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## The development of sport and tourism in the Międzychód County and the concept of the European Green Deal

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### Abstract

Sport and tourism may become one of the most important areas of the local economy of the four communes in the Międzychód district. Its areas are associated with the Międzychódzko - Sierakowskie Lake District, and the studies of the intensity of tourist traffic confirm this exactly. They show that guests' stays in the region are mainly limited to visits to two tourist centers, the cities of Sieraków and Międzychód, and usually they are not long stays. The proposal for the development of sports and tourism in the Międzychód County is to increase the tourist traffic for sports tourism and extend the stay of tourists using the rich natural, cultural and landscape resources as well as agritourism infrastructure in rural areas. This idea is also guided by the inhabitants involved in the development of the region,

representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, cultural institutions, schools and entrepreneurs, therefore the main goal of the presented article is to find out about the opinion of the inhabitants of the Międzychód district on bicycle transport in the context of the European Green Deal.

**Key words:** sport, tourism, physical activity, health promotion, regional development

## **Introduction**

The Międzychód County is an area consisting of four municipalities in the Greater Poland Province. The powiat consists of: 2 urban-rural communes: Międzychód, Sieraków; 2 rural communes: Chrzypsko Wielkie, Kwilcz; 2 cities: Międzychód, Sieraków (Strategia Zrównoważonego Rozwoju Gminy Chrzypsko Wielkie do 2015 roku, [www.intur.com.pl](http://www.intur.com.pl), [www.powiatmiedzychod.pl](http://www.powiatmiedzychod.pl)). Its seat is the city of Międzychód. According to data from December 31, 2019, the powiat was inhabited by 36,751 people ([www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl), Baza Danych GMINA). The conducted research is a response to the need to program activities in the area of broadly understood promotion of health and physical activity as well as the development of sport and tourism in the region, especially as in relation to the prevailing trends, the Międzychód district has a huge potential for increasing the importance of this branch of the economy. This potential is based not only on the strength of the main tourist centers such as Sieraków and Międzychód, but also on the richness of tradition, cultural and natural heritage, as well as the activities of the most important people for this region, its inhabitants (*Strategia Rozwoju Gminy Sieraków do roku 2020*, s. 37, Szpotkowski 2006, s. 16-27). The research was inspired by the extremely important role of sport for modern man. The widespread interest in sports events today in the "sport for all" category and the promotion of people's participation in various sports disciplines, competitions, tournaments, races such as marathons or triathlons, in local sports competitions, proves that sport is one of the most important passions in life. This interest is not only passive, but more and more often manifested in the systematic practice of a selected sports discipline, regular participation in various types of physical activities, such as: gym, gymnastics, jogging together, tennis, ball games, swimming, cycling, long walking, dancing. The social demand for sport is confirmed by the large number of recreational centers, sports halls, swimming pools, bicycle routes, sports fields and jogging areas. Sport is more and more often practiced by entire families, as

part of school extracurricular activities, in youth sports clubs, as an amateur and institutional, individual and team activity (Anders P., Kusiak W. 2005, s. 61-124).

