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## FAN TOURISM AND FAN TOURISTS: DISCUSSION ON DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH ISSUES

**Abstract:** The purpose of the article is to systematize the concepts of fan tourism and fan tourists and an attempt has also been made to identify the profile of a fan tourist. There are certain research gaps in terms of defining the concept itself, therefore the authors have decided to investigate this. Literature analysis and criticism as well as synthesizing ideas were methods used in this work. The article presents the characteristics of fan tourism and a description of a fan tourist using psychological, social and economic criteria identified on the basis of a literature investigation. The following attributes were distinguished: the main motive of activity, emotional involvement, 'extreme' support, commitment to ideas, sympathy towards ideas, personal attendance at an event and the nature of a consumer or a prosumer when a fan tourist participates in an event personally. The concepts of a fan in general, fanatic and sports fan (*kibic*) were used in the process of identifying the characteristics of a fan tourist.

**Keywords:** fan tourism, fan tourist, sports tourism, cultural tourism, fan, fanatic, sports fan.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the subject literature, fan tourism is most often associated with sports tourism (Hinch, Higham, 2001; Mokras-Grabowska, 2016; Stasiak, Włodarczyk, 2015; Włodarczyk, 2016), and Włodarczyk (2016) indicates that fan tourism can be approached as a kind of hybrid combining event and sports tourism. For this reason, it has been assigned a significant role in contemporary tourism, primarily from the perspective of the competitiveness of destinations (Kurek, 2007). This form of tourism is much less frequently analysed in terms of cultural goals e.g. participation in music festivals or concerts of famous artists (Geraghty, 2018; Liszewski, 2016; Williams, 2017). Cited publications often present quite superficial remarks on the essence of fan tourism and a fan tourist, in which the writers consider general motives followed by discussion of a tourist on a trip. Such discussion certainly limits the possibility of a deeper understanding of fan tourism, and the fan tourist him/ herself, and encourages more detailed and interdisciplinary literature research in this respect. It is all the more important as fan tourism can be currently classified as one of tourism's most dynamic forms. This

is confirmed by the rapidly increasing number of fan clubs and followers' groups on social media. For example, the most popular worldwide idols in the area of contemporary culture and sport are on [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com) including the popular music band Pink Floyd followed by 2.7 million, and Beyoncé, the singer, by 141 million. In the world of sport, the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team (12.5 million) and the football player Cristiano Ronaldo (204 million) are very popular on the internet. Not all sports fans follow their idols, however it can be assumed that the vast majority do. Fan tourism represents a developing domain, and the tourism industry increasingly perceives fans as a key market segment (Geraghty, 2018). According to Twitter Internal & Crimson Hexagon (2020) research, fan tourism increased by 39% in the period 2016-2019.

It should also be highlighted that the sports industry is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. In North America the recorded value of the sports industry amounted to \$67.3 billion in 2016, and this figure is expected to reach \$78.5 billion with an annual growth rate of 3.1% (Cho, Joo, Chi, 2019). Within

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the sports industry, research issues preferred in tourism include the behaviour of sports fans and sportsmen and women themselves (Hanks, Zhang, McGinley, 2016; Ramirez-Hurtado, Berbel-Pineda, 2015; Walters, Shipway, Miles, Aldrigui, 2017), sport as a their pastime (Morrison, Misener, Mock, 2020; Theodorakis, Kaplanidou, Karabaxoglou, 2015) and sports management (e.g. Dotson, Clark, Super, Dave, 2013).

Such academic popularity is mainly confirmed by the economic importance of sport for spectators (Cho, Joo, Chi, 2019). Statistics show that each year an increasing number of people attend both cultural and mass sporting events, however, does this reflect fan tourism for sports fans or simply as tourists? Statistics show the total number of those who attend sports or cultural events without a clear division between sports fans and fan tourists, which leads to some controversy. The absence of a fan tourist definition in the literature constitutes a research gap and a reason for undertaking the research presented here.

