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CHALLENGES IN THE AREA OF PUBLIC SAFETY FOR THE MAŁOPOLSKA PROVINCE

Abstract

In the face of various threats, such as natural disasters, pandemics, and technical incidents, it is important to have an integrated approach to crisis management that takes into account the specific needs of the region. Therefore, this article focuses on identifying the main challenges and threats of the 21st century that may lead to crisis situations. The analysis covers global trends, such as climate change, as well as local threats specific to the Małopolska Province, including dangers related to infrastructure, ecology, and social aspects. The presentation of specific crisis aspects in Małopolska, identifying the main threats and previous cases of crises, was preceded by a detailed description of the region, taking into account its demography, geography, and infrastructure, which allowed for a better understanding of the unique challenges facing the Małopolska Province. It should be emphasized that the article is an introduction to further scientific considerations focused on the analysis of strategies, structures, and actions taken by the authorities and institutions responsible for crisis management in Małopolska.

Keywords

Threats, public safety, Małopolska Province, Małopolska

Introduction

Crisis is an inherent part of the modern world, affecting both public institutions and local communities. In the face of a growing number of threats, such as climate change, natural disasters, cyberattacks, and pandemics, crisis management is becoming a key aspect of ensuring security and social stability. The Małopolska Province, as one of the most important regions in Poland, is not immune to these challenges. The rich history, dynamic economic development, and diverse geographical landscape of this area require special attention and effective crisis management strategies. In the 21st century, the world has faced constant changes that radically shape social, economic, and political reality. The dynamics of events and global crises are only the tip of the iceberg, representing the challenges that local communities around the world must face.

Characteristics of the region

The Małopolska Province is located in southern Poland and is characterized by diverse topography, which is both an advantage and a potential source of crisis risks. The Małopolska Province consists of 22 counties (including 3 cities with county rights), 182 municipalities, and 1,915 villages. There are 62 cities and 1,951 rural localities within its territory, and the entire province is located at the intersection of important transport routes. The tourist, entertainment, and historical accessibility of the Małopolska region is guaranteed by good transport infrastructure. The area has railways, national roads, and other transport routes running from east to west and from north to south. In the south, the province reaches the state border. It borders the Silesian Province (273.4 km to the west), the Świętokrzyskie Province (178.4 km to the north), the Subcarpathian Province (177.9 km to the east) and the Slovak Republic (301.6 km to the south). The area of the Małopolska Province is 15,182.87 km², which accounts for 5% of the area of Poland. The Małopolska Province currently has 3,428,900 inhabitants, 1,640,200 in cities and 1,768,700 in rural areas. Małopolska is home to representatives of ethnic minorities: Karaites, Lemkos, Roma, and Tatars. The population density is 226 people per km².

Krakow, a royal city, serves as the capital of this province. Extraordinary landscapes, unique nature, an impressive number of monuments, and a unique atmosphere – all this attracts millions of tourists from Poland and around the world to visit this region every year. As a result, Małopolska has long been one of the most visited regions in Poland. It is worth noting that the Małopolska Province is the leader in terms of the number of licensed mountain guides and hotels. “Małopolska is a region of extraordinary wealth and historical and landscape values, as well as a rich cultural past, perceived as an important center of cultural activity in Poland.” Małopolska is an area with a diverse topography. The lowest point is 130 m above sea level, while the highest point, Rysy, reaches 2,499

