulturowe Bambrów Poznańskich)
6.	2018	Basketry in Poland (Plecionkarstwo w Polsce)
7.	2021	Culture tradition of Bukowiec Górny (Tradycje kulturowe Bukówca Górnego)
8.	2022	Golina "snutka" – south Wielkopolska embroidery (Snutka golińska – hafciarstwo południowej Wielkopolski)
9.	2024	The cultural traditions of Chazy / Hazy (Tradycje kulturowe Chazów/Hazów)
10.	2025	Embroidery from Pałuki (Hafciarstwo pałuckie)
11.	2025	Easter bears from Góra (Niedźwiedzie wielkanocne z Góry)
12.	2025	The Emmaus Procession and Turks – Guarding the Holy Sepulchre in the parish of Dobra (Procesja emaus i turki – straż Grobu Pańskiego w parafii Dobra)

Source: National Heritage Institute, https://niematerialne.nid.pl/niematerialne-dziedzictwo-kulturowe/krajowa-lista-niematerialnego-dziedzictwa-kulturowego/, access: 1.12.2025.

embroidery of Golina, Pałuki embroidery, and the cultural expressions of groups like the Poznań Bambers or the communities of Bukówiec Górny and Chazy/Hazy. These practices highlight the material dimension of intangible heritage, expressed through manual skills, aesthetic codes, and symbolic representations embedded in everyday life. Their preservation contributes not only to cultural diversity but also to regional development by strengthening local identity and supporting cultural tourism initiatives. As such, the documented heritage elements of Wielkopolska form a dynamic and evolving cultural system, one that reflects both continuity and adaptation within contemporary cultural landscapes.

Socio-environmental characteristics of the ethnographic regions

The ethnographic regions included in the study display notable environmental and demographic diversity, fundamentally shaping both settlement patterns and cultural development (Table 4). Forest cover varies substantially, from relatively low levels in Biskupizna (10.3%) to very high proportions among the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy (52.9%), suggesting differing ecological contexts that historically influenced local livelihoods and resource use. The area of Włoszakowice municipality (including the village of Bukówiec Górny) and Krajna also exhibit substantial shares of protected areas (70.5% and 38.0%, respectively), reflecting landscapes of high ecological value and conservation importance. In contrast, areas like Chazy or Szamotuły land have minimal lakeside areas and more modest levels of protected territories, indicating more intensively managed or agriculturally oriented environments. Population density likewise varies considerably, from sparsely populated regions such as Pałuki and Krajna (42.4 and 39.1 people/km²) to more densely settled areas like Biskupizna and Szamotuły land (132.9 and 80.0 people/km²), highlighting internal contrasts in demographic pressure and settlement structure (Table 4).

Cultural infrastructure indicators demonstrate additional regional differentiation. Higher densities of monuments, as seen in Chazy (33 units/100 km²) and Szamotuły land (25 units/100 km²), point to areas with rich architectural or historical legacies, whereas regions such as Bukówiec Górny village or the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy exhibit much lower monument density, reflecting more dispersed or less formalized heritage assets. Museum density follows a similar pattern of variation, with the area inhabited by Tośtoki demonstrating the highest concentration (4 units/1000 km²),

Table 4. Selected characteristics of the regions inhabited by the ethnographic groups included in the study

No	Ethnographic regions	Forest cover (%)	Lake-side (%)	Protected Areas (%)	Population density (no of people 1 km²)	Flats (m²/ 1 person)	Monu-ments (units/ 100 km²)	Museums (units./ 1000 km²)	Forest cover (%)
1.	Biskupizna	10.3	0.0	31.1	132.9	30.6	21	3	10.3
2.	Chazy	16.9	0.7	0.1	127.9	31.6	33	3	16.9
3.	Pałuki	20.5	2.5	25.0	42.4	29.2	13	1	20.5
4.	Krajna	38.7	1.3	38.0	39.1	28.4	8	0	38.7
5.	Bukówiec Górny (the village in the municipality of Włoszakowice)	36.2	4.4	70.5	77.2	36.1	3	0	36.2
6.	the area inhabited by Tośtoki	28.9	0.7	22.3	71.0	30.1	10	4	28.9
7.	the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy	52.9	1.0	49.7	40.2	30.0	7	1	52.9
8.	Szamotuły land	30.9	1.4	12.3	80.0	31.7	25	1	30.9
9.	Wielkopolska Province	26.5	1.3	29.6	80.1	32.3	21	3	26.5

Source: own elaboration based on data of the Local Data Bank, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw.

suggesting stronger institutionalization of cultural heritage, while several regions report minimal or no museum infrastructure. Residential space per person remains relatively consistent across most areas, though the municipality of Włoszakowiec (including Bukówiec Górny village) stands out with the highest value (36.1 m²/person), potentially indicating lower population pressure or different housing development trajectories. Altogether, the data illustrate a complex interplay between environmental characteristics, population distribution, and cultural infrastructure that underpins the distinctiveness of the ethnographic regions under study and the development of sustainable tourism in the Wielkopolska region.