The purpose of the article is to systematize the concepts of fan tourism and fan tourist. An attempt has also been made to identify the profile of a fan tourist. The intention of the authors is not, however, to settle these debatable issues arbitrarily, but to present their own reflections on the profile of a fan tourist and related issues which could serve as useful material for research, teaching and empirical purposes. Literature analysis and criticism was used in the study and synthesising of ideas found allowed the authors' own characterisation of a fan tourist to be developed.

## 2. A DISCUSSION OF THE TERMS: FAN TOURISM AND FAN TOURIST

The discussion begins with consideration of the essence of fan tourism, its divisions and motives. In the literature, it is most often associated with sports tourism and one of the most popular definitions was proposed by Alejziak (2016), who defines it as a form of tourism covering both the activity and the functioning of various institutions directly related to it as well as the provision of services to those who travel, voluntarily and temporarily rather than for work outside their everyday environment. This is in order to pursue their interests related to sport either by undertaking physical (sports) activity, or by attending sports events as spectators. Distinguishing fan tourism from tourism itself is based on a presentation of motives, and so fan tourism is defined as tourist trips made by those motivated by a willingness to attend sports events as sports fans (Brumm, 2012; Higham, Hinch, 2001; Kurek, 2007; Mokras-Grabowska, 2016; Stasiak, Włodarczyk, 2015; Włodarczyk, 2016).

In addition to the definition of sports tourism, there are also sub-classifications in which fan tourism is one. Among popular systematizations there is the one proposed by Standeven and De Knop (see: Mokras-Grabowska, 2016) where they identified four types of activity undertaken as a part of sports tourism:

- trips to watch sports events (so-called fan tourism);
- trips to visit sports facilities (so-called nostalgic sports tourism);
- trips to participate in sports events as competitors;
- trips to engage in various forms of sporting activity.

Mokras-Grabowska (2016) has adopted a similar standpoint regarding the sub-classification of sports tourism. In turn, Stasiak and Włodarczyk (2015), by introducing the sub-division of fan tourism those who actively participate in sports events and also make tours of the facilities related to their organization. This provoked controversy as the latter form of fan tourism was previously assigned to sports tourism. Fan tourism is approached slightly differently by Liszewski (Liszewski, 2016), who proposes to divide it into sports fan tourism and a more general fan tourism related to motives for participating in music festivals or other mass cultural events. Buczkowska also indicates the cultural aspect of Olympic tourism (considered in the context of participation in great sports events) (Buczkowska, 2008). In the English-language literature, cultural fan tourism is associated with film-induced tourism, film-motivated tourism, teletourism and media tourism (Beeton, 2005; Karpovich, 2010; Williams, 2019). Iwashita (2006) also mentions literature tourism. When describing culture-induced fan tourism, writers frequently refrain from providing a specific definition, but instead describe certain relationships between fans and a given space and its residents, or material objects connected with a particular film, book or character. In order to explain the essence of cultural fan tourism, the authors also use an analogy with traditional city tourism, emphasizing the fact of developing a personal relationship between fans and an urban space, which for them becomes e.g. real and unreal (fictional), imagined or inspiring (Geraghty, 2019), and this is not found among traditional cultural tourists. Geraghty (2014) also describes music-induced fan tourism, which involves following rock music and the practice of collecting souvenir pins produced and sold by the Hard Rock Café.

The literature overview allows a certain synthesis of the main characteristics of fan tourism in order to understand it (Table 1).

