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90-142 Lodz, 31 Kopcińskiego St.
tel. +48 42 635 63 05, fax +48 42 635 45 50
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CONTENTS

Dr Robert Wiluś (1962–2020)	7
Articles	
VICKY KATSONI, ANNA FYTA – From Pausanias to Baedeker and Trip Advisor: Textual proto-tourism and the engendering of tourism distribution channels	11
SONIA MILEVA, MARIANA ASSENOVA, EMIL PETROV, VENETA GYAUROVA – The potential of location-based gamification apps for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination	21
IRYNA MANCZAK, MARIA BAJAK – Tourist mobile applications: Evaluation of the VisitMalopolska app	29
VASYL KYFYAK, OLEXANDER KYFYAK – A cluster approach to the formation of tourism destinations in Western Ukrainian cross-border regions	39
OLIMJON SAIDMAMATOV, UMIDJON MATYAKUBOV, ELBEK KHODJANIYAZOV, JONATHON DAY, ERGASH IBADULLAEV, SANAT CHUPONOV, DILMURAD BEKJANOV, MURODJON MATNIYOZOV, BUNYOD MATYUSUPOV – TOWS analysis for sustainable ecotourism development and state support during the pandemic: The Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan	47
ALIAKSANDR CYARGEENKA – Changes in cross-border tourist traffic on the Poland–Belarus border, as exemplified by the Augustów Canal	57
NATALIA OLESZCZYK, NATALIA DOMINIAK – An analysis of health tourism: The example of Kołobrzeg	69
GRZEGORZ GODLEWSKI – Perception of innovation in tourism with regard to controversial types of travel: A study of Polish consumers	79
Notes	
PINAZ TIWARI, NIMIT CHOWDHARY – Has COVID-19 brought a temporary halt to overtourism?	89



DR ROBERT WILUŚ (1962–2020)



Robert Maciej Wiluś was born on 13th April 1962, in Wieluń where he attended Elementary School no. 4 and Tadeusz Kościuszko Liceum. In his home town, he was engaged in scouting and learnt to play different instruments at the community music centre. A passion for music accompanied him throughout his life and he enjoyed playing the accordion or guitar at different events and during trips. While at liceum and later, he developed his interests in geography, travel, tourism and photography. In the early 1980s, he studied geography at the Biology and Earth Sciences Department, University of Łódź and in 1986, he took his Master's degree in geography, specializing in the field of tourism. The MA thesis he defended was entitled *The impact of recreational tourism on the urbanization of Jastrzębia Góra* (supervised by Prof. Liszewski). After graduating, he was employed as an assistant lecturer at the Faculty

of Urban Geography and Tourism. In 1996, he was awarded a PhD degree in Earth Sciences in the field of Geography, for his thesis entitled *The development of the tourist function in the Warta valley between Działoszyn and Uniejów* (supervised by Prof. Liszewski). Following this, he worked as a lecturer and later senior lecturer at the Faculty of Urban Geography and Tourism (in 2007 renamed as the Tourism Geography Section at the Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism). His post-doctoral thesis, *Rivers and their valleys as tourist areas*, remained unfinished.

Even though Dr Robert Wiluś spent most of his adult life in Łódź, he was strongly attached to his 'little homeland' – the Wieluń area – and particularly to his home town of Wieluń. He was engaged in various regional endeavours and projects, such as the Amber Trail. He died on 21st April 2020, in Łódź.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Dr Robert Wiluś was author or co-author of over 70 academic and popular academic publications. His research interests were focused on a wide range of tourism geography issues covering three main themes: spatial analyses of tourist movements (Wiluś, 1991b, 1995, 2003b, 2003c), tourism space (especially in central Poland) (Dziegieć, Wiluś, 2001; Liszewski, Wiluś, 2010; Wiluś, 1988) and river valleys as tourist activity areas (Wiluś, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2007a, 2008, 2009, 2010).

From 1992 to 2018, Dr Robert Wiluś was the academic secretary of the "Field seminar: Tourism Geography Workshops" in Poland. As a result, he became widely recognized and valued among Polish geographers and tourism specialists. In 2000-2018, he was a representative on the Institute of Urban Geography and Tourism of ATLAS (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education and Research) and took part in numerous academic conferences held by this association, e.g. Naples (2004), Barcelona (2005), Viana do Castelo (2007) and Brighton (2008). In 2006, when the annual ATLAS conference was organized in Łódź ("The Transformation of Tourism Space"), he was the Chair of the Organizational Committee, as well as its academic secretary.

DIDACTIC ACTIVITY

In his 32-year-long teaching career, Dr Wiluś worked not only at the Geographical Sciences Department, University of Łódź (to 2001, the Biology and Earth Sciences Dept.), but also at its branch in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, a satellite university centre in Sieradz, and the Postgraduate Tourism Studies section. In the opinion of his superiors and students, he always conducted classes conscientiously and with passion, which was confirmed by the multiple awards that he received in annual votes for the best academic teacher at the Geographical Sciences Department.

What was very noticeable in Dr Robert Wiluś' didactic career, was the wide range of subjects he taught. In the beginning, he taught them as part of the tourism and hospitality specialization, and then on the Tourism and Recreation course. The classes concerned cultural tourism, work as a courier and a guide, organizing and providing services during tourist events, customer care, spatial planning and development of recreation areas, quality management in tourism, tourist information and promotion, regional geography of Europe and the world, and the tourism geography of Poland and Croatia.

An important part of his classes with students was field practice. He went on the first trip of this type to Krynica in 1990. Later, he was the supervisor of

specialization practical work in the Silesian Beskids and in central Poland (in 1996 renamed as Łódź region). Every year, he suggested the location, the itinerary and was the "guardian" of the journey with the principal theme being the tourist regions of Europe. Starting in the 1995/1996 academic year, he led students to Austria, Croatia and Hungary several times, as well as Slovenia, Romania, Lithuania, the Netherlands, the north and south of Italy and Prague the capital of the Czech Republic.

From 1989, Robert Wiluś was involved in international education. He organized visits to Łódź for students and academics from the Tbilisi University (Georgia) and oversaw them. He led tours of Łódź for the participants of the International Students' Congress, took care of students from the University of Westminster, and accompanied students of tourism and recreation on study trips to St Petersburg in Russia. He also took care of Russian students visiting Łódź.

In 2004, under the Erasmus program, he visited the University of Eastern Finland, in Savonlinna, where he conducted classes with students. In Poland, he taught different subjects in English to Socrates and Erasmus students. With foreign students studying in Łódź in mind, he wrote *The Natural history of Poland*, a chapter of the course book entitled *Poland: History, culture and society* (Wiluś, 2003a, 2007b, 2015).

Dr Robert Wiluś supervised the writing of 129 BA and 26 MA theses. He performed different didactic functions at the University of Łódź, such as examiner at the entrance exams, syllabus council secretary and extramural MA studies coordinator.

AN ORGANIZER AND A POPULARIZER

Next to research and academic teaching, Dr Robert Wiluś was a keen organizer as well. We should mention here his participation in the work of many national and international organizations. He was particularly strongly attached to the Polish Geographical Association of which he was a member from 1986; he held the position of the Łódź division secretary (1993-1995 and 2005-2017), as well as being a member of the Audit Committee (2017-2020). He was also engaged in the work of the Tourism Geography Commission where he was secretary (1996-2016).

Robert Wiluś actively co-operated with international organizations, e.g. with the abovementioned ATLAS association and the European Leisure and Recreation Association (ELRA). He frequently led tours of Łódź and Poland for foreign guests who were visiting the university for conferences, seminars or congresses. During the Regional Congress of the International Geographical Union held in Kraków in 2014, he was

the organizer and co-author of a presentation entitled *The study of tourism space in Poland: the example of Central Poland* (Krakowiak, Latosińska, Liszewski, Makowska-Iskierka, Wiluś, Wojciechowska, Włodarczyk, 2014) and prepared a field trip for the conference participants.

As regards Dr Wiluś' organizational activity, it is worth noting that for several years, he held the position of chair of the examination board for tourism couriers at the Łódź Province Marshall's Office. To perform his duties well, he used his profound geographical knowledge, professional experience and broad contacts with representatives of the tourism business. One of the outcomes of that activity was a publication entitled *Tour Guiding*, prepared together with Andrzej Stasiak which included tests and examination questions (Stasiak, Wiluś, 2004, 2007) and was used by candidates for couriers in the whole country.

He frequently took part in the meetings of the Tour Guiding Forum (*Forum Pilotażu i Przewodnictwa*) integrating couriers, tourist guides, representatives of travel agencies, tourism organizations and employees of Marshall's Offices, and participated enthusiastically in discussions about the Polish system of educating tourist guides and couriers, and their examining procedures and licensing, contributing his valuable opinions (Stasiak, Wiluś, 2010).

Privately, Robert Wiluś loved walking in mountains both high (the Himalayas, the Andes) and lower (the Carpathians, the Sudetens). He took part in several large geographical expeditions, e.g. to Nepal (2000), Ecuador and Peru (2001), as well as Chile and Argentina (2009), and was the author of photographic exhibitions presenting the places he had visited. As a keen traveller, he liked attending events devoted to expeditions to remote parts of the world and listening to accounts of journeys and stories told by other 'globetrotters'. Several times, he visited the 'Explorers Festival' of travel, adventure and extreme sports, held in Łódź. He gave presentations and lectures about icebergs in Patagonia as a part of the 'Grand Geography Lesson' (an event accompanying the festival organized for older secondary school students). His interest in mountains and his urge to spend his free time in an active way materialized in the form of frequent trips with students and members of Tourism Geography Students' Study Group, "Vagabonds". It was with them that he walked on mountain trails in the Beskids and Sudetens, sometimes several times a year, shared his geographical knowledge, provoking their curiosity of the world, and singing and playing the guitar making their stays at hostels even more pleasant. Evenings spent together in front of the fire or by a bonfire, strengthened the bonds between the teacher and his students.

In recognition of his research, didactic, organizational and popularizing activity, Dr Robert Wiluś was awarded the Gold Medal for Long Service, the Medal of

the National Education Commission, the 'Gold Badge' of the University of Łódź, and the 'Gold Badge' and Jubilee Medal of the Polish Geographical Association.