Accommodation facilities and tourism functions of the ethnographic regions

However, statistics from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) show that tourism infrastructure, as measured by the availability of accommodation in the ethnographic regions surveyed, remains underdeveloped. Table 5 presents a comparative overview of accommodation infrastructure in 2023 (as of 31 July) across selected rural regions inhabited by distinct ethnographic groups. The data include the number of accommodation units and beds in total, as well as their functional structure divided into year-round accommodation, guest rooms/private accommodation, and agritourism establishments. This classification allows for a detailed assessment of both the scale and the type of tourism infrastructure supporting the tourist function in ethnographically diverse rural areas.

The results of the study indicate significant spatial differentiation in the level and structure of accommodation development. Regions such as the municipality of Włoszakowice show relatively high accommodation capacity, including a more diversified structure with both private lodging and agritourism facilities. No accommodation facilities were identified in Bukówiec Górny. Smaller ethnographic regions like Biskupizna and Chazy are characterized by a very limited number of accommodation units, although in some cases these are fully year-round facilities. Agritourism plays a particularly crucial role in selected areas such as that inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy and Pałuki, where it constitutes a noticeable share of the accommodation base. Overall, the table highlights the uneven development of tourism infrastructure and suggests that the capacity to utilize

Table 5. Accommodation in regions inhabited by the ethnographic groups in 2023 (as of 31st July)

No	Ethnographic regions	Total accommodation*		Year-round accommodation (as a % share in total)		Guest rooms / private accommodation*		Agritourism accommodation*	
		No of units	No of beds	No of units	No of beds	No of units	No of beds	No of units	No of beds
1.	Biskupizna	3	188	100.0	100.0	0	0	0	0
2.	Chazy	3	129	100.0	100.0	0	0	0	0
3.	Pałuki	4	191	75.0	73.8	0	0	2	80
4.	Krajna	13	539	61.5	38.8	0	0	4	76
5.	Bukówiec Górny (the village in the municipality of Włoszakowice)	13	1 216	30.8	36.3	1	10	0	0
6.	the area inhabited by Tośtoki	5	163	60.0	47.9	1	29	1	12
7.	the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy	12	408	75.0	71.3	0	0	6	121
8.	Szamotuły land	4	212	100.0	100.0	0	0	1	16
9.	Wielkopolska Province	582	40 499	78.9	74.3	34	843	58	1 112

*Data refer to establishments with 10 or more beds in accommodation.
Source: own elaboration based on data of the Local Data Bank, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw.

ethnographic diversity for tourism purposes strongly depends on the availability and diversification of accommodation services.

A slightly different picture of the accommodation infrastructure emerges from data provided by Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre. Table 6 presents data on agritourism and rural tourism accommodation in 2023 across selected ethnographic regions, showing the number of accommodation units and bed places, and allowing comparison between the two forms of tourism infrastructure. It also reveals clear spatial and functional differentiation in the development of rural tourism within ethnographically diverse areas.

A first key observation is the dominant role of agritourism in almost all regions. The largest concentration is recorded in Krajna (47 units, 836 beds), the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy (60 units, 821 beds), and in Pałuki (14 units, 252 beds), indicating that these areas have developed relatively strong agritourism sectors. In contrast, smaller ethnographic regions such as Biskupizna, Chazy and the municipality of Włoszakowice (including Bukówiec Górny) exhibit much lower levels of agritourism capacity, reflecting limited commercialization of rural tourism resources. At the same time, some regions (e.g. Chazy and Krajna) have no registered rural tourism accommodation outside agritourism, which suggests a narrow specialization of their tourism offer.

Rural tourism accommodation (excluding agritourism) is generally less developed and more unevenly distributed. At the regional level, only selected ethnographic areas such as Biskupizna, Pałuki, the area inhabited by Tośtoki, the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy, and Szamotuły land show any presence of rural tourism accommodation, while others report none at all. This indicates that rural tourism outside agritourism remains underdeveloped and spatially concentrated.

Overall, the data highlight that agritourism is the principal driver of tourism development in ethnographic rural areas, while broader rural tourism infrastructure is still uneven and relatively limited. The data also suggest that ethnographic diversity alone does not automatically translate into diversified tourism development; instead, its economic activation depends strongly on regional development levels, infrastructure availability, and institutional support.