m above sea level and is the highest peak in Poland. The southern part of the region includes the Tatra and Beskid mountain ranges. The Tatras are the only alpine mountains in Poland, while the Beskids are a gentler range of flysch mountains, rich in forests, fields, and floodplains formed in the valleys. The limestone Pieniny Mountains with the Dunajec River Gorge, a natural monument of global importance, are another important element of the landscape of Małopolska. The central part of the province is crossed by the Vistula, Poland's largest river, which forms a natural border between the mountains and the lowlands in this area. To the north of the Vistula lies the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland, known for its limestone outcrops, gorges, and caves. Among the most famous formations are Hercules' Club in Pieskowa Skała and the Prądnik Valley, located near Ojców. Another unique attraction is the Błęderska Desert, the only desert of its kind in Europe. Małopolska is also known for its complex of Landscape Parks of the Małopolska Province, which includes 11 landscape parks, such as the Beskid Mały Landscape Park, the Bielańsko-Tyniecki Landscape Park, and the Popradzki Landscape Park. These parks protect the unique natural and landscape values of the region. The Małopolska Province attracts numerous tourists thanks to its wealth of monuments and traditions. In May, the Małopolska Cultural Heritage Days are held, during which tourists can visit monuments that are not normally accessible. A special attraction is the Wooden Architecture Trail, which includes 250 buildings, such as churches, Orthodox churches, bell towers, old Polish manors, wooden villas, and open-air museums, where concerts are organized in the summer. The Eagles' Nests Trail with its gorges, ruins of fortresses and castles, the Gothic Trail, the Małopolska Jewish Trail with synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and tenement houses, the Lemko Orthodox Church Trail and the Salt Trail are other routes that attract lovers of history and culture.

The Małopolska region is unique in terms of the number and diversity of monuments that attract tourists from all over the world. Among them are castles, manors, and other places of great historical and cultural value. The Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow is one of the most important places in Polish history. It was the residence of Polish kings and is a symbol of national identity. Its majestic architecture, rich interiors, and Wawel Cathedral, the place of coronation and burial of many Polish monarchs, make it a must-see for every tourist. Visitors can see, among other things, the royal chambers, the armory, and the crown treasury. The castle in Niepołomice, often called "the second Wawel," is another gem of Małopolska. Located in the picturesque surroundings of the Niepołomice Forest, this castle served as a summer royal residence. Today, in addition to visiting the historic interiors, tourists can take part in numerous cultural events, such as concerts and art exhibitions, which take place within its walls. The picturesque castle in Nowy Wiśnicz, built in the Renaissance style, impresses with both its architecture and its picturesque location. It is the second largest castle in Małopolska. Surrounded by a beautiful park, the castle offers visitors the opportunity to travel

back in time thanks to its richly decorated interiors and a museum that presents the history of the region and the Lubomirski family, the former owners of the castle. Jan Matejko's manor house in Koryznówka is a place of special significance for art lovers. It was here that the great Polish painter spent his summer holidays, and today there is a museum dedicated to his life and work. Visitors can admire the artist's original works, as well as numerous family memorabilia that give an insight into Matejko's everyday life. Ignacy Paderewski's manor house in Kąсна Dolna is the only surviving house in the world where this outstanding pianist, composer, and politician lived. The manor house is surrounded by a beautiful park, and its interiors have retained their original furnishings. Numerous concerts and cultural events are held here, referring to Paderewski's rich musical heritage. The Jewish cemetery in Bobowa is an extraordinary place, full of contemplation and reflection. It is one of the most important testimonies to the presence of the Jewish community in Małopolska. With its historic tombstones (*matzevot*), the cemetery is a valuable historical and cultural monument, reminding us of the rich tradition and history of Polish Jews. Wysowa Zdrój, in addition to its spa qualities, also offers monuments of great religious and cultural significance. Two historic Orthodox churches – St. Michael the Archangel Church and the Church of the Protection of the Holy Virgin – delight visitors with their architecture and unique iconostases. These wooden temples are examples of the region's excellent craftsmanship and sacred art. Each of these places not only enriches the historical and cultural knowledge of visitors, but also offers unforgettable experiences and insight into the rich heritage of Małopolska. From monumental castles to intimate manor houses and memorial sites, this region is a real treasure trove for all those who wish to explore its history and traditions.