We have lost a friend, co-worker, teacher and colleague, a researcher and a good and open-hearted person. Dr Robert Wiluś was a true friend to young people, and his passion for teaching and organizing student trips will long be remembered by many graduates.

Friends and Colleagues

*From the Institute of Urban Geography, Tourism
and Geoinformation
Geographical Sciences Department, University of Łódź*

THE MOST IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS BY DR ROBERT WILUŚ

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FROM PAUSANIAS TO BAEDEKER AND TRIP ADVISOR: TEXTUAL PROTO-TOURISM AND THE ENGENDERING OF TOURISM DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

Vicky Katsoni^a , Anna Fyta^b

^a University of West Attica, Department of Tourism Management; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4808-9564>; e-mail: katsoniv@uniwa.gr

^b Athens College, English Department; e-mail: annafyta@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The key aim of this article is to provide an interdisciplinary look at tourism and its diachronic textual threads bequeathed by the ‘proto-tourist’ texts of the Greek travel author Pausanias. Using the periegetic, travel texts from his voluminous Description of Greece (2nd century CE) as a springboard for our presentation, we intend to show how the textual strategies employed by Pausanias have been received and still remain at the core of contemporary series of travel guides first authored by Karl Baedeker (in the 19th century). After Baedeker, Pausanias’ textual travel tropes, as we will show, still inform the epistemology of modern-day tourism; the interaction of travel texts with travel information and distribution channels produces generic hybrids, and the ancient Greek travel authors have paved the way for the construction of networks, digital storytelling and global tourist platforms.

KEYWORDS

digital storytelling, Pausanias, proto-tourism, travel narrative, travel guides

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I hate travelling and explorers. Yet here I am proposing to tell the story of my expeditions”, wrote L. Strauss, the eminent young anthropologist and scholar, arguably the ‘most famous academic’ of his time in his melancholic 1936 travelogue *Tristes Tropiques* (McSweeney, 2015). A few millennia before him, Hesiod, the first Greek to tell us about myths, gods and mortals in his *Theogony* and *Works and days*, admits that he also hated travelling adding that sometimes it is a necessary evil but he avoids it if he can. Homer does not self-disclose; instead, he creates the archetypal human traveler Odysseus, and while the *Iliad* is not about Odysseus’ Travels, it is the first extant work to provide the seeds of cultural topography in its catalogue of the Greek fleet at the port of Aulis that kept Troy under siege for 10 years.

Travel narratives and organized travel are by no means novel. Authors like Thucydides and Herodotus wrote their works of history but their texts are enriched with their own observations, including supplementary information and sources on geographical sites, people, their religions, customs and traditions. It is the same with Xenophon’s military autobiography *Anabasis* (circa 370 BCE), by many considered to be the oldest periegetic text (Hutton, 2005), though Maria Pretzler claims that the first extant traveler’s report is the fictional *Arimaspeia* of Aristeas of Prokonnesos, an epic poem probably written in the early 6th century BCE (2011). Frequently, these authors cannot restrain themselves from providing unhistorical details. Consider for instance Herodotus, in whose *Historiae* (440 BCE), he informs us that the women of Adurmachidae, a tribe living at the borders between Libya and Egypt:

wear a bangle on each chin made of bronze. They let the hair on their head grow long, and when a woman catches lice she bites them in retaliation and then throws them away. These are the only Libyans who do this (Redfield, 1985, pp. 97–98).

Herodotus writes like a tourist, thinking out loud, in shock and, most likely, slightly disgusted or amused at the sight of open warfare against insects. His remarks accentuate the notion of ‘heterotopicality’, a term Lisa Lowe uses in her study *Critical terrains: French and British orientalisms* (1991) to describe the innate heterogeneities and non-correspondence between cultures. And yet Herodotus’ excerpt contains the generic seeds of modern-day tourist-writing: anecdotal narration, description, acerbic humor, first person-testimonial, sensationalism and concealed authorial commentary on the ‘otherness’ of a tribe. The term ‘periegesis’ (gr. *periegesis*) and periegetic writing or, in other words, a compilation of writings the result of travel observations ‘around’ a geographical region as ‘peri’, the prefix of the Greek term suggests, must wait for nearly seven centuries until it acquires its current meaning.

With Pausanias, a Greek born in Lydia approximately in 140 CE, and his voluminous *Periegesis* or *Description of Greece*, travel writing, now an independent genre, seeks to engage its readership in the recounting of travel experience. As a multifarious, multi-generic narrative, it offers careful observation of physical surroundings, research, secondary source consultation, and record-keeping of archeological, historical, political, cultural and religious information. Stressing the importance of Pausanias’ text and its multiple perspectives, William Hutton, (2005, p. 3) writes that in this travelogue, we may also encounter “explanations of the myths he relates, verifications or debunkings of his historical accounts, and detailed correlations of his descriptions with the latest archaeological finds”.

The aim of this collaborative article is not to tackle nor delineate the controversies surrounding the generic identity of Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*. Instead, it will attempt to generate and encourage the debate centering around the interdisciplinary links between travel literature and the epistemology of contemporary tourism. We will illustrate how a clear-cut textual lineage connects what we have come to understand as travel authorship, travel writing, tourist and tourism. Additionally, we would like to introduce the term ‘proto-tourism’ with Pausanias as its key founder and proponent. In his proto-tourist text *Description of Greece*, Pausanias paves the way for the industry of tourism, first by spelling out the need to organize a common, practical code for travelers and then forecasting the notion of tourism as much more than an educated periegete’s artistic and cultural experience.

2. THEORETICAL PREMISES

Ancient civilizations such as the Greek had deeply rooted convictions with regards to social tourism, entertainment and recreation. Quoting El-Harami (2015, p. 168):

The Greek belief system in that setting aside time to enjoy music, art and other activities performed during leisure time is a critical aspect of living *a good life* and is physically and spiritually thought to be a key to happiness has a major influence on today’s concepts.

Travel writing engages an author in making sense of experience and negotiating ‘new identities’ (Roberson, 2007) while she/he simultaneously strives to understand the self as much as the foreign (Schulz-Forberg, 2005). Bruner (2002, p. 64) writes that “talking about oneself is like making up a story about who we are and what we are, what has happened, and why we are doing it”.

Story telling is principally a ‘post-consumption’ activity: people create stories to organize their experiences (Bosangit, McCabe, Hibbert, 2009; Escalas, 2004), communicate with others (McCabe, Foster, 2006), relay memories of events and activities as well as their significance in terms of identity (Moscardo, 2010), and shape memories and impressions of events over time (McGregor, Holmes, 1999). Consequently, storytelling helps in understanding tourism experiences and as Woodside, Cruickshank & Dehuang, (2007, p. 172) argue, “stories can be considered an emic, that is, from a native’s point of view, interpretation of how, why, when and where events unfold, with what immediate and long term-consequences”. Stories also contain relational structures and temporal dimensions, which enable the creation of factors of meaning (Escalas, 2004).

If travel narratives are fundamental in the construction of tourism experiences (McCabe, Foster, 2006), and vice versa, then tourist experiences are also narrative resources used to perform and (re)establish identity and a natural mode through which human beings make sense of their lives (McAdams, 1996). Talking about experiences can include talk about social worlds, sometimes achieving iconic status in everyday life; communicated through stories into lived identities (McCabe, Foster, 2006).

Travel narratives are not only reflect on travel experiences but also on the self. Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner (2010) argue that although touristic autobiographical narratives are constrained by the spatial and temporal limitations of tourism experience, they incorporate selective memories and experiences from our everyday lives. Thus, a narrative is crucial for exploration and understanding of how meanings have been constructed and used across the totality of human experience, including tourism experience.

Travel writing and fictional narratives often display a figural common ground defined by the unexplored physical plane and the uncharted spaces of language (Kelley, 2015). Both are boundary crossers and that is why, generically, they are often conflated. A travelogue may be sold under fiction, non-fiction, history, archaeology, travel, autobiography or glossary. For example, the Greek version of J. Lacarrière's classic personal memoir *Promenades dans la Grèce antique* (the Greek title reads "In the Footsteps of Pausanias"!) is sold under the History/ Historiography section of a central Athenian bookstore. Lacarrière consciously records his own emotional and spiritual experiences by retracing Pausanias' routes and destinations, but the publisher decided his text would sell more as historiography instead of tourism and travel.

3. TRAVEL NARRATIVES BEFORE E-TOURISM

Travel writing as a systematic continuous narrative has often been attributed to Herodotus whose *Historiae* (5th century BCE) exploit military expeditions to create a mixture of fact and fiction, truth and speculation, interspersed with anthropological observations. Most importantly, his *Histories* are frequently viewed as an ethnographic account of 'otherness', drawing from comparisons between cultures and the peoples of the lands visited. Like Pausanias, Herodotus insists on 'autopsy', the act of seeing for oneself (Youngs, 2013), and like Xenophon his method initiates the traveler into a reconstruction of preconceived ideas which would ultimately facilitate or induce a redefinition of personal identity. The case of Pausanias and his travelogues, however, steps beyond the historical method of these eminent Greeks and requires further investigation for his contribution to tourism as we perceive it in our time.

Pausanias' much overlooked *Description of Greece* evidently 'defies simple definitions' as it bears links to the fields of "classical archaeology, ancient history and classics ...[and] has the potential to become a crucial source for studies of the reception of art, history, comparative literature (particularly travel literature)" (Pretzler, 2011, p. IX). It is not coincidental that during the first half of the 20th century Pausanias and travel writing were no longer seen as ancillary forms of writing among modernist literary authors such as V. Woolf, E.M. Forster, T.S. Eliot and H.D. (pen name for the American high modernist author and poet H.Doolittle). The latter travelled to Greece twice during the early 1920's and in her *Notes on Euripides, Pausanias and Greek Lyric Poets* (1919), devoted five essays to an appreciation of Pausanias, his *Description of Greece*, and the literary merits of his writing for the poet and author. For

H.D., Pausanias, "a country surveyor of travelers", is admirable for his "colossal impersonality", most evident in his reserved stance when talking about some ancient mystery or half-obsolete deity (H.D., 1919, pp. 2-3). Scottish anthropologist J.G. Frazer's *The golden bough: A study in comparative religion* (1890), with its claims that savagery underlies the texture of British society on a par with pagan or primitive myths, informs the travel-related writings of these modernist authors as well as their own travel narratives. Erudition displays, multiple perspectives, varied sources and impersonal authoritativeness seem to lie at the heart of travel writing and at the heart of modernism with its experiments and explorations into formal instability and generic renewal. Pausanias seems to possess these very traits in his modern travelogues and these lend their method to modern travel texts.