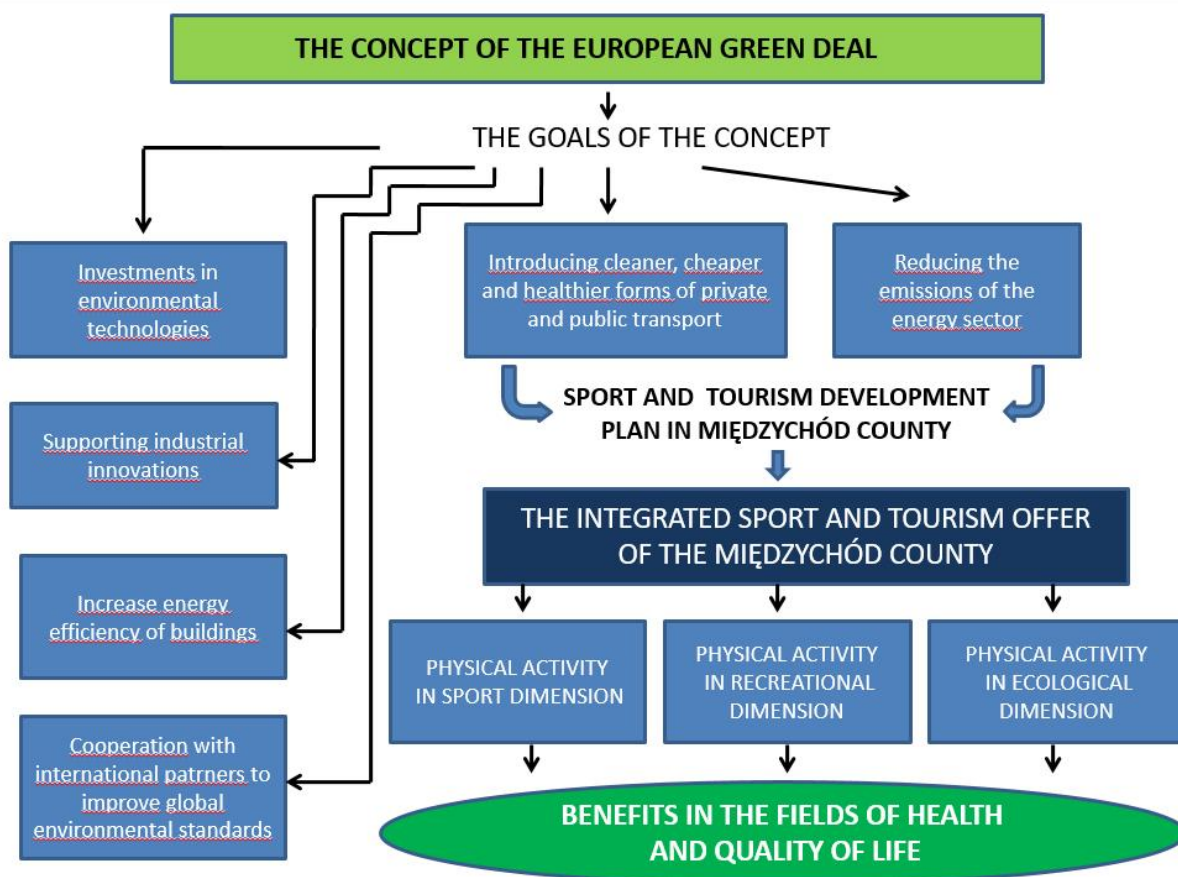
One of the goals of this study is to present sport in the perspective of the educational process and use it as a tool for health promotion in terms of social good, the phenomenon of civilization and its value in relation to educating people in physical activity. The values present in recreational sport, as well as the attitudes and relationships occurring in it, can be treated as a specific tool in shaping pro-health attitudes and in the development of human personality. Therefore, a well-thought-out plan, using the region's rich natural and anthropogenic resources, can be used to implement utilitarian values such as developing habits of practicing sports and recreation. Sport and active recreation satisfy the natural need for movement and improve adaptation abilities, and physical effort is necessary for the proper development of the body (it shapes the muscular system, stimulates the heart and nervous system), shapes personality features (discipline, perseverance, responsibility, co-creation in a team); prevents civilization diseases: metabolic (atherosclerosis, obesity), nervous system overload (neurosis, peptic ulcer disease), traumatic diseases and diseases resulting from harmful, i.e. toxic environmental influences (Rodniański 1997, s. 329-340). Sport and education meet and complement each other by, for example, the following: improvement of adaptive abilities, development of the organism, shaping the features of perseverance, responsibility, discipline, prevention of civilization diseases. These are both tasks in the world of sport and can be treated as strictly educational. Both sport and education reveal features that serve the generally understood social good. The phenomenon of sport and education have a common and similar task, namely to shape man and form him in a holistic manner. The physical side of a person, its mental and spiritual dimension is the "subject" of influences and development-oriented influences taking place both in the world of sport and education. Thanks to the analysis of sport and education and the search for common features and differentiating between these two realities, a specific relationship can be shown (Poczta 2012). It consists in the fact that: the humanistic, moral and social value of sport is the result of educational impact and the upbringing process itself can be made more attractive, and thus more effective, thanks to its inclusion in the process of everyday human functioning. The creation of an integrated sports and tourist offer of the Międzychód County should refer to the concept of the European Green Deal, which is an action plan for a sustainable EU economy. Achieving the objectives of this plan is possible through broadly understood measures such as *introducing cleaner, cheaper and healthier forms of private and public transport and reducing the emissions of the energy sector* (<https://eur->

[lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/PL/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document2](http://lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/PL/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document2)).

