

FOREST EDUCATION AS THE BASIS FOR CONSCIOUS USE OF ALL FOREST FUNCTIONS BY SOCIETY IN THE CELESTYNÓW FOREST DISTRICT

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Abstract

The Celestynów Forest District covers areas located southwest of the Warsaw agglomeration. The forests in this area are a place for recreation, hiking and cycling for local residents, a habitat for biodiversity, as well as a workplace for many people and a source of eco-friendly raw material - wood. The forests of the Celestynów Forest District serve ecological, social, and economic functions, and the task of foresters is to reconcile all of them, ensuring their sustainability for future generations. To achieve this goal, the employees of the Celestynów Forest District conduct forest education, one of the main tasks of which is to increase awareness among society about sustainable forest use. Most of the educational activities conducted by foresters are focused at the Forest Education Center in Celestynów. The center offers natural science lessons, workshops, lectures, and educational events for children, youth, and adults about nature, forests, and forestry. Forest education, combined with play and direct experience of natural phenomena, facilitates learning and understanding of processes occurring in nature, and builds responsibility for the natural environment. A comprehensive approach, taking into account all ecosystem aspects and various social groups, allows for the effective promotion of sustainable use of all forest functions.

Key words: ecological awareness, State Forests

Introduction

Forests in Poland serve diverse functions - ecological (protective), economic, and social (Polityka ekologiczna państwa 2030, 2019). From an ecological perspective, forests shape the climate, regulate the water cycle in nature and provide habitats for many species. Forests also have significant economic importance - they provide employment opportunities and a source of renewable raw material - wood. Forests are also a place for cultural and scientific development, tourism, and recreation.

Urban forests and forests within the reach of cities are particularly important for society. These forests allow local residents to appreciate the richness of nature, have a positive effect on human psychology and improve aesthetic impressions. Urban forests also have protective functions - they protect against wind, noise and pollution as well as preserve drinking water and soil resources. Forests managed by State Forests, growing close to city borders, are mainly perceived by society as a place for rest and recreation (Jaszczak 2008).

The growing interest in forests is a challenge for modern nature and forest education. Actions to increase public awareness of rational and responsible forest use are becoming increasingly important (Płoskonka 2018). Forest education is an essential element of State Forests' activities. Its goal is to provide society with knowledge about multifunctional and sustainable forest management and to shape appropriate attitudes towards the forest environment (Będkowska 1999). Educational activities are particularly carried out by Forest Promotion Complexes - functional areas of ecological, educational and social significance, established in accordance with the Forest Act.

An example of innovative activities that increase public awareness of the benefits of sustainable forest management, nature conservation, and responsible nature interaction is the educational activity of the Celestynów Forest District (Brytan et al. 2019).

The aim of the study was to analyze the educational activity of the Celestynów Forest District and to present the issues addressed within forest education for society.

Material and methods

The study utilized internal data documenting the educational activities carried out in the area of the Celestynów Forest District. Information about the object comes from the Forest Education Program for the years 2019-2028 of the Celestynów Forest District.

Results

Celestynów Forest District covers the forest areas located southeast of Warsaw, along with the neighboring Forest Districts of Drewnica, Jabłonna, Chojnów and the Warsaw City Forests making up

the "Warsaw Forests" Promotion Complex. These forests are popular among local residents who enjoy sports, recreation and gaining knowledge as well as use of the tourist infrastructure created by the Celestynów Forest District. In response to societal expectations, the foresters have also prepared a rich educational offer. The main educational activities of the Celestynów Forest District are focused in the Forest Education Center (CEL) (Fot.1), which was opened in 2009. The center is located in Celestynów, surrounded by picturesque oak forest. The staff of the Forest Education Team conducts classes, lectures, workshops and various educational events. The center's offer is addressed to educational institutions and private individuals.



Fig. 1: Forest Education Centre (R. Brytan)

Forest education should combine theoretical knowledge with practical activities (Sobczyk 2000). The Forest Education Center has an extensive infrastructure (lecture and exhibition halls) and a rich collection of educational equipment and materials (such as field microscopes, binoculars, magnifying glasses, preparation equipment, forestry tools and wooden outdoor games), allowing for interesting classes to be organized both indoors and outdoors. Guests of the Forest Education Center can visit a sound-equipped exhibition hall presenting animals and plants inhabiting Polish forests, providing information about the environment that surrounds them. The tourist infrastructure around the main building of the center (a shelter with a campfire place, a camping site, a playground, a flower meadow) allows learning and relaxing in the company of nature.

During field classes, participants absorb knowledge with all their senses - they get to know the sounds and smells of nature, create artistic works using forest materials and taste the gifts of the forest in the form of forest fruits. Survival workshops, presenting the principles of outdoor ethics "Leave No Trace" are attractive activities for children, youth and adults visiting the center. During these lessons participants learn to light fires in controlled conditions, hang hammocks, get to know wild edible plants and also learn how to practice forest tourism without harming nature.

Every year the Forest Education Team organizes a series of open events "Do CELu po wiedzę!" (eng. "To CEL for knowledge!"), aimed at encouraging society to spend time in nature with respecting the natural environment. The events take place on selected weekends and take the form of picnics. The

lecturers are specialists from various fields who discuss selected topics including biology, nature conservation, and tourism. Additional points of these events are educational games and activities that facilitate knowledge acquisition.