Stasiak and Włodarczyk (2015) focus on types of fan tourism activities, but point out that such fans explore the city and its surroundings, get to know the local cuisine and contact other fans. Based on the discussion presented, it can be concluded that fan tourism refers not only to sports tourism but also to cultural tourism. In addition to making tourist trips, writers perceive fan

Table 1. An overview of fan tourism definitions including a specification of their main elements

Author and title of publication	Definition	Main elements of definition
Brumm (2012)	Fan tourism represents one of a quite new type of tourism which is gaining in popularity. It consists in making tourist trips to attend sports events, most often in relation to large ones, e.g. the Olympic Games or World Championships, however fan tourism also refers to smaller events e.g. ski jumping or cycling competitions. Fan tourists' idea is to support their compatriots or favourite sportsmen and women. It is a result of the motives stimulating fan tourists to feel positive emotions or the prestige of being attending an event.	Tourist trips Purpose: sports events of various kinds Motive: attendance at sports events, desire to feel positive emotions, a sense of prestige
Włodarczyk (2016)	Fan tourism is an element of both national heritage and contemporary cultural tourism and consists in learning about national sports. Fan tourism also relates to Olympic tourism due to its nature and contact with both sport and culture.	Main motive: a visit to a sports arena, watching the players competing live and cheering favourite sportsmen and women The chance to attend as many sports events as possible The chance to visit sports stadiums
Williams (2017)	Fans are often involved in research and collecting information related to their form of tourism, trying to archive information, photos and maps of important places and often find more unobvious places. So, while fans often look for other types of knowledge about fan objects (e. g. learning as much as possible about actors or writers from their favourite TV series), so much so they can also get involved in this kind of practice when looking for places to watch films or TV sets.	Fan tourists are the fans perceived as collectors Purpose: collecting, archiving photos, maps and information about idols Their involvement revolves around their interest in traveling to follow artists and cultural artefacts
Geraghty (2018)	Fan tourism is passing through different tourism spaces and making sense of being present, taking photos and appearing as a fan in these spaces. In such cases multiple identities are revealed, fan identities change over time and the memories of geographic landmarks become important fandom markers. The spaces of sports fans are imagined, real and unreal, constructed and natural, challenged and official, absorbed and constructed, creative and hierarchical. They may be known for traditional tourism such as city tours. Typical tourist spaces can become the destinations of fans. What fans do in the field of media tourism contributes to building their identity; it can confirm their existence and make them fans of new media texts.	Passing through tourist spaces Most important role: fan Culture-induced tourist trips

Source: authors' compilation.

tourists as pilgrims. It is worth noting that fan tourists use some kinds of spaces which are not typical of mass tourism. An equally interesting issue is approaching fan tourists as if they are also perceived as sports fans, and this raises controversy in the light of the discussion presented here. It should also be noted that in the subject literature, fan tourism is identified with a passive form of sports tourism, in the sense of attending a sports event. However, the activities undertaken by fan tourists, concerning both tourist sources and tourist destinations, may lead to an active attitude towards such events.

A fan tourist primarily combines elements of a tourist in general with a specific category of spectator – a *fan*. *Fan* distinguishes the type of tourism discussed from those actually interested in it. The PWN dictionary of Polish states that a *fan* is an avid sympathizer of someone or

something (*Fan*, 2020b) which has been functioning in Polish since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and according to Długosz-Kurchabowa (2008) originates from the English word *fanatic*. Włodarczyk (2016) has a different opinion and translates the term *fan* from English as a sports fan (*kibic*). Another (English language) source presents a fan as someone who admires and supports a person, a sports discipline, a sports team, etc., but also as one highly interested in and spending a lot of time watching or reading about artists or sports teams (*Fan*, 2020a). Moreover, the term *fan* is used to refer to or express admiration for a selected book, its author, a cartoon, a film, actors, a director, a TV show, presenters, games or other product of the cultural industry (Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2017). An opportunity to support a favourite sportsman or woman or artist increases the desire for consumption and travel to tourist destinations.

In the era of SARS-CoV2 pandemic, fan tourists spend time on the internet to support their idols. It is also worth paying attention to the fact that fan tourists make virtual trips to events which take place without any audience. An example of such event was the #koncertdlabohaterów [concert for heroes] broadcast on the player.pl platform. The artists' own apartments or houses were their stages, whereas the aim of the event was to support health workers fighting the coronavirus.