The integrated sports and tourist offer of the Międzychód County is to stimulate and encourage physical activity in the sports, recreational and ecological dimension, and the proposed solution to encourage a healthy lifestyle, e.g. to use ecological transport such as cycling. Such activities contribute to the reduction of the use of traditional forms of transport and at the same time reduce the emission intensity of the region (Jak skutecznie budować..., 2006; Poczta-Wajda, Poczta 2016).

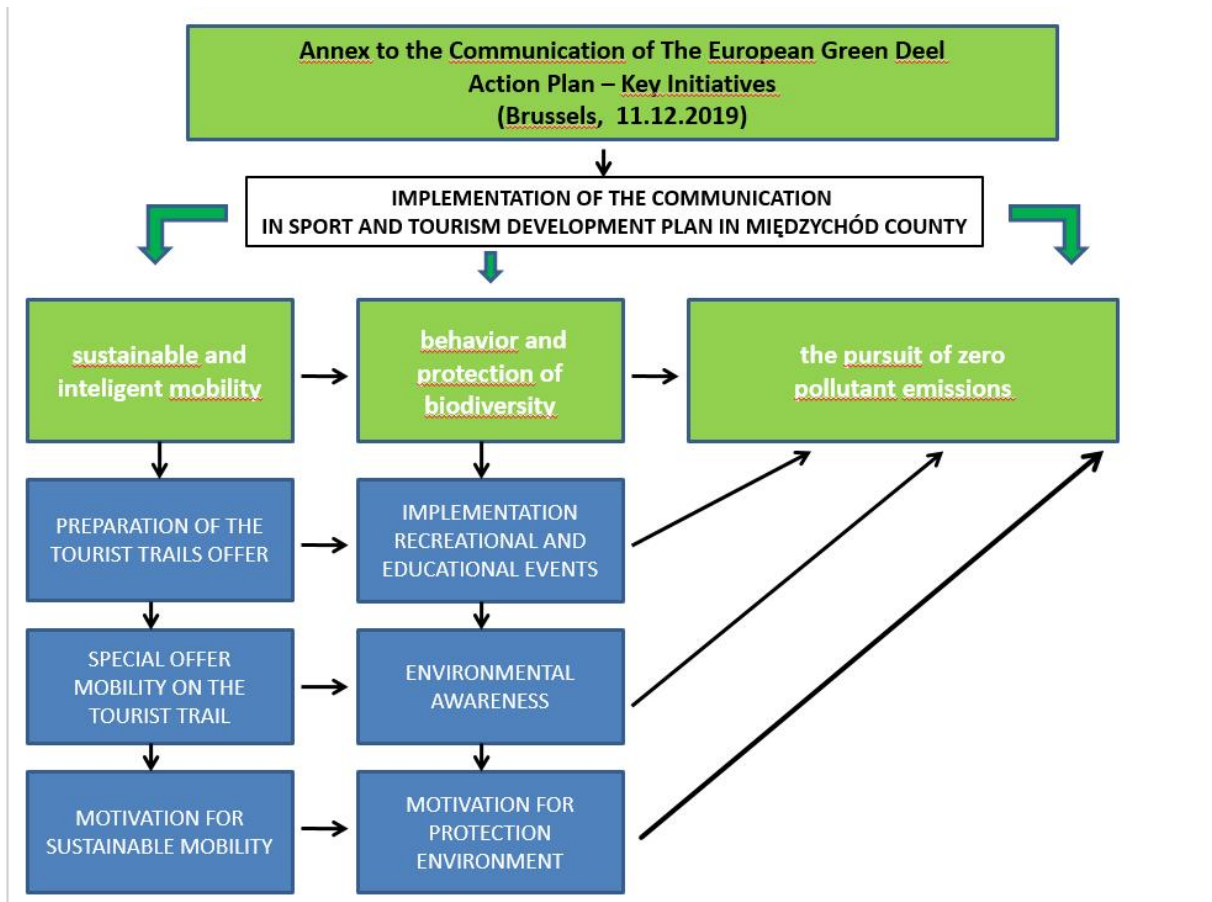
The concept of the European Green Deal implies "the necessity to take courageous and comprehensive policy actions in order to achieve the greatest possible benefits in the field of health and quality of life". This endeavor is reflected in the activities of the Międzychód County Office, initiating and implementing an integrated sports and tourist offer of the Międzychód County as an ecological regional product (Figure 1 and 2).