The Małopolska Province, rich in monuments, beautiful landscapes, and tourist attractions, attracts millions of tourists from Poland and abroad every year. The most important cities in Małopolska are Wadowice, the hometown of Pope John Paul II, Miechów with the wooden manor house of Tadeusz Kościuszko and the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, Tarnów with its medieval old town, Nowy Sącz with one of the largest market squares in Poland, and Kraków, rich in historical monuments. Oświęcim, known throughout the world for the former Nazi death camp Auschwitz, today serves as an important place of remembrance and education about the Holocaust. Its natural and cultural wealth, as well as its developed tourist infrastructure, make Małopolska one of the most visited regions in Poland, both by tourists and students attracted by its renowned universities. The area also offers unique experiences for all mountain lovers. The region, which is part of the historical area of Małopolska, has lowland and mountainous areas, including the Tatra Mountains, Pieniny Mountains (Tropical Mountains), and Beskids. Despite potential hazards, the mountainous region of the Małopolska Province is very often the most popular tourist destination and natural attraction, attracting thousands of tourists from all over the world.

Crisis aspects in the Małopolska Province

In the southern part of this region, there is a possibility of many crisis threats due to its mountainous terrain. Extreme weather events, such as heavy rains or rapid warming, can cause floods, landslides, avalanches, construction, transport, industrial, and environmental disasters. The level of security in the Małopolska Province is also influenced by external factors related to Poland's participation in military and stabilization operations in a "hot" region, the war in Ukraine, the unprecedented increase in the threat of terrorism in Europe and worldwide, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Mountainous areas are particularly vulnerable to such phenomena due to steep slopes and changes in topography, which can lead, for example, to local crises hindering communication, access to cities, and care for the injured. Let us also consider the risks associated with mountain tourism. Especially during periods of increased tourist traffic in summer and winter, mountain regions become crowded, which can contribute to infrastructure overload and pollution, as well as an increase in the number of accidents and missing tourists. In the event of bad weather or a mountain accident, rescue operations can be hampered by difficult terrain, requiring greater coordination of rescue services and adequate preparation for such situations. Proper planning, monitoring, and risk management are therefore essential to minimize the impact of potential geological hazards while ensuring the safety and protection of the region's unique natural heritage, and are also necessary for natural disaster management and to ensure an integrated approach to crises.

The province is picturesque and interesting, but it is also exposed to various natural disasters that can lead to regional crises and emergency situations requiring a quick and effective response. Floods are one of the greatest threats to the Małopolska Province, especially during periods of heavy rainfall or sudden snowmelt. This is one of the most common natural hazards, constituting an extreme, often violent and unusual natural phenomenon. According to Article 16(43) of the Act of July 20, 2017 - Water Law, a flood is defined as "the temporary covering of an area that is not normally covered by water, in particular caused by the swelling of water in natural watercourses, water reservoirs, canals, and from the sea, excluding the covering of an area caused by the swelling of water in sewage systems." In low-lying areas, especially along the Vistula River and its tributaries, flooding can occur, causing significant material and human losses. In the past, this region has experienced numerous floods that have damaged homes, roads, bridges, and infrastructure, as well as caused crop and human losses. The mountainous areas of the Małopolska Province, which include the Tatra, Pieniny, and Beskid Mountains, are prone to landslides and avalanches, especially during periods of heavy snowfall and rapid temperature changes. These phenomena can block roads, destroy infrastructure, and even endanger human life. The flood risk level is 15% higher than the average flood risk in Poland and covers about 50% of the province's area. The total length of rivers and streams

is about 6,000 km. Natural lakes are found only in the Tatra Mountains. In addition, high mountains are susceptible to sudden atmospheric changes, which can lead to sudden weather changes and storms, increasing the risk of avalanches and landslides. Another threat that the Małopolska Province may face, especially in summer, is heat waves and drought, and extreme temperatures can cause heat waves, threatening the health and lives of people, especially the elderly and the sick.

Droughts in the region have become increasingly frequent in recent years and can lead to crop damage, loss of water resources, and deterioration of living conditions for residents. Finally, storms, gales, and hailstorms are further phenomena independent of human factors that can pose a threat to the Małopolska Province and its inhabitants. Severe storms are often accompanied by gusty winds and heavy rainfall, which can damage buildings, knock down trees, break power lines, and cause transportation disruptions. Hailstorms accompanied by thunderstorms can destroy crops, cars, buildings, and injure people outdoors. To effectively prepare for extreme weather events, Poland, and especially the Małopolska Province, must implement emergency plans, invest in warning systems (such as the RCB), and monitor and train local communities so that they know how to deal with the threats they face. Appropriate precautions and emergency response can help minimize the effects of potential disasters.