Fans gather in groups which is characteristic for young people interested in pop culture, however, according to the source (Jaszewska, 2011), it is not only focused on pop culture. The variety of fan groups is so extensive that fans have a wide spectrum to choose from depending on their preferences. By joining such groups, they enter with a sense of belonging new cultural homelands. Fan communities are characterized by an active consumption of cultural texts, both learning about cultural products and their transformation as well as further replication. They are capable of discussing and transforming lyrics and even creating alternative endings. Fans explore territories that belong to someone else and remain in potential conflict with the original. However, they are extremely active and raise their interests to the rank of art, resulting in expanding experience beyond mere consumption. There is no clear division between the reading and writing of fans and their consumption is interspersed with production (e.g. songs, texts, films, etc.). Reading is an active, intellectually and emotionally engaging activity where fans creatively transform and continuously reinterpret texts (Jaszewska, 2011).

In terms of sociology, fans are defined as a specific category of pop culture recipient, interested in music, movies, TV series or books. How do they stand out? They are characterized by their commitment and multiple reception of cultural artefacts. The object of interest is very often adored and many times over. In the case of music fans, their behaviour revolves around attending concerts and pilgrimages to places associated with their idols. Fans know the works of a particular artist by heart and are also frequently a secondary producer, creating amateur versions based on a beloved work (Siuda, 2010). They often get involved in re-staging specific scenes and take part in thematic tours (Norris, 2016) e.g. to participate in an "imaginary space of action" (Couldry, 2007, p. 143) related to a given film or novel. A specific emotional bond is also developed between a fan and a place where the action of a movie or a novel is held, based on memories and identity. This place can be interpreted differently depending on the fan's knowledge.

It seems that discussion focused on the essence of a fan should include consideration of synonymous terms – a fanatic and a sports fan. A fanatic can be defined in two ways. On the one hand, it is a person who

passionately adheres to an idea or religion, remains extremely intolerant of those who follow other views. On the other, it is a person passionately devoted to certain activities or is persistently someone's admirer (Fanatyk, 2020). Fanaticism is often associated with religion (Poniatowski, 1969), although it is also found in culture and sport, and this is an important issue for this article. When interpreting the arguments by Forest (1991) it can be noticed that fanaticism is also understood as a threat to ideas and values. It happens that fanatics in sport are identified with hooligans and pseudofans (Dudała, 2004) and this means a fanatic is strongly emotionally involved in the object of his/her interest and demonstrates extreme support. A fanatic does not change views and persists strongly committed to the specific idea along, often manifested in aggressive and xenophobic behaviour towards those who have completely different views. A fanatic participates in the most active form, gets involved in rows or fights violating social and legal norms (Dudała, 2004).

In the literature, the term *fan* is associated only with sport which is a very important factor which integrates individuals from various groups, environments and social strata. As indicated by Roche, Spake and Joseph (2013), sports fans travel to attend sports events, watch sport and visit sports attractions. Traveling is an extremely important activity to a sports fan, and is associated with many incentives enhancing participation in sports events. Tourist trips and the desire to spend time with family or friends are listed among the main motives of sports fans (Ryśnik, 2019). The research also shows that the event itself motivates sports fans to travel, more than supporting a team or destination attractiveness. A committed sports fan travels to a world championships venue even when the favourite team has not qualified (Florek, Breitbarth, Conejo, 2008). It is also worth paying attention to the fact that, for example, speedway fans prefer tourist trips as a form of recreation (the main motive of the trip is relaxation) with family or friends (Kondraciuk, 2019). A sense of belonging to a community is created, along with emotional and psychosocial bonds (Siuda, 2010). The feeling of experiencing emotions by sports fans is called the 'contagion effect' and mutual observation, gestures and behaviours leads to the intensification of the emotions experienced. Sports fans put on T-shirts and scarves for a match of a specific team, which has been called *flagging* and means a conscious action aimed at demonstrating unity and the precedence of a given group of sports fans over others (Billig, 2008). A sports fan is emotionally involved in a long-term commitment towards a given club, a player or a discipline. He/she identifies very strongly but this does not rule out interest in other teams, players or clubs. A fan indulges in great passion, and sport is his/her main interest. A modern image of a sports fan shows that such a person regularly attends matches