**Figure 1. Reference scheme of the Sport and Tourism Development Plan in Międzychód County to the Concept of the European Green Deal**



Source: Own study (J. Styperek 2020)

**Figure 1. Reference scheme of the Sport and Tourism Development Plan in Międzychódzki Powiat to the Communication on the European Green Deal**



*Source: Own study (J. Styperek 2020)*

The assumptions of the "Sports and Tourism Development Plan in Międzychódzki Powiat" also refer to the "Annex to the Communication on the European Green Deal", Action Plan - Key Initiatives (Brussels, 11/12/2019) in three aspects: sustainable and intelligent mobility, behavior and protection of biodiversity and the pursuit of zero pollutant emissions for the benefit of a non-toxic environment (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/PL/TXT/?qid=1596443911913&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640#document2>).

### **Main goal**

The main aim of the presented article is to find out about the opinion of the inhabitants of the Międzychód County on bicycle transport in the context of the European Green Deal.

## **Material and Method**

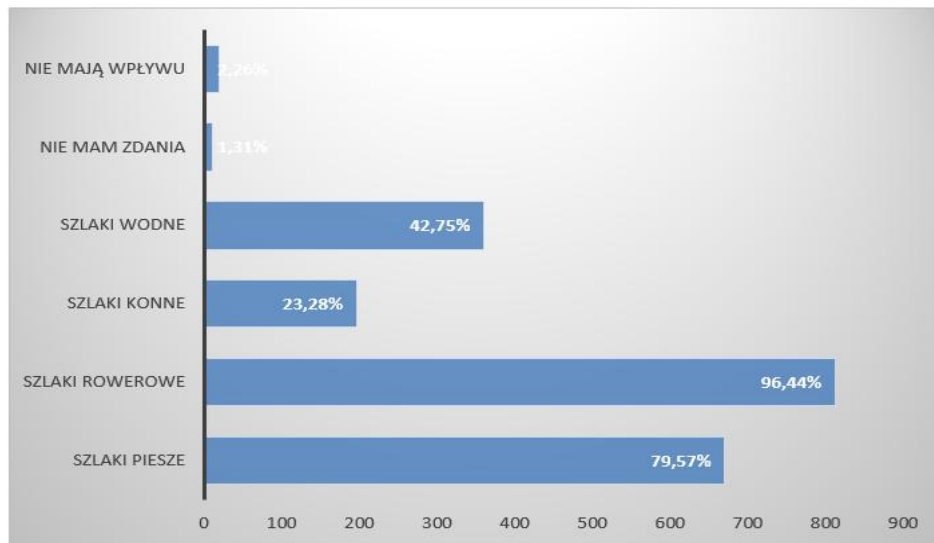
A questionnaire study was conducted (using the standardized interview method). The research was conducted in the period from March to October 2021. The COVID 19 pandemic meant that both a paper questionnaire and an on-line questionnaire were used to collect data. 842 people living in the Międzychodzki Powiat took part in the survey. The survey was anonymous. When deciding to fill in the questionnaire, the respondents agreed that the data and information provided in them could be used for the indicated purposes, i.e. to recognize the opinions of the inhabitants of the Międzychód district on the possibilities of developing sport and tourism and the implementation of the Sport Development Plan. and Tourism of Międzychód County.