In forest education it is also important to address the issue of using and managing natural resources. Participants in educational activities should be allowed to have doubts and resolve them independently, based on the interpretation of facts provided by educators (Naturski, Stępińska 2018). Lectures and discussions on topics related to forest management and protection of forest ecosystems are organized at the Forest Education Center. Participants in such activities have the opportunity to participate in debates, for example on the validity of tree felling.

Data from the educational activities reports of the Celestynów Forest District indicate that from 2009 to 2022 a total of 218,683 visitors took advantage of the Forest Education Center's offerings (Fig. 2).

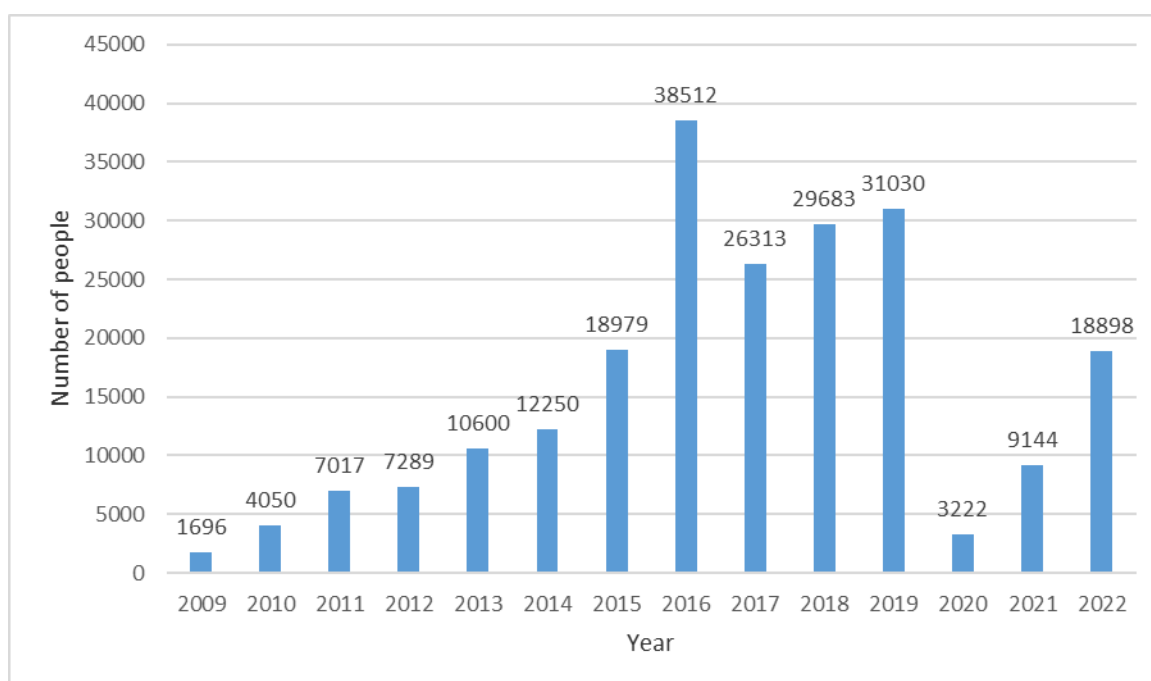


Fig. 2: Number of people using the educational offerings of the Celestynów Forest District from 2009-2022.

The sudden increase in the number of education recipients in 2016 was due to the expansion of the Forest Education Team, an increase in the number of available lesson slots, and a wider promotion of the center's activities, which enabled a larger number of interested individuals to take advantage of the educational offer. The continuous expansion of the center's educational offer with new lesson scenarios and events led to further growth in the number of forest education recipients. However, from 2020 to 2021, a visible decline in attendance at the Forest Education Center was observed on the graph due to the restrictions on the center's operations related to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the temporary suspension of lesson delivery and events, and the closure of exhibition halls for visits. After some restrictions were lifted in mid-2022, a sudden increase in public interest in participating in activities at the Forest Education Center was observed again. According to reports from the Celestynów Forestry, the main recipients of education during this period were children from primary schools and preschools (Celestynów Forestry 2022).

Conclusion

The forests of the Celestynów Forest District and the Forest Education Center are often visited by local residents, and the educational offer prepared by forestry workers is very popular. The diverse range of topics covered in the Forest Education Center's activities allows forest education recipients to learn about many aspects of the functioning of the forest environment and enables an understanding of the principles of sustainable forest management. Reaching an increasingly larger audience with forest education can contribute to raising awareness among the local community about responsible use of all the forest's functions.

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Souhrn

Lesy v Polsku plní mnoho funkcí, přičemž městské a příměstské lesy mají pro lidi zvláštní význam. Zájem o lesy roste, což představuje výzvu pro současné přírodovědné a lesnické vzdělávání. Proto je důležité úsilí o zvýšení povědomí veřejnosti o racionálním a odpovědném využívání lesů. Státní lesy provádějí vzdělávací aktivity zaměřené na zprostředkování znalostí veřejnosti o multifunkčním a trvale udržitelném lesním hospodářství a na formování správných postojů k lesnímu prostředí. Inovativní vzdělávací aktivity v lesích v okolí Varšavy, které jsou intenzivně využívány veřejností, provádí Lesní správa Celestynów. Hlavní činnost probíhá ve Středisku lesní pedagogiky, kde se pořádají kurzy, přednášky a různé akce. Vzdělávací nabídku připravenou lesníky využívá mnoho lidí z okolních měst a obcí. Lesní pedagogika vedená atraktivní formou přispívá ke zvyšování ekologického povědomí a znalostí o trvale udržitelném využívání všech funkcí lesa ve společnosti.

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