

Equestrian tourism in Niepolomice Forest – conditions of development and its impact on natural environment

Justyna Kmiecik-Wrobel, Jagiellonian University, Poland, j.kmiecik.wrobel@gmail.com

The Niepolomice Forest is large forest complex set on the east side of Cracow, Poland. It is located within the Sandomierz Basin, on the confluence of the rivers Raba and Wisla. The forest covers about 110 km². From the botanical and morphological point of view it can be divided into two parts: the main part occupied about 80% of whole complex is pine and mixed forest and the second, smaller part is deciduous forest. In the Niepolomice Forest there were implemented several types of natural environment protection. The most important of them are: nature reserves (there are 6 reserves in the forest concentrated on protection of unique plant complexes), natural monuments (represented mostly by very old oaks) and protection of particular species of plants and animals. The forest is famous especially because of continued here from the end of second world war breeding center of Polish wisent.

The Niepolomice Forest authorities have prepared for tourists walking tracks (total length about 33.2 km), bicycle tracks (total length 8 km), didactic path (3,5 km length) and horse riding trail (8,5 km length). Horse riding is becoming more and more popular recreation in Poland these days. This makes also big interest of people who want to practice horse riding not only in studs and equestrian schools but also in nature considering beautiful landscapes. The trail for equestrian tourism in Niepolomice Forest was signed in 2003, It is about 8,5 km length and it is located in western part of the forest. The loop of the trail covers about 1,5 km², less than 1,2 % of the whole forest complex. Except of this one trail, horse riding in the Niepolomice Forest is now forbidden. The horse riding trail is equipped with a basic infrastructure like bulletin boards (at the starting and end points of the trail), barriers (also at the starting and end points – used to tie a horse for a moment just before starting the trip) and natural hurdles (like fallen trees). The location of the trail makes it available only for riders from stables set on the south-west side of the Niepolomice Forest. The authorities of the forest do not lead already any monitoring of number and type of tourists using the horse riding trail.

On the basis of observation and information available in the Internet it can be said that there are up to 10 stables located in the nearest surroundings of the forest. Some of them are private and 6 are recreation stables leading riding lessons. The location of these stables and also the huge opportunities offered by the Niepolomice Forest for horse riding make a possibility and need of creating some more trails in the forest. The Niepolomice Forest includes areas advantageous for horse riding. Most of all there are many sand paths which can be safely and with low investments use for creating new trails. Research done in the Niepolomice Forest shows that there are tens of kilometers of paths where the trail could be led. Because of fact that all of the trails in the Niepolomice Forest are dedicated for one day trips there is no need of putting in the forest any dedicated infrastructure.

The impact of equestrian tourism on the natural environment of the Niepolomice Forest can be defined as slight. This is most of all trampling plants along the trail and disturbance of wild animals.

Summarizing, the development of equestrian tourism in the Niepolomice Forest depends on the authorities. The proposal of signing new horse riding trails presented on the poster is just one of the possible solution. But it is worth saying that signing some more trails would make the Niepolomice Forest more available for local riders and more attractive for tourists. It would also give a possibility of organising some events and horse riding competitions.