The dominant group of respondents were women who constitute 75% of the respondents. In the age structure of the respondents, over 50% are people in two age groups: the range 26 - 35 years (27.3%) and the range 46 - 55 years (43.8%). The third group is in the 56-70 age group (19.9%). The share of men and women in the analyzed age groups is basically the same. Most of the respondents (57.2%) declare higher education, and in second place are people with secondary education (25.6%). In terms of the current professional situation, professionally active people definitely dominate (82.4%), while the second largest group are the unemployed (11.8%). Noteworthy is a small percentage of people in the education process: schoolchildren (3%) and students (0.9%). It also turns out that economically active women constitute 79.55%, however, the number of unemployed women compared to the respondents is almost 16%. There were no unemployed men in the study group. We can assume that this is related to the fact that women stay at home more often and raise children or grandchildren. There were also no students among the male respondents.

## **Results**

In the last decade, the general trend towards engaging in various forms of physical activity has been clearly noticeable. This is largely facilitated by linear recreational systems, which include various types of hiking trails. One of the conditions for using these trails is information about their values and the route in the field. In the question related to this issue, a multiple-choice question was used, which means that the respondents could choose more than one answer. The results of the research show that the inhabitants of Międzychód County believe that the promotion of health and physical activity in the field may be largely influenced by information on bicycle routes (96.4%) and hiking trails (79.5%). Water routes (42.7%) were indicated in third place.

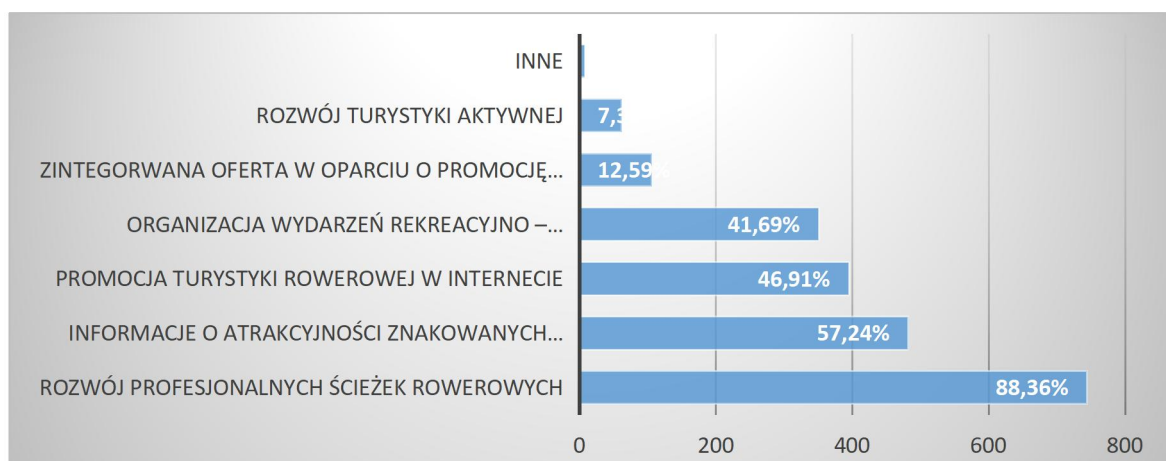
**Figure 3. Information on what types of tourist routes may affect the promotion of health and physical activity in the Międzychód County**



Source: Own elaboration based on survey research,  $n = 842$ .

The study also takes into account the opinions on the factors influencing the development of cycling tourism in Międzychódzki County. The four most important factors include: development of professional bicycle paths (88.3%), information on the attractiveness of marked bicycle routes (57.2%), promotion of bicycle routes on the Internet (46.9%) and the organization of recreational and cultural events.