Three terms or key features bequeathed to us from Pausanias and his predecessors seem to occupy the epicenter of travel discourse in his proto-tourism narratives: writing what is 'travel-worthy' necessarily entails the notion of selectivity and a dialogical process in which the author-reader pair shares what Pretzler identifies as *autopsia*, *logoi* and *theoremata*. Pausanias adopts all three methodological tools in the first book of his travelogue, outlining the grounds for travel writing and forecasting the needs of the future tourist. The style is "simple and unpretentious" (Pausanias, 1992, 3.16.10) the translator writes characteristically in his preface to the Loeb Edition. Pausanias himself explicitly declares the aim of his travelogue and paves the way for what has now been termed as 'travel noteworthy':

Such in my opinion are the most famous legends (*logoi*) and sights (*theoremata*) among the Athenians, and from the beginning my narrative have selected from much materials that deserve to be recorded (*autopsia*) (Pausanias, 1992, 1.39.3).

If the author attempts to make sense of his travel experience then, necessarily, the inside and the outside formulate inseparable parts of the travel discourse. The *logoi*, according to Pretzler, involve the process of documentation. Accounts of myth, history, and narratives or comparisons of the history of archaeological and other sites are part of the interpretation or what Pausanias defines as "all things Greek" (Pausanias, 1992, 3.16.10). The *theoremata* however, from the Greek verb *theo*, on the one hand suggest the physical act of seeing, then identifying the physical sites and providing visual details for various purposes; on the other, *theo* in Greek also involves the conversion of the visual aspect of the travel experience into a written 'theory'. In other words, travel documentation entails the concretization of a real, or imaginary, experience into text.

In the 19th century, K. Baedeker, the German travel writer and philhellene, becomes one of the first contemporary travel authors after Pausanias who painstakingly records his own travel experiences in *The Traveler's Handbook to Greece* about the Greece of his own time responding to the increased demand for travel and information in the gradually emerging tourism there. In this volume, Baedeker embarks on a dialogue with his eminent Greek predecessor. Baedeker's guides include his travels to other countries while presaging the *Blue Guides* published in 1918 by the Scottish Muirhead brothers. Not coincidentally, the two brothers for more than two decades had acted as the English-language editors of the German *Baedeker* series.

Pausanias' exegetic combination of *logoi* and *theoremata* dictates to Baedeker the notion of selectivity, the end goal of the periegetic traveler. In the preface to the second edition of the *Handbook for Greece* dated 1894 he writes:

[My aim – author's note] is to supply the traveler with the most necessary information regarding the history and culture of the people he is about to visit, to render him as independent as possible of the services of couriers, guides and commissionaires, to protect him against extortion, and in every way to aid him in deriving enjoyment and instruction from his tour in one of the most profoundly interesting countries in the world (Baedeker, 1894, p. V).

Baedeker has interpreted Pausanias quite accurately; first he encapsulates his notion of selectivity within three words, 'most necessary information'; then the use of the adjective 'independent' empowers the prospective visitor traveling in an unknown, potentially hostile environment. The triangulation between writer-authority, text-information and reader/seeker becomes both an intellectual and visceral bond promising an ostensible, if not paradoxical sense of freedom within several prescribed choices. Of course, Baedeker and Pausanias have in mind an audience of mostly antiquarian travelers in pursuit of spiritual enjoyment through cultural 'instruction' but is not instruction also a warrant for the success of a travel destination?

For Baedeker, whose travel guide refers to Pausanias 102 times, the Pausanian *logoi*, the accompanying, descriptive and informative segments of the guide follow almost faithfully the pattern of the *Periegesis*, offering lengthy accounts of the history of the Greek Art while providing pertinent textual allusions to the German art historian J. Winckelmann's seminal *History of Ancient Art*. Baedeker reviews it in brief stating that it is 'no longer a final authority' (Baedeker, 1894, p. LXIV); he then includes comments on H. Lodge's translation of Winckelmann. In the manner of the eminent aesthete W. Pater, he offers reflections on the essence of Greek art such as "Truth and beauty of form were attained by practice in masculine, although somewhat

hard and sharply marked outlines" (Baedeker, 1894, p. LXV), and makes fleeting references to Plato and his theory of forms: "there is no form capable of expressing the highest" (Baedeker, 1894, p. LXVI). Baedeker's most innovative contribution to the dialectic of the Pausanian *logoi* is perhaps his commentary on the fictionalization of travel textuality. Pausanias and Homer must explain themselves about Aulis and the gathering of the Greek fleet:

The thousand vessels mentioned in the catalogue of the ships in the *Iliad* could not, of course, have been all afloat at one time in the bay; we must, therefore think of them as drawn up on the shore according to the ancient custom, at the same time allowing something for the exaggeration of later time, when the desire arose to have any town of any importance whatever mentioned in the Homeric poems (Baedeker, 1894, p. 184).

Baedeker's inclusion of Pausanian *theoremata* in his own *Handbook* display both his erudition as well as a constructive appropriation of Pausanias' travel tropologies. Baedeker's travelogues/ guides introduce for the first-time key concepts which Cohen's comprehensive list defines as the five modes of tourism: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental and existential (Cohen, 1979). The final three modes more specifically reflect modern travel quests and they pre-date modern day alternative forms of tourism involving the concept of authenticity via the sampling of others' authentic lives as is the case of a traveler's undertaking of a life-changing pilgrimage.

In like manner, Baedeker provides a detailed tour of important sites including, possibly for the first time, fold-out maps. As well, the guide offers information on museum exhibits, introduces visual topography, lists of names in English, and, on occasion, employs relevant German and Greek terms. The itineraries in the *Handbook* are marked by miles and the time needed to move from place to place: "A visit to the ruins [of Delphi – author's note] requires five hours [from Itea – author's note]. Following the description of Pausanias, we begin our pilgrimage" (Baedeker, 1894, p. 154). Pausanias performs the role of shadow tour guide offering recommendations and an old narrative subject to revision and reinterpretation. Site or area visits are accompanied by brief yet blunt language regarding issues of a more practical nature such as food and hotels. In Thebes for instance, "the accommodation is very indifferent, the least objectionable quarters being at the *Xenodocheion Boiotia* kept by Drakos. The only tolerable eating house is the *Dimitra* kept by Belos" (Baedeker, 1894, p. 176). The guide introduces a basic dictionary/ glossary of words and expressions in Greek to help the traveler get by in everyday interactions. Baedeker's sociocultural commentary with qualifying adjectives such as 'tolerable' and 'objectionable' intended to rate the travel experience, including some

details of financial transactions, pre-dates the series of printed guides that heralded the 20th century and the induction of the consumer/traveler into the concept of mass tourism.

The end of the 19th century witnesses the birth of a lucrative market stemming from the emerging tourist industry. This market needs to enrich the prospective traveler's experience with testimonials, often written by eminent authors who 'authenticate' travel as a form of both shared and individual discovery. For instance, H.M. Stanley's *In darkest Africa* (1890) sold 150,000 copies within the first two weeks of its publication and was translated into five languages. Stanley's historiographical travel narrative records the expedition of King Leopold II of Belgium who had hoped to acquire the Sudan. Tourists can now become storytellers, writers of introspective accounts of their own experiences and feelings (Pace, 2008) and as McCabe & Foster (2006) argue, tourists can acquire a *narrativistic* attitude. They communicate their travel memories, their visits to different places and meetings with different peoples through stories and representations of their lived experiences in a thematically and temporally-related sequence. Pausanias and Baedeker have offered their shared experience to the modern-day tourist. The foundations of the tourist industry have been placed.

4. TRAVEL WRITING AND FICTIONAL NARRATIVES IN THE E-TOURISM ERA

Tourist information and distribution may be implemented through many different channels, that is, paths by which tourism stakeholders carry out the communication, information and sales of their products and services. To varying degrees, all tourism product suppliers depend on these channels for the distribution of their products. Before the 1970's, under traditional distribution, tourist stakeholders relied heavily on intermediaries such as travel agencies, guidebooks, magazines and pamphlets, word of mouth etc.

Nevertheless, in our time, a plethora of studies confirms that the internet is the most important distribution channel in tourism, initiating an electronic era (e-tourism) where it is "constantly redefining itself and requires continual reorientation in marketing and management along the way" (Katsoni, 2016, p. 21). The internet, together with the new interactive means of communication provided by online booking tools, such as online travel agents, last-minute inventory distribution and flash-sale websites, virtual tourist communities, social media and mobile devices, has fundamentally changed travel and marketing, since all tourism stakeholders are now enabled to enhance their

experiences together (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, O'Leary, 2006; Neuhofer, Buhalis, Ladkin, 2014).

The application of information and communication technologies in tourism, can support consumer involvement and experience co-creation in several different ways. For instance, by giving and sharing information regarding points of interest to be visited, accommodation, sales, details about a specific location, etc (Gretzel, Jamal, 2009; Neuhofer, Buhalis, Ladkin, 2014; Sabou, Nistoreanu, Vlad, 2014; Tussyadiah, Fesenmaier, 2016).

After Pausanias and Baedeker, the use of storytelling still offers the 'thick' experiential aspects of a trip (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, O'Leary, 2006; Mattila, Enz, 2002). Digital storytelling combines the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia such as digital graphics, text, recorded audio narration, music and video (Robin, 2008). Digital storytelling as a narratological strategy involves "telling personal stories through digital forms, storing and exchanging those stories in sites and networks that would not exist without the world wide web and which, because of the remediation capacity of digital media, have multiple possibilities for transmission" (Couldry, 2008). Storytelling, one of the most powerful ways to breathe life into tourism business, is often called one of the main components of a content marketing approach. By giving the products and services an identity and by capturing and sharing the stories, tourism destinations can take their target audience on a journey they yearn to encounter and enhance the reputation of the attractions (Bassano et al., 2019; Wu, 2006).