Table 7 presents a set of indicators describing the tourist function in selected rural ethnographic regions, capturing both accommodation capacity and intensity of tourist activity. The variables include Baretje' & Defert's tourist function index, accommodation density (beds per 100 inhabitants), Schneider's tourist traffic index, Charvat's index of overnight stays, Defert's tourist traffic density index, the number of overnight stays per 100 inhabitants, the number of foreign tourist overnight

Table 6. Agritourism and rural tourism accommodation in regions inhabited by ethnographic groups in 2023

No	Ethnographic regions	Agritourism		Rural tourism	
		No of accommodation units	No of bed places	No of accommodation units	No of bed places
1.	Biskupizna	2	27	6	114
2.	Chazy	7	62	0	0
3.	Pałuki	14	252	3	110
4.	Krajna	47	836	0	0
5.	Bukówiec Górny (the village in the municipality of Włoszakowice)	3	26	0	0
6.	the area inhabited by Tośtoki	4	92	4	189
7.	the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy	60	821	2	51
8.	Szamotuły land	28	254	18	307
9.	Wielkopolska Province	677	8 719	381	10 997

Source: own elaboration based on unpublished data of Wielkopolska Agricultural Advisory Centre in Poznań.

Table 7. Indicators of the tourist function in rural areas for the ethnographic regions*

No	Ethnographic regions	W_{BD} - Baretje's & Defert's index (tourist function index) (no of beds per 100 permanent inhabitants)	W_{GBN} - accommodation density index (the area's saturation with tourist facilities index) (number of tourists per 1 bed)	W_{BN}(accommodation development index (number of tourists per 1 bed)	W_S - Schneider's index (tourist traffic intensity index) (number of tourists per100 inhabitants)	W_{CH}- Charvat's index (number of overnight stays per 100 inhabitants)	W_D- Defert's index (tourist traffic density index) (number of tourists per 100 inhabitants)	T_n - the number of overnight stays index (number of overnight stays per 1 km^2)	W_{GON} - accommodation facility density index (numer of fecilities per 1 km^2)
1.	Biskupizna	0.2	0.1	18.4	3.6	8.9	2.2	5.4	0.8
2.	Chazy	1.1	0.7	76.7	42.0	59.7	29.5	41.6	2.1
3.	Pałuki	2.2	0.6	67.1	66.2	157.8	19.1	45.4	1.1
4.	Krajna	6.4	2.2	136.1	98.7	229.3	32.2	72.4	8.5
5.	Bukówiec Górny (the village in the municipality of Włoszakowice)	12.9	9.2	6.8	88.0	328.6	62.6	233.9	13.3
6.	the area inhabited by Tośtoki	0.1	0.1	4.6	0.7	2.0	0.4	1.1	0.8
7.	the area inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy	5.4	1.9	69.9	113.9	225.4	31.1	66.3	5.0
8.	Szamotuły land	4.6	1.6	58.2	75.2	119.3	26.4	41.6	4.2
9.	Wielkopolska Province	2.6	1.4	24.2	47.2	96.5	32.1	59.6	2.4

*Indicators of tourist function were calculated for 2012, because the lack of data for the following years.
Source: own elaboration based on data of the Local Data Bank, Central Statistical Office, Warsaw.

stays, and the accommodation facility density (facilities per km²). Together, these indicators provide a multidimensional picture of tourism development, combining demand-side measures (tourist flows and overnight stays) with supply-side characteristics (accommodation infrastructure).

The results show considerable spatial differentiation among the analysed ethnographic regions. The Krajna region exhibits relatively high values across most indicators, particularly in accommodation density and tourist traffic measures, suggesting a more developed and diversified tourism function. In contrast, smaller localities such as Biskupizna and the area inhabited by Tośtoki display very low values across nearly all indices, indicating limited tourism development and weak integration into broader tourism networks. Intermediate values observed in regions such as Chazy, Pałuki, and Szamotuły land suggest a transitional stage of tourism development, where infrastructure and visitor numbers are growing but have not yet reached high levels of intensity.

Overall, the variation in indicator values reflects the uneven development of the tourism function across rural ethnographic regions. Areas with stronger cultural identity and better-developed accommodation infrastructure tend to attract higher tourist flows, reinforcing the role of ethnographic distinctiveness as a potential driver of rural tourism development. At the same time, the relatively low values in several regions highlight untapped potential, where cultural resources exist but have not yet been effectively transformed into tourism assets.

DISCUSSION

The study findings align with the broader body of literature emphasizing the significance of ethnographic diversity as a key cultural resource in rural development. Classical works by Burszta (1960; 1964; 1967; 1998b) and more recent contributions (Brzezińska et al., 2020) consistently highlight the richness and persistence of local cultural systems in Wielkopolska. The present study confirms these observations, demonstrating that both tangible and intangible heritage, such as architecture, rituals, and dialects, remain important components of regional identity. This is also consistent with Bartmiński's (1996, 2009) argument that language and cultural practices function as key carriers of collective identity. The role of language in shaping national distinctiveness and identity is of paramount importance. For Poles, language remains one of the most important criteria for ethnographic affiliation.