However, high tourist traffic, especially seasonal traffic, can be both an opportunity for development and a potential threat to the region. First, infrastructure overload is a major challenge for the Małopolska Province. During the peak tourist season, tourist infrastructure such as roads, parking lots, and hiking trails can become congested, especially in the vicinity of Krakow and the Tatra Mountains. The influx of tourists can lead to traffic jams, difficulties in accessing tourist attractions, and a deterioration in the quality of life for residents. In addition, increased travel can lead to congestion in public transport and public transport. Environmental pollution is another problem associated with intensive tourism. Increased tourism is often accompanied by increased waste, air pollution, and destruction of natural ecosystems. Especially in mountainous areas where tourism is highly developed, the problem of environmental pollution can be particularly acute, leading to the degradation of nature and threats to local flora and fauna. In addition, excessive exploitation of tourist attractions can lead to soil erosion and loss of biodiversity. When it comes to tourist traffic in the Małopolska Province, the safety of tourists is also a serious threat, as the terrain is often difficult and unpredictable, and tourists are exposed to various hazards such as injuries, accidents, and disappearances. Sudden changes in weather, failure of tourist equipment, or inadequate preparation can lead to critical situations requiring the intervention of emergency services. In addition, an increase in the number of tourists may result in an increase in criminal incidents, such as theft and property damage, which may affect the sense of security of tourists and residents. Another challenge associated with tourism is social conflict. Intensive tourism can lead to social conflicts between residents and tourists, especially in cases of public

disorder, environmental pollution, or safety violations. These conflicts can affect the social atmosphere, negatively influence the perception of tourists, and increase tensions between different social groups. Therefore, tourism management and related tourism infrastructure planning are of great importance in minimizing the effects of potential tourism-related crises. Preventive measures, tourism education, and coordinated actions by emergency services and local governments can contribute to ensuring tourist safety and sustainable development in the Małopolska Province.

The Małopolska Province is characterized by a diverse landscape, ranging from lowlands to mountainous areas, and is rich in unique ecosystems that are an important part of the local natural and cultural heritage. However, the protection of the natural environment in the Małopolska Province faces many threats that can lead to ecosystem degradation, loss of biodiversity, and negative effects on human health. The first threat to environmental protection in the Małopolska Province is environmental pollution. Population growth and intensive industrial and transport development can lead to the release of harmful substances into the atmosphere, surface waters, and soil. This pollution negatively affects the quality of air, water, and soil, which in turn negatively affects human health, quality of life, and ecosystem functioning. Another threat is the degradation of natural ecosystems, especially those in rural and mountainous areas, and the increased consumption of natural resources, particularly water and energy. Overuse of natural resources, deforestation, urbanization, and the expansion of tourist infrastructure can lead to the loss of nature.

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environment and human health, while climate change poses a serious challenge to environmental protection throughout the province. Rising temperatures, changes in precipitation, extreme weather events, and rising sea levels can have serious environmental, economic, and social consequences. The increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and storms can lead to an increased risk of natural disasters and loss of natural resources. Therefore, protecting the natural environment of the Małopolska Province requires coordinated action at the local, regional, and national levels. Preventive measures, investments in sustainable development, public education, and effective environmental protection regulations can help minimize the impact of potential threats to natural and human health. Appropriate adaptation to climate change and the promotion of pro-environmental attitudes are key to maintaining ecological balance and sustainable development in the Małopolska Province.

Summary

In the face of various threats, such as natural disasters, pandemics, or technical incidents, it is important to have an integrated approach to crisis management that takes into account the specific needs of the region. Therefore, this article focuses on identifying the main challenges that pose potential threats to the local community, using the example of the Małopolska Province. It should be emphasized that this article is an introduction to further scientific considerations focused on the analysis of strategies, structures, and actions taken by local authorities and institutions responsible for crisis management in Małopolska.

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