It has been found that when tourists are highly influenced by digital storytelling, they become engaged in this digital process and are also encouraged to share their travel experiences through digital media (Bassano et al., 2019; Hassan, 2016; Klimmt, Roth, Vermeulen, Vorderer, Roth, 2012; Wu, 2006). To form a personal connection with each tourism destination or tourism business, the consumer needs to register these digital stories as authentic, creative and inspirational and, as a result, be open to create strong emotional bonds with the given destination. In the era of e-tourism, online travel agencies such as booking.com, online reviews published on specialized websites such as TripAdvisor.com, destination marketing organizations and various social media, incorporate the narrative and interactive nature of first-person stories as a feature of their websites.

Travel blogs, a popular hybrid form of online writing constitute one of the best examples of a modern narrative form of travel writing and are a digital version of word-of-mouth communication and storytelling (Jeuring, Peters, 2013; Pudliner, 2007). According to Carù & Cova (2008, p. 168), bloggers are "self-reflexive individuals who tell their stories and explain their actions using

their own words, which are useful in understanding the hedonic and subjective dimensions of experience"; a blog is not just a reportage about places, people and culture, it is also about the self and the author's world, a means of expressing oneself and sharing positive and negative travel experiences (Schmallegger, Carson, 2008) or how they see others (Bohls, Duncan, 2005). Travel blogs can be considered as expressions of travel consumption (Bosangit, Hibbert, McCabe, 2015) where tourists share experiences, moods and feelings (Volo, 2010). Blogs rely to a great extent on the orality of the narrative, that is the eye-witness perspective of the blogger and the half-journalistic aspiration of the author as an objective voice of professional expertise suffused with a more intimate, confessional tone. Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier (2016) inform us of the emergence of the digital writer as a personal character, either in blogs or social media, in online reviews etc.

The blogger redefines the notion of tourist identity and allows blog readers to access a picture of lived identities, created through actions, attitudes and values, forming a key marketing element called characterization. Space categorization is another key element presenting the evaluation and result of the narrative sequences, allowing blog readers to have a cognitive construction of hypothetical travel scenarios, including rehearsals of likely future travels. Their analysis concludes with two additional key marketing elements, that is the overall product and experience evaluation.

Research on digital storytelling tends to focus on key concepts such as aesthetic attractiveness, consumer-oriented content, narration, configuration and self-reference (Bonacini, Tanasi, Trapani, 2018; Robin, 2008). According to Lavie & Tractinsky (2004, p. 272): "Perceived aesthetics is the perception of people, nature, or artefacts with an artistically beautiful or pleasing appearance". Narrative structure has elements of temporality and chronology (beginning, middle and end) and causality in relationships (Delgadillo, Escalas, 2004), the latter influencing the reader's emotional reaction as a result of the order in which the reader encounters them (Escalas, Stern, 2003). Self-reference refers to "audiences' past experiences or memories that can strike an emotional chord" (Hsiao, Lu, Lan, 2013, p. 174).

Thus, the tourist experience is (re)presented, (re)produced, and (re)created through narrative in all traditional and digital distribution channels (Woodside, 2010) while tourists use them to interpret the world around them not only to create meaning and encourage their imagination (Escalas, 2004), but also for judgments of other people, objects or events (Schank, Abelson, 1995) and for an understanding of the self (Noy, 2004), the experience of self in a place (Cutler, 2010) and even for playing a role in shaping memories of experience over time (McGregor, Holmes, 1999).

5. BRIDGING PAST AND PRESENT: TRAVEL, TOURISM AND NEW TEXTUALITIES

If Pausanias or Baedeker were writing in our time, they would be successful bloggers or leading administrators on Trip Advisor. New texts are like old texts in their compulsion to incorporate *autopsies*, *theoremata* and *logoi* to acquire credibility and authority. E-tourism increasingly exercises control over its consumers with its narrative power. Stories about broken faucets or dirty sheets in a 5-star hotel, read on Trip Advisor or Booking.com, impact on a reader's emotions and imagination in similar ways as to when Baedeker, following a brief visit to 19th century Thebes in Greece, brutally excoriates Drakos's inn for its intolerably dirty premises. Pausanias' account of the "blood-stained altar of the goddess Artemis" and the "scourging of young boys" to keep the altar stained with human blood (Pausanias, 1992, 3.16.10) must, in his time, have equally impacted with his use of sensationalist descriptions on the emotions, and imagination, of his educated readership.

Travelers' need to communicate their experiences (Mattila, Enz, 2002) and use stories that persuade via *narrative transportation* which involves immersion into the text (Green, Brock, Kaufman, 2004). Furthermore, experience is conveyed and represented through narratives which consist of facts, or a sequence of events interconnected into a pattern or structure representing this experience (Mattila, Enz, 2002). Self-referential elements in the narrative evoke memories of past personal experiences; in this way, travelers can project themselves into the narrative as if they are the actual protagonists (Escalas, Stern, 2003; Freedberg, Gallese, 2007). Pausanias' proto-tourism periegetic narratives adopt a structure whose basic principles comprise the contemporary key marketing elements presented above (Tussyadiah, Fesenmaier, 2016). Additionally, Pausanias accesses a picture of lived identities created through actions, attitudes and values; he presents a critical assessment and results of the narrative sequences and then evaluates his experience.

The process of "talking about tourism experiences that provide a means of constructing and representing identity" (Desforges, 2000, p. 928), or "recount transformations in the self and express a rite of passage" (White, White, 2004, p. 211), seems to have remained unchanged from the past until now. Pausanias' tourism still lies in the subtext of contemporary travel guides such as *Fodor's* and *Lonely planet*. Pausanias drew on his personal experience of a place to describe it in as accurate a manner as possible (Harloe, 2010; MacCormack, 2010). The current travel and tourism distribution of information on vastly popular textual platforms such as the editions and media network of *Lonely Planet* or *Trip Advisor*, combine the underlying

message and persuasiveness of the story and reflect positively on a tourism destination, if we consider a tourism destination as a brand on its own.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Pausanias's use of an interwoven tripartite structure in his topographical descriptions (his *autopsia*, *theoremata* and *logoi* discussed earlier) provides in many respects a proto-tourism model for modern approaches to storytelling. Far from being an empiricist, however, Pausanias creates in his text representations or reflections of destinations through culturally determined grammars as he creates *a sense of place* rather than a definition of place. The authors have illustrated how Pausanias' writing was preserved, 'translated', and furthered not only by Baedeker and his contemporaries, but also in current travel and digital tourism distributions of information.

Based on the underlying textual principles guiding the travel information provided, the authors then filter them through various tourism distribution channels. In the realm of digital tourism, popular sites, blogs and e-social media have in turn, attempted to reinvent the tourism bequeathed to them by the printed guides. The keen competition in the tourism market drives tourist stakeholders and online information providers such as tourist boards, hotel and resort websites, travel agents, bloggers and magazines to find new ways, concepts and strategies to promote their tourism destinations and actively compete for attention to attract searchers and, ultimately, those who book (Govers, Go, Kumar, 2007). But the current emphasis on storytelling in almost all tourism distribution channels is really a reinvention of Pausanias' practice.

In addressing the selectiveness of memory, Michel Foucault has written that the choice of memory is an essential element in any group's perception of itself, making it a point of contestation. Control of social memory, according to Foucault, bears directly on issues of hierarchy and authority (Faustino, Ferraro, 2020). The modern-day travel industry seems to possess this knowledge as evidenced in its obsession with ranking, ratings and reviews of 'Best or Worst Restaurants on the Globe'. Nevertheless, Pausanias' multivocal writing, his holistic approach towards the formation of context as well as his construction of time and memory within his text and his selectivity, argue against this assumption. He successfully creates a memorialized narrative (Stewart, 2013) in whose complex, and on occasion difficult to wade through, descriptions of the landscape, mythic heroes and political or artistic personages, successfully rebuilds, and at the same time preserves, an archival embodiment of mytho-historic traditions.

Interestingly, in the course of time the interaction between travel texts along with travel information and distribution channels produces generic hybrids, that is, travel texts providing information based on a combination of travel narratives and arrangement services. These texts are unique in their inspiration and construction, yet they are still guided by the same principles aimed at involving and engaging the tourist into the journey. They provide information for prospective tourists by bundling tourism products together and by establishing mechanisms that enable consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations. Should the new e-tourist media consider a return to Pausanias' practices?

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THE POTENTIAL OF LOCATION-BASED GAMIFICATION APPS FOR PROMOTING SOFIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Sonia Mileva^a , Mariana Assenova^b , Emil Petrov^c, Veneta Gyaurova^d

^a Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Industrial Economics and Management; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5636-874X>; e-mail: smileva@feb.uni-sofia.bg

^b Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Geography of Tourism Department; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6639-5816>; e-mail: mariana@gea.uni-sofia.bg

^c Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Geography of Tourism Department; e-mail: emil@gea.uni-sofia.bg

^d Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"; e-mail: veni.nikolova@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The main aim of the research is to identify the potential of location-based gamification apps for promoting tourist destinations. The specific goal is to investigate and evaluate the existing gamified apps for Sofia and reveal their potential as a marketing tool for enhancing the capital as a tourist destination. The study is based on a literature review on the topic and desk research of the available location-based gamification apps for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination thus allowing a comparative analysis of the main attributes of the gamified apps to be made. The qualitative research technique of using key informants is also applied, providing an expert source of information and a deeper insight into current and potential practices in the research area and their effectiveness. The results indicate that this has the greatest potential for further engagement of users and the co-creation of products and services as well as for raising awareness of the destination. The main limitations are related to the fact that they are a relatively new and little-known marketing tool in the field of tourism, and this predetermines a lack of sufficient knowledge and experience for their use for promotional purposes.

KEYWORDS

gamification, app, tourism, destination, Sofia

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently gamification has entered as a marketing tool with great success for enhanced engagement and dynamic interaction with consumers (Seaborn, Fels, 2015). As a concept, gamification is defined as the "use of game design element and game thinking in a non-gaming context" (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011, p. 5).

In the field of tourism, gamification as a theory has only recently captured researchers' attentions and is seen as a powerful acceleration tool for consumer

loyalty (Zichermann, Cunningham, 2011) whereas in fact it is a new concept for an old phenomenon (Swacha, Ittermann, 2017). In the tourism sector gamification is not unknown and has been applied to building loyalty programs for consumer engagement (Xu, Weber, Buhalis, 2014), nevertheless only a limited number of publications consider a gamification app at destination level.

