

## Marketing execs soak up Mazuria.

By Peggy Simpson.  
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Hana Formandlova not only had a great tan, but she looked far too relaxed for a regional marketing executive. When she mentioned a Mazurian Lakes kayaking trip the previous weekend, that seemed to explain it. A marketing executive who took time off!

But it turns out she was on a Unilever retreat. Piotr Dreszer, leader of the Unilever "brand activation team for spreads and cooking products," said the kayaking weekend was one of several team-building retreats that had been held.

The one in late July, however, was different and this may explain part of Formandlova's buoyant behavior afterward. A Czech, she has been on the road a good deal since moving to Warsaw as a regional project manager for the company.

Dreszer said product specialists with Unilever have been running marketing "learning forums" four or five times a year. Usually, these are one or two-day sessions "where we share the best practices and major lessons from our successes and failures," he said. "So far, we have had these organized outside of Warsaw."

This retreat focused on the intangibles of team building, skipping any formal discussion of business. The focus was on "being together, enjoying nature, showing our expats some of our beautiful countryside, preparing and sharing food and the campsite as well as simply calming down from a stressful business life," Dreszer said.

The site was the Krutynia River in the Mazurian countryside. For the 20 Unilever staff, many of whom are Dutch, Turkish and Czech, the three-day retreat was their first exposure to the Mazurian lakes.

This fall, a mountain-bike trip is also in the offing, "perhaps in the Swietokrzyskie mountains combined with some sightseeing and visits to consumers' homes and local shops, then sharing our observations and insights about our consumers," Dreszer said.

**Janine R. Wedel**, a U.S. anthropologist, whizzed through Warsaw recently, using it as a stopover between her forays to Russia and back to Washington. In 1998, she made waves with a high-profile book criticizing Western aid to Russia and Eastern Europe. She was particularly damning about the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

USAID folks might beg to differ. But her congressional testimony on the early 1990s "Marriott Brigade" and the barrage of U.S. consultants offering help that Poles didn't necessarily want reflected criticism that forced fundamental changes in the agency.

Since the mid-1990s, for instance, the consultants are required to train the trainers. Not just to consult, but to stay long enough to transfer their skills.

William M. Frej, the last USAID mission director here, said the Poles had soaked up the knowledge and had become independent actors in record time. This occurred in local democracy and economic programs. It also broke the mold for USAID assistance globally, he said, where help can often be spread over decades.

What isn't known is whether USAID or other foreign advisers were responsible for this change or if it was a result of the Poles' own energy, initiative and intensity of desire to compete with the best of the West.

Wedel has just finished updating her "Collision and Collusion" paperback book. But she isn't trying to tackle

that frontier question. And that would seem to be a pretty crucial issue for policy chiefs, as Poland's transition is adopted as a model for many other countries, especially among former Soviet republics and countries in Latin America.

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The IKO school for teaching Polish to foreigners is not only getting more customers, but is also being recognized by foreign language institutions. Malgosia Kujawska, a founding partner of IKO with Dorota Drewnowska, said they have a contract with a British language training company, International Circles, for language training monitored by Brits.

IKO is also working on a London-based project aimed at developing a standardized proficiency test for teaching Polish. A consortium of European universities runs the European Certificate for Attainment in Modern Languages. So far, there are standardized tests that control the teaching and proficiency levels of Swedish, Finnish, French, German and Portuguese.

"The Polish project could become a part of it. We run the Polish part. So we are preparing the test and, once it is ready, we will give a pilot test to those who are interested. It is called the ECL," Kujawska said. Those passing the test would get a certificate from the consortium.

There are many questions still in flux, including the fees. But for IKO, the money-making aspects are only one facet of the challenge. IKO's goal is to market its Polish-immersion teaching techniques, and to develop tests that can grade those language-acquisition skills, Kujawska said, "so that this would be recognized as a standard European test."

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