**Figure 4. Factors influencing the development of cycling tourism in the Międzychódzki Powiat**



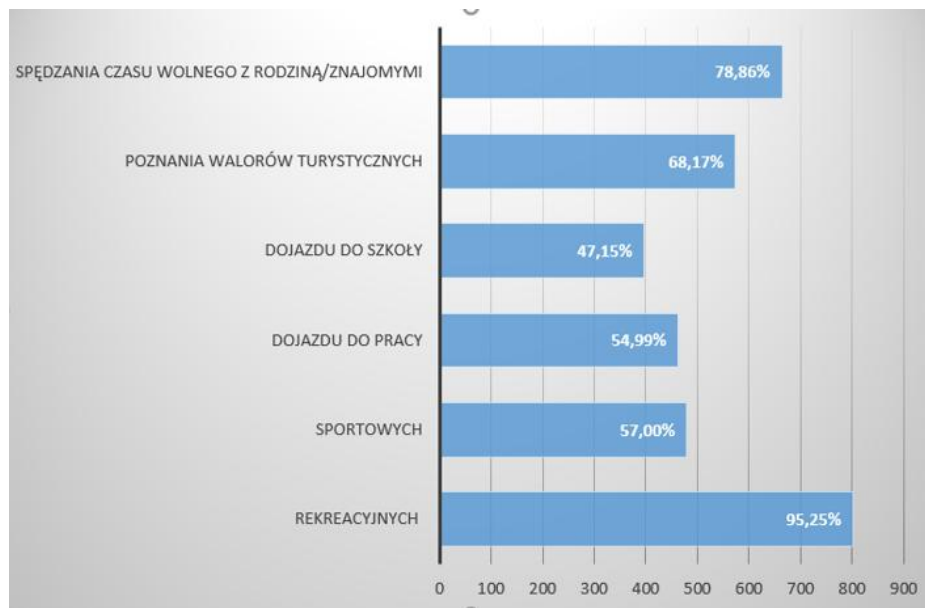
Source: Own elaboration based on survey research,  $n = 842$ .

Taking into account the rapidly growing popularity of bicycle tourism, the questionnaire also includes a question to what extent a professional offer on safe bicycle routes and bicycle paths



can be a motive for cycling for various purposes. In response, more than one of six different cycling themes could be selected. Most responses concerned recreational and tourist motivations: recreational (95.2%), spending free time with family (78.8%) and getting to know tourist values (68.1%). The sport theme was mentioned by 57% of the respondents. It is also worth noting that the prepared offer of safe routes and bicycle paths would motivate 54.9% of the respondents to commute to work and 47.1% of the respondents to travel to school.

**Figure 5. The offer of professional and safe bicycle routes and the motivation to cycle**



*Source: Own elaboration based on survey research, n = 842.*

The conducted survey also referred to the concept of the "European Ecological Order", which emphasizes the importance of ecological transport in terms of improving air quality, and thus the quality of life. In this trend, another question was posed: Can the use of a bicycle as a form of commuting to work / school / sports facilities improve the air quality in the Międzychodzki Powiat? The vast majority of responses (86.7%) concerned a positive assessment of the impact of cycling on air cleanliness. Only 5.7% of the respondents did not notice the impact of cycling, air quality. The above results may constitute grounds for considering the development and promotion of cycling in the studied powiat as an increasingly frequently chosen means of transport.



## **Summary and final conclusions**

The analysis of contemporary trends in tourism clearly shows that the model of stationary leisure has been losing its importance for years and is no longer attractive. It turns out that modern people, for whom health is important, give up passive tourism in favor of active recreation, sports for all, where entertainment is combined with physical activity and education. Sport and tourism may become one of the most important areas of the local economy of the four communes in the Międzychodzki Powiat, and the offer of active recreation, sport for all, where entertainment is combined with physical activity and education, may constitute the core of the brand's recreational product in the region. However, before the first steps are taken, the task of which will be to increase the tourist traffic for sports tourism and extend the stay of tourists, it is important to check whether this idea is also guided by the inhabitants of the Międzychód County. Therefore, conducting public consultations among representatives of cultural institutions, schools, entrepreneurs and inhabitants of the powiat who are no longer professionally active turned out to be necessary in this situation. Only residents who are interested in their "Little Homeland" can directly influence its development.

Bicycle routes play an important role for the development of the Międzychód County, both in the area of active tourism development, but also in terms of increasing the quality of life and broadly understood health promotion of its inhabitants. The results of the research showed that the inhabitants of the Międzychód County believe that the promotion of health and physical activity in the field can be largely influenced by information on bicycle and hiking routes. Water routes are indicated in third place.

Most of the inhabitants positively assessed the impact of cycling on air cleanliness. The above results may constitute grounds for considering the development and promotion of cycling in the studied powiat as an increasingly frequently chosen means of transport and for the implementation of the sustainable development policy.

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