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## CHRYSTKOWO-A THEMATIC TOURIST VILLAGE, IS A NEW OFFER FOR TOURISM

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### Introduction

The concept of the creation of thematic tourist villages derives from the experience of Western European countries, such as: Austria, France, Holland and Italy. Assigning a specific thematic specialty to chosen villages in those countries proved to be a great success. Thematic villages, which were included in the area of tourism economy, have become a new tourist attraction. Such an approach has been adopted for Chrystkowo, which is located in the picturesque valley of the Lower Vistula. It documents unique in the country, more than 200-year history of the Dutch settlers who came to these lands at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Assigning thematic specialisation to this village, on the basis of well-preserved cultural heritage values, will allow its tourist development. The concept to re-introduce Chrystkowo as the Vistula Thematic Mennonite Village (\*), creates a chance for this village to establish itself as a tourist attraction on the regional and European level.

\* The Project: “*Chrystkowo- A Thematic Tourist Village*”, has been developed by the Department of Geography of Tourism, under the direction of Dr Maria Dombrowicz, UKW, Bydgoszcz, 2008.

### 1. The choice of Chrystkowo for the implementation of the concept of 'Thematic Tourist Village.’

Tourist Thematic Villages function through a specially developed model to make the best use of their tourist value. The basis for the preparation of such a model are unique historical and cultural features of such a village, which distinguish this place among other tourist attractions. The specially prepared ‘Thematic Tourist Offer’ will be the reason to visit those villages.

Selected for the implementation of the tourism project “Chrystkowo- a Thematic Tourist Village” Chrystkowo meets the set criteria for a thematic tourist village. These are as follows:

- Interesting history of the village. It was founded in the fifteenth century as the knights' property, then in the sixteenth century as gentry estate and in the second half of the

sixteenth century it was related to the settlement of the Dutch-Mennonite, Anabaptist Protestant sect from the Netherlands.

- Well-preserved buildings and layout of the Mennonite homesteads, with the historic arcade cottage from 1770, which dominates the landscape of the village.
- The spatial layout of the village with inline arrangement of the buildings, parallel to the Vistula River.
- Scenic and natural values of the Lower Vistula Valley and European Area 'Nature 2000.'

The most distinctive cultural value of Chrystkowo is the arcaded wooden cottage from 1770, which is considered as a gem of architecture of the Dutch construction industry in Poland. This monumental building has a gable roof, almost three times higher than the ground floor walls. The arcade occupies a central position in front of the cottage. It is flanked by five ornamental pillars, on which the first floor is based. It was used as a granary, where grain used to be stored after having been loaded directly through a special opening. The room also served members of the household during floods. The residential part of the cottage consists of a hall and chambers. The building is unique due to the style of ornamentation of the arcaded columns. This cottage was the centre of a large Mennonite farm. On its premises there were: cowshed, stables, piggery, a wooden barn, coach house and blacksmith shop built from bricks, flock and cellars.



Photo 1: The historic Mennonite cottage from 1770.

In 1992 the cottage has been entered into the central 'Historic Monument Register', and since 1995 it serves as a museum and has an educational function through the team from the Complex of Landscape Parks of Chełmno and Vistula. Inside the cottage there is a small collection of exhibits that relate to the life of the inhabitants of Chrystkowo and surrounding villages. The cottage is available to visitors everyday except Mondays and Tuesdays. Near the cottage a nursery of old varieties of fruit trees, such as apples and plums, was established, together with drying and storage facilities for the collected fruit. Since 2007, in the immediate vicinity of the cottage there is an agrotourism farm that offers guest rooms.

The Dutch settlers that came to Chrystkowo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries joined the native rural population and brought with them their culinary traditions, based primarily on products from their own farms, gardens, orchards and from breeding and fishing. The traditional Mennonite food consisted of simple, everyday dishes. More exquisite dishes were only prepared for special occasions, such as family celebrations, Christmas, etc. The attractiveness of the Mennonite dishes was due to the quality of the natural products that came from their farms, the mode of their manufacture, storage and also from their culinary secrets. Getting to know the Mennonites culinary heritage is also one of the distinguishing features of Chrystkowo as the Thematic Tourist Village. During 'Mennonite Evenings' organized in the cottage, tourists can taste dishes prepared according to old recipes.

The Vistula landscape in the vicinity of the village is extremely interesting for tourists. It offers a unique mosaic of Vistula ravines, slopes, fragments of deciduous forests, fields, meadows, regular rows of willows, the old orchard with rare varieties of apples and plums and a system of drainage canals (remnants of the Mennonite draining wetlands). On the floodplains of the Vistula River attention should be given to a belt of flood embankments and parts of the old river. It is cut off from the mainstream of the river and has become the natural habitat for many species of birds and fish and forms the unique landscape of the area.

The unique features of the Vistula landscape are under a legal protection in form of a landscape park "the Complex of Landscape Parks of Chełmno and Vistula," one of the largest natural parks on a national scale. This unique landscape offers opportunities to cycle, hike and horseback in the immediate vicinity of the village Chrystkowo.