and all sorts of support activities thus influencing the atmosphere of a sports event. A sports fan identifies with the club and its colours, in particular by wearing a scarf and a club T-shirt (Pikora, 2013). Sports fans follow a division of roles when attending a sports event where group structure is of great importance. Group relationships and the positions of all members differentiate their roles as sports fans. There is a relationship in which if relations between social actors are deeper and the sense of belonging is stronger, the actors are more intensely involved in group activities and care about maintaining the relationship. Sports fan typology distinguishes ultras, hooligans, football fans and pseudofans (Pikora, 2013).

From an economic perspective, sports fans (including fanatics) present in the stands during sports events take on the role of consumers of a product because they have made a purchase, or more precisely, prosumers, i.e. consumers and producers at the same time. It should be highlighted that they co-create an event, at the same time remain a component by organizing and creating both support and the entire setting, resulting in a specific atmosphere and increasing the attractiveness of a sports event as a product that is dedicated to sports fans, sponsors, media and those who watch on TV, on the internet or listen to radio coverage. Sports fans promote a sports event on internet portals where they create communities around a given object of interest. The analysis of the literature in the humanities or sociology shows that sports fans may fall into a kind of fanatical and extreme support for their favourite teams whereas a fan is a peaceful person, refraining from such extremes and primarily focused on an intensive pursuit of his/her interests.

This analysis of the literature has allowed the psychological, social and economic characteristics of sports fans, fans in general and fanatics to be identified (Figure 1). Table 2 presents both objective and subjective criteria.

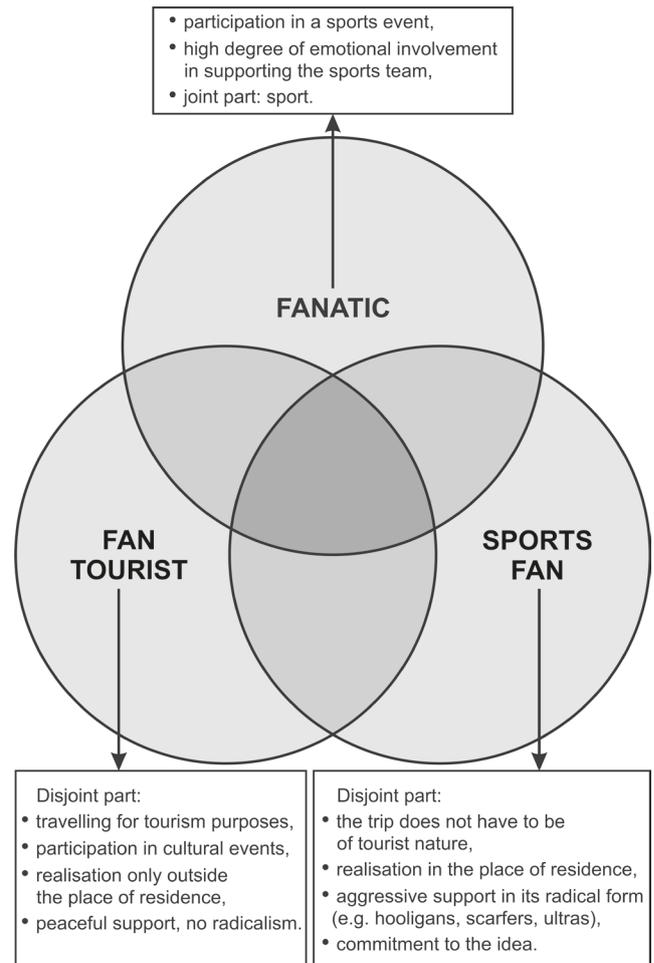


Figure 1. The distinction between a fan tourist, a sports fan and a fanatic  
Source: authors' compilation

Based on these characteristics, it is possible to identify the profile of a fan tourist who meets the criteria of both a tourist (tourist activity outside the place of residence, travelling for tourism purposes, voluntarily) and also a fan. On the one hand, identifying the characteristics of a fan tourist makes the target group of fan tourism