Gamification in tourism has been approached in different ways and six areas of impact are identified: raising of awareness, enhanced tourist experience,

engagement, improved customer loyalty, entertainment and employee management (Xu, Weber, Buhalis, 2014). Taken into consideration as well are sustainability effects (economic, social and environmental) and the relationship between major stakeholders in tourism: tourism organizations, tourists, employees and the community (Negrușă, Toader, Sofică, Tutunea, Rus, 2015). From a tourist perspective value co-creation and enriched tourist experiences (social, emotional and immersive) are the major areas of gamification influences (Neuhofer, Buhalis, Ladkin, 2012; Xu, 2012). The impacts of gamification apps for pre-, during and post-travelling (Weber, 2014) are also explored.

In this article we consider technologically-mediated gamification apps. Usually they can be applied in the three major phases of the tourist visiting process: before, on-site and after. Before trip gamification apps aim to attract, raise interest and create awareness, but it is at the destination level itself that tourist experience is formed and shaped. That is why in this article only on-site, location-based apps will be considered. The main idea is to investigate and evaluate the communication impacts on tourists, already arrived on site and this is why the authors approach location-based gamification apps at destination level and in particular for Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

Tourists' motivation and expectations are becoming extremely complex in their search of meaningful experiences, entertainment and learning, with game design and game elements then being related to "self-determination theory" and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Richard, 1985; Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011). Three innate needs for intrinsic motivation are identified: relatedness (connectivity), competence (effective in a given environment) and autonomy (control of one's own life), and are all fundamental for successful gamification (Groh, 2012).

Entertainment and the power of gamification are based both on extrinsic and intrinsic gaming elements. The extrinsic elements are achievements, badges, rewards, gifting, feedback and reinforcement, pattern recognition, collecting etc (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011; Zichermann, Cunningham, 2011), while intrinsic elements are relation groups, messages, blogs, chats; competence feedback, progressive bar levels, leader board; autonomy profiles, avatars, privacy control, notification control (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011; Schell, 2008; Xu, Weber, Buhalis, 2014).

From a tourist behavior perspective, *relatedness* can be seen as an attempt to connect with others, e.g. local communities, travelling gurus and other meaningful communities for tourism destinations or interests; taking part and creating meaningful stories or co-creating travel experience; connecting personal goals with the destination. *Competence* links to interesting challenges, clearly location-based, visual goals and fun learning, or

discovering at one's personal pace. *Autonomy* needs are matched with contemporary tourist individual needs, interests and behavior.

Tourism by definition is an expression of free will, as it is in gamification apps as well. Recent developments concerning COVID-19 enhance even more social distances when travelling at one's own pace and tempo, according to personal interests and preferred activities. Thus, location-based gamification apps satisfy tourist needs and motivation combining not only engagement, but also experiential co-creation and an individual pace of visiting, discovering and learning about the destination.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

In the context described the main aim of the research is to identify the potential of gamification apps for promoting tourist destinations. The specific goal is to investigate and evaluate existing gamification apps for Sofia and reveal their potential as a marketing tool for enhancing the capital as a tourist destination.

The study is based on a literature review on the topic, as well as on desk research of international experience and the available apps for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination. This allows a comparative analysis of the main attributes of the gamified apps to be made. The research as undertaken in the period 26.05.2020–21.06.2020. The data about the available mobile apps for Sofia was collected via desk research on iOS and Android platforms, and the respective mobile app stores for end users. For Sofia, a useful source for desk research was the information available from National "Culture" Fund under the "Cultural Heritage" program, and in particular the "Cultural Industries and Cultural Tourism" project enhancing innovations and gamification as a tool for tourism development, all financially supported by Sofia municipality.

To fulfill the purpose of the study the key informant technique (Marinov, 2005; Marshal, 1996) was applied to utilize expert sources of information to provide a deeper insight into current and potential practices in the research area and their effectiveness. This technique is chosen in order to obtain qualitative data in a relatively short period of time. In selecting the key informants, five eligibility characteristics are considered, namely, formal role and position in the community, knowledge, willingness, communicability and impartiality. A pilot testing of the questionnaire was undertaken among the twelve key informants selected to represent tourism associations and companies, cultural institutions, Sofia destination management organizations, governmental bodies, the IT sector and academia.

As a qualitative research method, interviews with key informants are primarily intended to gather "soft"

information (opinions, assessments, attitudes) but they can also provide “hard” quantitative information (facts and data) through the use of pre-defined tools (semi-structured questionnaire, pre-defined answers, rating scales, ranks, etc.) allowing easy quantification of some of the results (Marinov, 2012). To avoid the main disadvantage of the technique, the reliability of the obtained information, and to further ensure “triangulation” (verification) of the results, secondary quantitative data from the apps are systemized, analyzed and assessed. A detailed survey of tourist demand for gamification apps is envisaged once the sector recovers from the coronavirus pandemic.

A semi-structured questionnaire was developed by the authors and its design was a challenge owing to the lack of tourists and the limited experience with gamification apps in Sofia. The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions, of which twelve were closed and seven open. The closed questions were intended to outline the experience of the key informants and to identify the degree of acceptance of predefined statements regarding the most important elements and characteristics of gamification apps for Sofia.

There have been numerous studies of tourist demand for Sofia as a destination in the last ten years, but in all cases apps are considered only as a source of information and gamification apps are not specifically differentiated (Marinov, Dogramadjieva, Assenova, Petkova, Baikov, 2015). For these reasons, research questions about marketing potential were derived from academic publications presenting the marketing potential of location-based gamification apps at destination level. The potential marketing effects are identified to outline the framework for investigation and discussion of results.

A hybrid survey approach was applied to avoid long face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was uploaded on Google Forms to be completed by the invited key informants, afterwards they were contacted by phone to further discuss specified issues. The survey was conducted in the period June 30th–July 10th 2020. The key themes were predefined based on the literature review and were subjected to quantitative assessment while the transcribed free comments were analyzed using iterative-inductive thematic analysis (King, 2004, after: Chapman, Light, 2016). The initial statements were coded into thematic groups which were subsequently further grouped by main topic, thus expanding on the predefined thematic areas.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At a destination level, gamification apps are not a very popular marketing tool, with some exceptions. Some destination management organizations have designed

their own games such as VisitNorway for Holmenkollen Ski Jump (2006), Tourism Ireland (2011), Brasil Quest Game (2012), Thailand and China (Corrêaa, Kitanoa, 2015; Xu, Weber, Buhalis, 2014). These gamified apps are seen as a marketing tool for promotion and shaping tourist behavior using game mechanics and design elements to measure, influence and reward target behaviors (Maan, 2013).

Apart from these, there are many successful gamification apps developed by independent start-up companies in the field of innovative digital marketing. Such a successful example is Nexto (Slovenia) – a gamification mobile app for promoting cultural and historical sites, integrating them into gamified storylines at the destination level (see. Nexto, 2021). The app is a ready-made solution for tourist sites and organizations aiming to promote a destination and to create engaging experiences in an augmented reality environment. The same app is used in Croatia, Austria, New Zealand and other places and was a winner at Booking.com Booster Lab for 2017 and “Best practice in digitalization” by the “European Capital for Smart Tourism” initiative for 2019.

Questo (Romania), launched in 2017, is another mobile app based on an interactive quiz about interesting and authentic tourist sites. Users of the app become „discoverers” by following riddles, hints, clues and questions (see *About Questo*, 2021). The app was a huge success receiving a UNWTO award for innovative start-ups in 2019. Among success factors is the combination of a tour guide service and gamification, targeted to the new generation of tourists (millennials). Proof of the success of the app are awards from Booking.com Booster Lab for 2018, eTravel Awards 2017 and others.

Secret City Trails (Portugal) is a gamification platform for preserving and promoting the authenticity of cities through the power of play (see *Secretcitytrails*, 2021). Created by young entrepreneurs as an innovative start-up, based in Lisbon in Portugal and partnering with local game creators from all over Europe, the gamification app allows users to discover hidden and off-the-beaten path places by solving a trail of riddles at a destination. The platform is supported by accelerators from Beta-i, Startup Lisboa, FutureNow, Altice, Booking.com.

For Sofia as a tourism destination the results of the research show the following types of mobile apps published on the official Sofia tourist site (www.visitsofia.bg): guides – Farrol City Guides, Pocket guide; VisitSofia (2019) – the official app using real-time location to direct users to the nearest sites of tourist interest.

Apart from the official site on the Google mobile app store (Google Play) there are more than 20 mobile apps available for Sofia which run on the Android operating system and can be downloaded and used when visiting the city, namely Sofia Travel Guide (Offline), Sofia City

Directory, Reinvent Sofia, Sofia City Guide, Sofia Map and Walks, Sofia Offline Map and Travel Guide, Sofia SmartGuide – Audio Guide & Offline Maps, Sofia Tour Guide, Sofia Travel & Explore, Offline Tourist Guide, Sofia Travel Guide, Sofia Amenities, etc. A popular app is *Sofia CulTOUR Mobile free App* which is an interactive platform that provides information about the most interesting and popular cultural events, cultural and historical landmarks, museums, galleries and routes around the sights of Sofia. Similar to this is the gamification app *Reinvent Sofia*, which is an interactive map of the city that includes various landmarks from different historical periods with the aim of putting all the places and themes in correct historical sequence.

The research revealed that none of them can be identified as location-based gamification apps for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination, with the exception of *Sofia's Centre: 7 millennia of secrets* and *Ancient Serdica Riddles*. The first one is a private initiative, a part of the Secret Cities Trail platform. The second, *Ancient Serdica Riddles*, has been developed by an NGO, starting as a project funded by the "Cultural Heritage" program "Cultural Industries and Cultural Tourism" module, supported by Sofia municipality and Sofia city museum. A comparative analysis of these two gamified apps has been made and the following distinctive attributes are outlined: 1) scope and thematic axis 2) extrinsic motivation and 3) gamification elements (Table 1).