## **2. The Model of the touristic development of Chrystkowo as a Thematic Tourist Village**

The main aim behind the concept of tourist development of Chrystkowo as a "Thematic Tourist Village" is the proposal to introduce new elements into the management of the village. The new tourist offer concentrates around the historic Mennonite cottage from 1770. This cottage dominates the Vistula landscape around the village and is its most valuable tourist attraction that documents the unique history of the village.

The proposal to introduce new elements into the development of Chrystkowo and its immediate environment concentrates on the enhancement of the tourist attractions of the village and improvements in its accessibility. To achieve these objectives, the following is recommended:

- Carrying out repairs and maintenance of the historic Mennonite cottage, together with equipping the interior with items referring to the life of the settlers.
- Restoration of the two buildings from the former farm, e.g. a forge and a coach house. After the restoration of the forge and its equipment, it should be used for demonstrations of forging of utility and decorative items for tourists. The coach house should be equipped with a carriage used as part of the tourist offer in this the picturesque landscape of the Vistula Valley.
- Using the reconstructed kiln building by the villagers to produce dried fruit.
- Highlighting various aspects of the life of the settlers through organising demonstrations in the cottage, and increasing the current modest exhibition that documents the life of the settlers.

- Creation of a tourist information board, that should be located next to the cottage and should contain detailed information about: the local cultural heritage and rural tourist routes, local accommodation and food, events, tourist attractions in the vicinity (e.g. the Gruzno Festival of Taste in August, the Feast of Plums in Lower Strzelce in September) and creation of tourist boards in Niedźwiedź and Kosowo villages that document more than 200- year-old history of the Dutch settlement.
- Creation of visually identical tables identifying Chrystkowo as the Mennonite Village, on the national road S-5 in Zbrachlin; in Aleksandrowo - the road in the direction of Strzelce Dolne, in Włóki on the national route 05, exit towards Topolno and in the Bydgoszcz district of Fordon – the road through Strzelce Dolne, Topolno, as well as in the direct entrance to Chrystkowo; the road Topolno-Gruczno (Annex No. 3, map).
- Signposting the panoramic route to Chrystkowo from the Bydgoszcz-Fordon way and creation of a panoramic view-point in Kozielec and a small parking space for buses.
- Enabling tourists to stay longer in Chrystkowo (particularly the Dutch tourists interested in the over 200-year history of the Dutch settlement in the area and its surrounding villages of Niedźwiedź, Kosowo, Topolinek) through using the nearby land as camping and caravan fields, and increasing the food offer by building a catering base in Kozielec (Flisacka Inn).

The proposal for a new tourist offer for Chrystkowo breaks with the existing methods of using the historic cottage, implemented by the employees of the Complex of Landscape Parks of Chełmno and Vistula. It is recommended that a new bid is prepared based on the following elements:

- Introduction of a professional guide in the cottage and its surroundings, dressed in traditional Mennonite clothes.
- Preparation of an events calendar, related to cultural heritage of the Mennonites, e.g. 'Mennonite Evenings' offered to tourist groups and a 'Mennonite Weekend' - a big regional event promoting Chrystkowo as the "Thematic Tourist Village."
- Preparation of a communication strategy: the promotion of events through posters and tourist information leaflets, introducing Chrystkowo through the use of the Internet, taking part in information programs, contests, fairs, etc.
- Organisation of thematic conferences, symposiums, open-air art training and workshops related to the Mennonite history in the historic cottage.
- Promotion of products related to the culinary heritage of Mennonites, their tasting and purchase in the nearby farms in Chrystkowo.
- Preparation and sale of souvenirs referring to the Dutch settlement history by the inhabitants of Chrystkowo to tourists.
- Introduction of unique local features across the local tourism-farms, e.g. the distinguished Mennonite cuisine.

Carrying out the above-mentioned tasks relating to the introduction of new elements proposed in the tourist development of Chrystkowo will be funded through the Regional Operational Program for 2007/2013, with the Priority Axis No 6, support for tourism. The tasks associated with the introduction of the new tourist offer are proposed to take place through modifications in the current management of the historic facility - the cottage: through raising the existing level of tourism and its historical value, e.g. obtaining a museum facility status, and its promotion at a national and European level.

## **Summary**

The proposed changes to the existing function of Chrystkowo as a Thematic Tourist Village should have the following effects:

- Increased appeal of Chrystkowo as an attractive tourist destination on a local and national level.
- An impact of the new tourist activity on the earnings of local communities in tourism sector.
- Increase of tourism and the promotion of the village amongst the European thematic tourist villages.
- Increased rank of Chrystkowo as a tourist village.

## **Abstract**

The article outlines the opportunity to use the European experience in the development of thematic tourist villages, which demonstrates their unique historic and cultural values. This is done by using the example of Chrystkowo, which documents the over 200-year history of the Dutch settlement in the Valley of the Lower Vistula. The newly proposed way of tourist management and a new tourist offer will allow this village to enter the tourism market and contribute to the development of tourism as well as activate the local community to participate in the tourist sector of the local economy.

**Key words:** thematic tourist villages, values of cultural heritage, a new tourism offer

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