Table 2. The criteria describing a sports fan, a fan and a fanatic

Criterion (psychological, social, economic)	Sports fan	Fan	Fanatic
Main motive of activity	Sport-induced, also relaxation	Sport-induced and culture-induced	Sport-induced, culture-induced (mainly religious)
Emotional involvement	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extreme support	Yes	No	Yes
Commitment to the idea	Yes	No	Yes
Sympathy for an idea	No	Yes	Yes
Personal attendance at an event	Yes /No	Yes	Yes /No
Consumer, and prosumer if personally participating	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participation on social media and establishing an online community	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: authors' compilation.

consumers more specific and, on the other, indicates its independence and facilitates the orientation of tourism service providers to a specific group of recipients.

It might seem that on the basis of the adopted criteria for a fan, fanatic or sports fan, the essence of a fan tourist can also be easily defined. The concept of fan tourism itself however is associated with many doubts related to its definition. As it turns out, on the basis of mainly the Polish literature, fan tourism is primarily approached as a form of sports tourism. It is of a passive nature and consists only in attendance at sports events. However, it is worth paying attention to the essence of the *fan* part and its connotations. If a fan is a person who is interested in the overall phenomenon, then a fan tourist is not just a passive participant of a sports event and does not come down to the passive attitude of a spectator. Fan tourists are active in their usual (everyday) environment where they prepare for a trip, collect symbols of the favourite team, and also takes part in active discussion about favourite sportsmen and women or teams. In the destination area, fan tourists are not only limited to devoting time by being present on the sports stand, but are also able to become emotionally involved and support their favourite team in the form of 'cheering', which makes them active participants in a sports event, taking responsibility for some part of the emotion. When remaining in the area of the destination, fan tourists also identify themselves with the nostalgic sports tourist. Owing to the opportunity to spend time in the sports arena and using its facilities, a fan tourist could see the changing rooms of the favourite team or visit a museum with souvenirs. It should be emphasized that a *fan* is a person who is interested not only in sport, but also in the wider culture, i.e. film, books, music or other cultural artefacts which determines his/her passion and tourist activity. A *cultural fan* tourist can go on a trip to a cultural event on the same terms as a sports fan tourist. There is no doubt that emotional involvement in culture can be on the same level as emotional involvement in sport.

### 3. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, a fan tourist is most often associated with a sports tourist. Fan tourism is also related to event tourism and cultural tourism. In this article, the phenomenon of fan tourism is presented in a broader perspective than just a sport oriented one. It is also worth considering cultural fan tourism and the significance of cultural events. Further doubts and questions related to fan tourism arise which in turn exert an impact on other research issues related to estimating the number of fan tourists participating in mass events as well as their expenditure.

As a result of the discussion, it can be concluded that a fan tourist is characterised by the following features:

- travels for tourism purposes voluntarily;
- attends cultural and/or sports events;
- is motivated by the desire to learn about cultural and sports facilities;
- only undertaken outside the place of residence;
- remains strongly emotionally involved;
- does not show extreme support;
- is sympathetic to the idea;
- is not committed to the idea;
- is interested in culture;
- is simultaneously a consumer and a prosumer when taking part in the events personally;
- participates on social media and establishes communities on the internet.

In their research efforts to understand the phenomenon of fan tourism, the authors take into account its nature and its interdisciplinary correlations. Therefore, their future research will be focused on a more extensive description of fan tourism, both in terms of its definition and its connections with psychological, sociological and economic issues. Future research should address the identification of socio-demographic and economic characteristics of fan tourism, divided into sports and culture, which will have cognitive but also practical significance for tourism, sports, the film industry and agencies dealing with e.g. sponsorship, product placement in films, social media, sports broadcasts and stadiums. The identification of a fan tourist may be useful for the purposes of future, in-depth research on the level of expenditure and factors influencing the scale and nature of a fan tourist's consumption.

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