What is common in these two is the use of game elements such as solving riddles along a designated tour/trail/route, and as such both apps are related to "self-determination theory" and intrinsic motivation (Deci, Richard, 1985; Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011). The innate needs identified for triggering intrinsic motivation are relatedness (connectivity), competence (effective in given environment) and autonomy (control of one's own life) for *Sofia's Centre: 7 millennia of secrets* and competence and autonomy for *Serdica Riddles*. Whilst the first is focused on the exploration of specific cultural heritage sites such as the archaeological remains

from a certain historical period (Late Antiquity) within the boundaries of the ancient city, the second represents the main tourist attractions from different historical periods within the present city center.

The *Serdica Riddles* app has been officially published and was available from 20.05.2020. In the period 20.05–8.07.2020 a total of 344 users from around the world have installed it on mobile devices and tablets, with a level below 47% for de-installations. By nationality, the main users are from Bulgaria (40%), Austria (11%), Great Britain (9%), the Netherlands (9%), Poland (8%), Germany (7%) – traditional markets for Sofia with regular flights. About *Secret City Trails* there is no available data for comparison.

Almost all key informants (90%) point out that currently the location-based gamification apps with a tourist orientation discussed are not very popular among Sofia's visitors, however 90% of those interviewed agree that gamified apps add value to the tourist experience in the destination.

The results of the survey indicate that selected key informants envisage moderate to high potential for location-based gamification apps for promoting Sofia as a tourist destination (Fig. 1), as the identified aspects of potential marketing effects are evaluated between 3.3 and 3.9 on a 5-degree scale (1 – the lowest and 5 – the highest). The highest is the potential for greater engagement of users and co-creation of products and services (3.9), as well as for raising awareness of the destination (3.8). Fairly high is considered to be the potential for creating positive attitudes (3.6) and an increase in brand awareness (3.6). The lowest turns out to be the potential for forming public opinion (3.3) and for impacting the behavior of users (3.3).

The main reason for the moderate optimism is the low level of awareness of existing location-based gamification apps for Sofia as a tourist destination: altogether 58% declare personal experience with them, but only 42% are familiar with and have personally tried at least one of the existing apps for Sofia in particular. The better known app is *Serdica Riddles* (80%), compared

Table 1. Comparative analysis of location-based gamification apps for Sofia as a tourist destination

App	Scope and thematic axis	Extrinsic motivation	Gamification elements
<i>Ancient Serdica Riddles</i>	Promotion of archaeological heritage sites and museum exhibits from the Late Antiquity within the boundaries of the Ancient Serdica complex in the city of Sofia	Based on collecting coins by solving riddles and receiving a badge reward at the end of the game when a minimum number of coins have been collected	Self-guided tour with 17 riddles based on ancient Serdica
<i>Sofia's Centre: 7 millennia of secrets</i> (Secret city trails)	Representing the main tourist attractions from different historical periods within the city center of Sofia	Based on sharing the best adventure photos using the tag #secretcitytrails and receiving a free game	Self-guided tour with 14 riddles for the main tourist attractions

Source: authors based on *Serdica Riddles* (2021), *Discover Sofia* (2021).

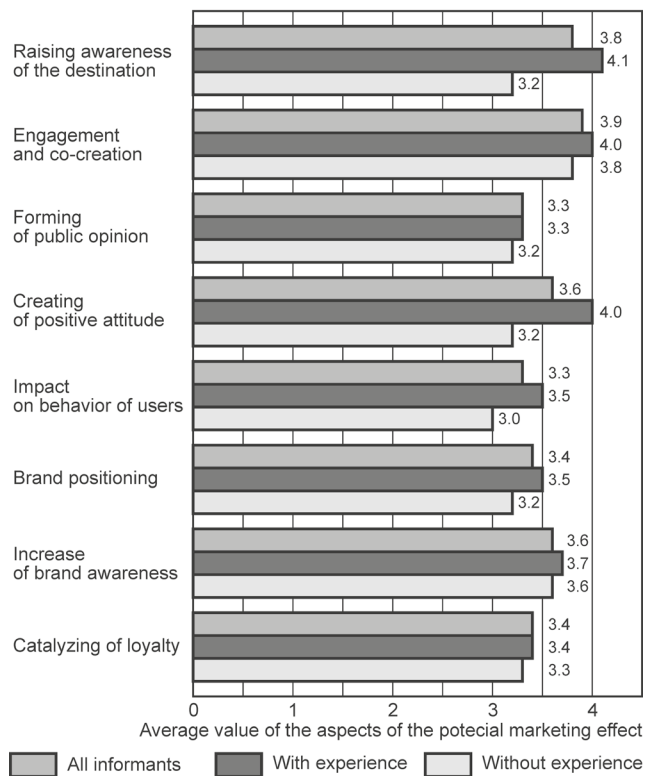


Figure 1. Evaluation of the potential marketing effect
Source: authors

to *Secret City Trails* (20%), which is probably due to the recently launched Facebook ad campaign for *Serdica Riddles*.

Informants with personal experience tend to be more inclined to perceive a higher marketing potential, especially in terms of raising awareness of the destination (4.1), the engagement and co-creation of services and products (4.0) and the creation of positive attitude towards the destination (4.0). They also see higher potential in the use of gamified apps for the brand positioning of the city.

From a marketing perspective, the use of location-based gamification apps envisaged by local key informants coincides with the experience and potential outlined in other destinations. Those interviewed agree that their main advantage, as pointed out by Wu and Stilwell (2018), is the need for physical presence in the destination and it is also stated that they could be used to attract visitors from market segments that would not visit for other purposes. Thus, the opportunity for a competitive offering in segments that are not currently the focus of destination marketing is foreseen. The innovative approach would be attractive and in compliance with new consumer needs and new forms of travel.

In general the informants comment on gamification apps mainly as a promotional tool and the opportunity to expand the channels for providing information and promoting the destination, including feedback

and data collection. In their opinion they could lead to raising awareness of the destination (Xu, Buhalis, Weber, 2017; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016) and create positive attitudes or changes in attitude towards the organizations (sponsors) related to the app (Wu, Stilwell, 2018). They could also impact the forming of public opinion and attitude by shared experience, recommendations and advocacy on social networks (Wu, Stilwell, 2018; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016; Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017).

A high level of agreement is stated in terms of deeper engagement and commitment (including co-creation of services) and the effect on the experiences of tourists in the destination resulting in higher satisfaction (Sever, Sever, Kuhzady, 2015; Xu, Buhalis, Weber, 2017; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016; Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017). The involvement in a gamified local product may also impact the behavior of users and affect a decision to re-visit or visit other attractions in the destination (Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017).

In terms of branding, the informants support the possibility of using the apps for brand positioning of the destination or of suppliers by displaying the logo and by interactive advertisements (Hofacker, De Ruyter, Lurie, Manchanda, Donaldson, 2016; Sever, Sever, Kuhzady, 2015; Wu, Stilwell, 2018; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016; Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017), but also for increasing brand awareness by sending brand messages and provoking an emotional connection (Sever, Sever, Kuhzady, 2015; Xu, Buhalis, Weber, 2017; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016; Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017), and for catalyzing the brand, product or service loyalty (Sever, Sever, Kuhzady, 2015; Xu, Buhalis, Weber, 2017; Xu, Tian, Buhalis, Weber, Zhang, 2016; Yang, Asaad, Dwivedi, 2017).

At the same time, the opinion of the key informants regarding the possible benefits of using gamification apps to promote Sofia as a tourist destination goes beyond the promotional element of the marketing mix. Two aspects especially should be mentioned. First, the development of location-based gamification apps could enhance product development. In this respect different thematic routes could be suggested, past-future connections, and new forms and ways of interaction with the past could be made to attract motivated tourists resulting in a longer and deeper engagement with the destination creating a new type of experience that would otherwise be inaccessible. The capital will benefit from the socialization of lesser known and exploited cultural landscapes, leading to diversification of the tourist product and the enhancement of cultural tourism. Secondly, the spatial aspect of tourism development in the city could also be impacted by a more even distribution of tourists, not only in the central part of the city but also in peripheral and nearby destinations (e.g. including Sofia Holy Mount).

The major limitations of the study are the sample of informants and that the period for the survey overlapped the COVID-19 pandemic. The key stakeholders in the tourism industry, including the interviewed informants, were differently affected by the pandemic situation and this influenced the results obtained. As stated, location-based gamification apps demand the presence of tourists on site, while COVID-19 changed the priorities and concerns of the main stakeholders. We believe that the survey should be continued after the normalization of the situation and the renewal of tourist visits. Desk research on mobile apps considered only those on iOS and Android, excluding other platforms. A comparative analysis of the apps discussed is also limited due to their recent launch and the lack of enough evidence from a consumer point of view and an assessment of intrinsic motivation.

The pilot testing proved the workability of the questionnaire but raised an issue of the appropriateness of key informants. Although they were specially selected to be knowledgeable on the topic and fulfilled the rest of the criteria, less than half of them were informed about existing gamification apps and had personal impressions of even one of them. This is the main limitation of the obtained results. Nevertheless, it should be noted that only a small part of the results are presented in this article and a detailed analysis will be very useful for the future research, as well as for the development, management and promotion of location-based gamification apps.

4. CONCLUSION

The investigated location-based gamification apps have a common business model of partnership and expansion of the partner network at the destination by recruiting local game creators/storytellers (including locals and tour guides or legal entities including tour operators and tourism organizations). A single tourist destination can have multiple gamified tours/trails/quests. What these location-based gamification apps have in common is independent freedom of movement, an individual pace for discovering/conquering challenges, the ability to choose a thematic axis while in the complexity of the quiz, and the combination of usefulness and enjoyment as an opportunity to learn something new. Appropriate targeting and marketing of the app itself is vital for successful implementation at destination level.

It is worth pointing out the limitation that the success of the app is not directly correlated with the attractiveness of a destination or the attractions involved. The rich history and presence of interesting little-known sites and facts, integrated into quizzes, are not enough

preconditions for enhanced tourist experience. Other factors such as the non-functional requirements of the app, how end-users perceive the product, and how they interact with the product and the product's features (user interface and user experience) can have a positive or negative impact and influence its success.

In conclusion, the location-based gamification apps for the promotion of Sofia as a tourist destination are considered as a new, little-known and under-used marketing tool with moderate to high future potential, especially for the deeper engagement of users and for raising awareness of the destination.

The theoretical contribution of the article appears in the identification of three emerging and under-researched areas nationally and abroad: 1) the initiative and leading role of local authorities for the development of gamified apps at destination level; 2) the development of gamification apps as independent products converting unrevealed local resources into marketable attractions; 3) the possibility of gamification apps to be used as a tool for spatial de-concentration and management of tourist flows.