However, the results reveal a significant discrepancy between cultural potential and its actual economic utilization. While the literature suggests that cultural heritage can effectively support rural tourism (Lane, 2009), this study shows that ethnographic resources alone are insufficient to stimulate tourism development. Instead, infrastructure, institutional support, and accessibility appear to be decisive factors, which is consistent with broader findings in rural tourism studies (Roberts and Hall, 2001).

A particularly important contribution of this study is the identification of strong intra-regional disparities. Regions such as Krajna or the areas inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy seem to exhibit relatively higher tourism development, whereas others (e.g. Biskupizna or the area inhabited by Tośtoki) remain marginal. This supports the argument that historical and structural conditions, such as settlement patterns, land use, and past political influences, continue to shape contemporary development trajectories (Davies, 2005; Bukraba-Rylska, 2013).

The dominance of agritourism observed in the study further confirms patterns identified in the literature, where it often constitutes the primary form of tourism activity in rural areas (Phillip et al., 2010). However, the limited diversification of tourism products suggests a structural weakness that may hinder long-term competitiveness and resilience.

At the same time, the study reinforces critical perspectives on the commodification of culture. As noted by MacCannell (1976), tourism can lead to "staged authenticity", while Shepherd (2002) emphasizes the risk of cultural distortion through commercialization. The findings support these concerns, indicating that increased tourism development, if not carefully managed, could threaten the integrity of local traditions.

Despite its contributions, the study also exposes several research gaps. Firstly, there is a lack of micro-level analyses addressing community perceptions and participation in tourism development, an issue highlighted in participatory tourism literature (Timothy and Tosun, 2003). Secondly, the long-term impacts of tourism on cultural authenticity and social cohesion remain underexplored. Thirdly, the role of governance, policy frameworks and stakeholder cooperation in activating ethnographic potential requires further investigation (Hall, 2008). Finally, comparative and cross-regional studies are needed to facilitate a better understanding of the conditions under which ethnographic diversity can be effectively transformed into a sustainable development asset.

Overall, the findings confirm that ethnographic diversity constitutes a valuable but underutilized resource in the region of Wielkopolska. Its effective integration into rural development strategies requires not only preservation efforts but also coordinated, inclusive and context-sensitive approaches that balance economic objectives with cultural sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

Ethnographic diversity represents a significant and multifaceted resource for the development of tourism in rural areas. By offering unique cultural experiences, it enhances the attractiveness of destinations, supports economic diversification, and contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. However, realizing this potential requires careful management to balance economic benefits with cultural integrity and environmental sustainability.

The study demonstrates that rural areas of the Wielkopolska region possess significant ethnographic diversity, expressed through both tangible elements (architecture, crafts, settlement patterns) and intangible heritage (language, rituals, traditions, and folklore). This diversity constitutes an important cultural resource with strong potential to support the development of rural and cultural tourism.

However, the findings indicate that this potential remains largely underutilized. Despite the richness of ethnographic heritage and the presence of numerous distinct cultural groups, tourism development in these areas is uneven and generally limited. In particular, many regions exhibit low levels of tourism infrastructure, including accommodation capacity, and weak tourism function indicators. This confirms that the mere presence of cultural resources does not automatically translate into tourism development.

The analysis also reveals significant spatial differentiation. Regions with more developed accommodation infrastructure (e.g. Krajna or areas inhabited by Mazurzy Wieleńscy) exhibit higher tourism activity, while smaller or less-developed regions (such as Biskupizna or the area inhabited by Tośtoki) remain marginal in terms of tourism. Agritourism emerges as the dominant and often the only well-developed form of tourism in many ethnographic areas, highlighting both its importance and the limited diversification of tourism products.

Importantly, the study confirms that ethnographic diversity can play a crucial role in supporting sustainable rural development. It may contribute to economic diversification, preserving cultural heritage, strengthening local identity, and bolstering community cohesion. At the same time, the study highlights key risks, particularly the commodification and simplification of cultural traditions, as well as the unequal distribution of tourism benefits among local stakeholders.

Therefore, effective use of ethnographic diversity for tourism development requires a strategic and sustainable approach. This includes:

- strengthening the tourism infrastructure and diversification of services,
- increasing the involvement of local communities in tourism planning and management,
- ensuring the protection of cultural authenticity,
- fostering cooperation between stakeholders (local authorities, residents, tourism operators),
- integrating cultural heritage into broader regional development policies.

In conclusion, ethnographic diversity in Wielkopolska represents a valuable but still insufficiently activated asset. With appropriate management and policy support, it can become a key driver of sustainable tourism and socio-economic development in rural areas.

Further studies should focus on developing frameworks for inclusive and participatory tourism planning, as well as exploring the long-term impacts of tourism on ethnographic diversity. As rural areas continue to adapt to global changes, the strategic use of cultural resources will remain a key factor in their sustainable development.

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