The management implications are not limited to Sofia as a tourist destination. Gamification apps can 1) be an essential part of destination management; 2) create added value, awareness and recognition of a destination's tourist resources; 3) be a useful management solution for urban public areas in terms of the spatial concentration of tourists. For Sofia, as a capital city, the local authorities are recognizing the power of gamification apps, and they are already supporting and funding such initiatives and partnerships. On the other hand, there is limited and restrictive recognition among the business sector and other local stakeholders which should not be underestimated as it is needed as a basis for successful partnership and emerging business models for destination development.

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TOURIST MOBILE APPLICATIONS: EVALUATION OF THE VISITMALOPOLSKA APP

Iryna Manczak^a , Maria Bajak^b 

^a Cracow University of Economics, College of Management and Quality Sciences, Faculty of Management, Department of Commerce and Market Institutions; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9661-9945>; e-mail: manczaki@uek.krakow.pl

^b Cracow University of Economics, College of Management and Quality Sciences, Faculty of Management, Department of Marketing; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4769-7696>; e-mail: bajakm@uek.krakow.pl

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to evaluate the functionality of the VisitMalopolska mobile application developed for tourists. An attempt is made to outline ideas that allow tourists to explore Małopolska on their own, as well as to facilitate access to information about the region. The study focuses on the diverse use of mobile applications in tourism and in addition discusses the objectives and research method used. The main part of the discussion concerns the characteristics and evaluation of the most important functionalities of the new VisitMalopolska tourist application. In the main part of the article the most important functionalities available are evaluated and to do this, the point method was used

KEYWORDS

mobile technologies, mobile applications in tourism, Małopolska, VisitMalopolska

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modern mobile technologies enable the creation of useful ideas in many sectors of the economy and products are being developed as a result of these technologies. It is worth noting that in recent times there has been a significant increase in the number of mobile device users in Poland. At the end of 2018, it was found for the first time that the number of Polish internet users using smartphones or tablets was greater than that for desktop computers (Dąbrowski, 2019) and this data inspires those who are interested in implementing projects that involve the provision of mobile tools which allow basic tasks in the area of market communication to be achieved (Sznajder, 2014). It should be added that mobile technologies have influenced the emergence of communication platforms that enable the provision of services through multi-channel media without losing their integrity and the quality of their content (Kachniewska, 2019).

Mobile technologies are an inseparable part of everyday life both from the perspective of individual users as well as various formal bodies (Martin, Ertzberger, 2013; Parys, 2016). An example is provided by mobile applications which should be considered as a follow-up to the implementation of information and communication techniques in business practice (Czajkowski, Nowakowski, 2015), and are one of the basic tools for mobile marketing (Zawadzki, 2018). These applications have mainly social, entertainment, educational and informational functions (Kubiak, 2015) but for a long time mobile applications have been used in tourism as well (Da Silva, Da Rocha, 2012; Liang, Schuckert, Law, Masiero, 2016; Pawłowska-Legwand, 2019). The general trend shows that travel in the era of information and communication technologies has changed its character and is now offered a rich set of conveniences, including mobile applications (Niemczyk, 2017; Tan, Lee, Lin, Ooi, 2017; Gadziński, 2018; Dorcic, Komsic, Markovic, 2019). Tourists have

more opportunities to organize travel without the help of travel agencies (Papińska-Kasperek, 2013) and for this purpose mobile applications are used.

Mobile applications are used in handling tourism on national as well as international levels (Lee, Choi, 2016). Most often they are an important element of the tourist information system (Zawadzki, 2018), as well as a useful tool for urban tourism (Papińska-Kacperek, 2016). This type of software allows tourists to plan their own sightseeing routes, including the quick finding of desired points of interest in an immediate vicinity (Piechota, 2014). A translation function is a popular mobile application making it possible to complete formalities during a journey (Rasińska, Siwiński, 2015) while tourists also have at their disposal, for example, applications made available by museums that make it easier for users to familiarize themselves with their resources and activities (De Rosset, Zielonka, 2016; Gmiterek, 2017).

The article attempts to evaluate the key functionalities offered by the VisitMałopolska mobile application. This is an element of the m_MISIT project, the mobile Małopolska Tourist Information System, initiated by the local government of the Małopolska Region in 2014–2020. The evaluation of its functionalities was based on a point method and it highlights selected issues regarding the use of mobile applications in tourism.

2. MOBILE APPLICATIONS IN TOURISM

Mobile applications are being implemented successfully in tourism and the industry will have a significant impact on further development of these technologies (Kim, Kim, 2017). The use of mobile applications in tourism is not a new phenomenon (Brown, Chalmers, 2003; Buhalis, Law, 2008), on the contrary, there are numerous examples of their implementation in tourist activities (Nunes, Mayer, 2014; Law, Cheng Chu Chan, Wang, 2018). However, it is still justified to initiate projects that assume a wider use of mobile applications in business practice. These activities should be treated as initiatives of a forward-looking nature, including those valuable from the point of view of the expectations of various stakeholder groups (including tourists, tourism industry bodies, and local government). It is worth mentioning that mobile applications are tools that after their implementation usually require little financial input, apart from the costs of maintenance and further development (Zawadzki, 2018). Such a feature may be of particular importance, and it may imply a number of benefits from the point of view of those implementing projects based on the applications.

Mobile applications are software designed for mobile phones. They are either paid for or free and in the vast

majority of cases available from online application stores (Zawadzki, 2018). Mobile applications can be divided into (Hamza, Hammad, 2020; Sharma, Kumar, 2020):

- native apps – prepared for specific mobile devices and their operating systems. They are developed in a particular programming language and linked to a specific mobile platform (e.g. Android, iOS),
- responsive web apps – a special version of a website which is additionally adapted to be operated by mobile devices,
- hybrid apps – software compatible with different mobile platforms that can use the functionalities of a phone (e.g. camera, GPS, calendar, etc). They combine the advantages of native and web apps and are currently the most popular type of software.

Assuming the purpose of a mobile application as the criterion, the following, for example, can be distinguished: information applications, educational software, social programs, business and office applications, financial and banking programs, shopping applications, navigation and location programs, tourist applications, health and sports programs, games and entertainment software, music and film programs. Based on the above classification, it should be recognized that mobile applications can have different functions and uses while in practice, most of the available applications combine functionalities from many of these areas.

Implementing innovative concepts at tourist destinations can contribute, thanks to an active tourism policy of a particular region, to a significant increase in the level of attractiveness, including having an impact on the competitiveness of the areas in question and thus influence the number of tourists (Panasiuk, 2015). The diversity of a regional tourist offer requires not only cooperation based on coherence, but also distinguishing the region from other competitive tourist destinations (Manczak, 2014). This goal can be realized within the framework of projects dedicated to developing and making mobile applications available. It should be added that tourist mobile products are often created on behalf of public bodies that recognize the need to prepare websites and programs for mobile devices, as well as to provide free multimedia resources (Papińska-Kacperek, 2016).

Research conducted by Pawłowska-Legwand (2019) shows that tourists are keen to use information and communication technologies before departure and are most interested in digital tools that provide access to the variety of information needed to help organize a trip. Above all, this information concerns planning, movement and selected tourist attractions. The most popular mobile applications are communication programs: searching for parking spaces or public transport connections, allowing taxis to be ordered as well as providing mobile guides (Papińska-Kacperek, 2016).

The implementation of applications allows greater interaction with tourists, and thus helps to better adapt the product to their expectations (Piechota, 2014). It is worth noting that the behavior of a consumer who uses this kind of technology comes with a certain dissonance. On the one hand, they use tools already known, based on previous habits, on the other, they are looking for new, more technologically advanced possibilities in order to optimize the process of planning their experiences as tourists (Xiang, Magnini, Fesenmaier, 2015). The deeper tourists immerse themselves in a given technology, the more intensively they feel the experience connected with it. Neuhofer, Buhalis and Ladkin (2014) distinguished several levels in the perception of technological support by tourists:

- conventional experience,
- experience aided by technology,
- experience enriched by technology,
- experience stimulated by technology.

These perspectives are connected with the concept of a 'smart tourist', who uses various available digital tools both before and during a trip, including applications, sensors, Wi-Fi, big data and more (Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang, Koo, 2015). At the same time, combining conventional and technological experiences is a factor that for smart tourists increases the attractiveness of destinations (Buonincontri, Micera, 2016; Brennan, 2020). It should be noted that according to the data presented in the *Turyści 2019* report, almost half the tourists in Poland with Android smartphones use mobile applications for tourism and on the basis of measurements from previous years, there is a noticeable upward trend (Spicy Mobile, 2019). In the light of the comments, it may be assumed that such software is one of the fundamental elements of smart tourism.

Taking into account the possibilities of mobile applications, including the preferences of their users, it should be stated that such tools are gaining support among tourists. It is worth noting however that this can take different forms. In domestic tourism, there are a variety of tools dedicated to particular audiences which include:

- maps and navigation systems (Traseo, Szlaki Trasy Mapy);
- applications for planning transportation routes (Koleo e-podróżnik.pl, BlaBlaCar);
- accommodation booking software (Meteor24, Niedrogie hotele, booking.com, Airbnb);
- guides to sites of cultural heritage (Wilanów Guide, Muzeum Książąt Czartoryskich, Muzeum Śląskie);
- programs supporting sports tourism (KajakTour, Szlaki Tatry, Green Velo);
- applications dedicated to participants of cultural events (Pol'And'Rock, Jewish Culture Festival, Rzeszowski Festiwal Jazzowy);

- urban guides (Bydgoszcz – Mobilny Przewodnik; Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot, Hel – Przewodnik po Trójmieście; Mobilny Przemysł Częstochowa – przewodnik);
- regional guides (VisitMalopolska, Konstelacje dobrych miejsc – Paszport Turystyczny, Karkonosze, Bieszczady & Górny San).

The popularity of mobile applications and the variety of software available on the Polish market, as well as the constant emergence of new ones, may be influenced by new phenomena in the contemporary tourism market. It is worth noting that increasingly often, tourists are looking for personalized offers, including those taking into account their individual expectations and preferences (Manchak, Sanak-Kosmowska, 2018). Therefore, it is important to emphasize the need to create increasingly dynamic, flexible and intelligent open tools, capable of responding to the needs of the tourist in real time (Perez Pulido, 2016). Realization of these expectations may promote tourist mobile applications.

3. THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCH METHOD

The key objective of the article is to evaluate the functionalities available on the VisitMalopolska tourist application. Taking into account this research goal, it was decided to identify tools enabling independent sightseeing, as well as facilitating access to tourist information about the Małopolska region.

For the purpose of this research, the following specific questions were formulated:

- what are the most important tasks of the analyzed applications?
- who is the target audience of the application?
- what new technologies does the application use?
- how does the application contribute to the promotion of Małopolska?
- how does the application contribute to the development of tourism in the region?

This article attempts to identify the opportunities offered by the selected mobile application and was achieved on the basis of a literature analysis and an analysis of the materials available concerning the software. It was decided to make a point evaluation of the functionality available in the application from the point of view of different target groups. In the literature it is accepted that this method allows the evaluation of anything according to a set of criteria (Szyran-Resiak, 2016; Gierszewska, Romanowska, 2017). The aim of the method is to create a list of criteria (factors) that will allow what is analyzed to be described and differentiated (Thompson, Strickland, 1997). These are

assigned appropriate weightings (because not all of them have the same value) to which points (scores) are awarded from a selected numerical range (Szyran-Resiak, 2016). One of the principles adopted for weighting evaluation criteria is their selection using the help of 'expert reviews' (Ziernicka-Wojtaszek, Zawora, 2011). Individual experts' opinions also apply to the determination of subjective probability, including verifying the ratings. According to Stabryła (2013) such judgments are the result of opinions issued on the basis of certain preferential premises. It was decided to use this approach and an attempt was made to identify the key functionalities of the mobile application. The authors decided to use their own experience while using the selected mobile software.

For the purposes of the research, it was decided to make a slight modification to the point method. The individual functionalities have been evaluated from the point of view of usability for different tourist target groups. Above all, it was recognized that the needs of each user are equally important and therefore different weightings were not given. A scale of 1 to 5 was used, assuming that:

- 5 implies a very useful functionality,
- 4 implies a useful functionality,
- 3 implies a functionality that can be useful,
- 2 implies a barely useful functionality,
- 1 implies a functionality without value.

The scores for each functionality are then summed and the average was calculated for each category. The functionalities of the VisitMalopolska application were divided into several categories according to their purpose and evaluated. An attempt was also made to discover the most important tasks achieved by the VisitMalopolska application.

4. VISITMALOPOLSKA APPLICATION – PROJECT ASSUMPTIONS

The VisitMalopolska application is an element of the m_MSIT project a mobile Małopolska Tourist Information System, implemented in 2014–2020 by the local government of the Małopolska Region¹. Its

primary goal is to create a digital platform that will enable the presentation of the regional tourist offer using modern technologies and multimedia tools and make it available to both tourists and residents of the region. The m_MSIT project provides for facilitating access to information in the field of tourism, as well as supporting independent sightseeing in Małopolska (VisitMalopolska, 2020a). Its implementation has been divided into several stages (Table 1).

The VisitMalopolska application uses its own functionalities as well as the capabilities of the device on which it is installed. Due to its use, the tool can be regarded as a source of cultural and tourist information about the region, including navigation and location. This software is addressed both to residents of the Małopolska region, and to domestic and foreign tourists, therefore the mobile software is available in eight languages (Polish, English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Slovak and Russian). Moreover, the integration of tourists and residents is supported by a functionality that enables translation of basic phrases between those languages.

The software allows users to direct the content to those sightseeing on foot, by bicycle or car. The user can choose the type of tour from among the following topics: 'Mountains', 'For children', 'Trail of the First War' [World War I trail], 'Actively in the Summer' [Summer/Winter activities (depending on the season)], 'Sacrum' [religious sites] or 'Tourist Routes'. Following the choice of topic, the available content is filtered according to the indicated preferences and divided into the following categories: news, points of interest (POIs), events and tourist routes. The user can view this content displayed in the form of a list, sorted chronologically (news and events) or alphabetically (tourist places and routes) as well as POIs marked on the map (Fig. 1).

In accordance with the assumptions of the project, an important part of the application is cooperation with multimedia tools to present the tourist offer of the region (VisitMalopolska, 2020a). The basic approaches in the area of new technologies applied within the VisitMalopolska program are:

- beacons – sensors using bluetooth technology to communicate with a device equipped with compatible software (Manczak, Sanak-Kosmowska, Bajak, 2019),

Table 1. Stages of implementation of m_MSIT

Specification	Key tasks
1 st stage	expansion of the system for sharing and presenting resources related to tourism and regional heritage by creating a web portal and mobile application with a travel planner, as well as purchasing and programming beacons connecting to this software
2 nd stage	collecting and sharing tourist information (especially related to bicycle tourism) through the m_MSIT digital system
3 rd stage	expansion of the software through the use of 360° films (in 2D and 3D technology) made at selected tourist attractions from the Małopolska region

Source: VisitMalopolska (2020a).

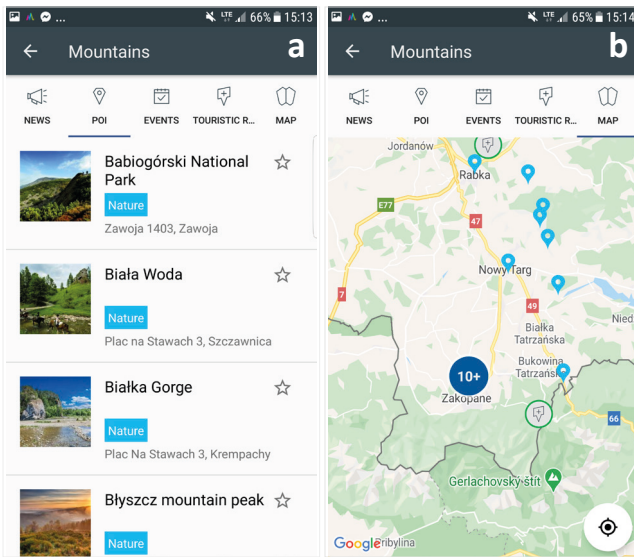


Figure 1. A screen print from the VisitMalopolska application showing a list of attractions related to the theme of mountains in the Małopolska region as a list (a) and on a map (b)

Source: own research

- augmented reality – a visual system which applies information and images from a computer environment (Peddie, 2017),
- artificial intelligence – a set of different technologies that combine data, computing power and algorithms by acquiring, processing and interpreting them to achieve a goal.

Beacons enable the transmission of information, the microlocation of people and places, and the collection of data about their users (Manczak, Sanak-Kosmowska,

Bajak, 2019). It is worth noting that in 2016–2019, as part of the m_MSIT project, 1,000 beacons were installed in 83 locations in the Małopolska region. Once within range, the user receives the relevant content related to the place visited (VisitMalopolska, 2020b). The VisitMalopolska application also uses augmented reality allowing the user to connect reality with the virtual world through simulations, projects, illustrations and content (Peddie, 2017). As a result, it is possible to gain automatic access to content related to the selected tourist attraction after placing it in the camera lens of a mobile device (Fig. 2a).

Artificial intelligence systems can adapt their behavior by analyzing their previous approaches and can learn using a numerical model (European Commission). The VisitMalopolska software allows users' behavior (e.g. places viewed, events, routes or planned trips) to be observed and analyzed in order to suggest tourist attractions that they are more likely to actually enjoy (Fig. 2b).

5. EVALUATION OF THE FUNCTIONALITIES OF THE VISITMALOPOLSKA MOBILE APPLICATION

The quality of mobile applications is analysed using various criteria and one of them is their functionality. Functionality is defined as the availability of certain features within the selected mobile application and can be measured from the functional requirements specified for the research undertaken (Zborowski, Łuczak, 2016).

The main goal in creating the VisitMalopolska mobile application is to enable independent sightseeing, as well as to facilitate access to tourist information about the region (VisitMalopolska, 2020b). The implementation of this intention possible thanks to the application functionalities and carefully selected thematically-divided content (Fig. 3). To work properly, the application requires Bluetooth on the phone and by activating its GPS location. In addition, the augmented reality function in the software uses access to the device's camera. As a result, the user gets full access to all functionalities within the application (Table 2).

The functionalities of the VisitMalopolska application can be divided into four categories according to their purpose:

- category I (tourist attractions) – 'news', 'events', 'places', 'thematic modules', 'bicycle touring';
- category II (tools supporting trip planning) – 'map', 'travel planner', 'tourist routes', 'favorites';
- category III (tools used during a tourist trip) – 'phrase-book', 'postcard', 'outdoor games', 'augmented reality', 'virtual assistant';
- category IV (application and user safety tools) – 'emergency numbers';

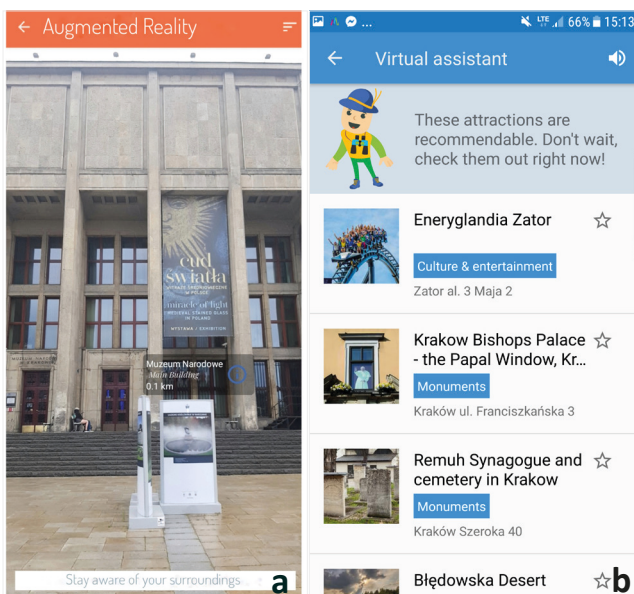


Figure 2. A screen print from the VisitMalopolska application showing functions related to augmented reality (a) and artificial intelligence (b)

Source: own research

Table 2. Overview of VisitMalopolska app functionalities

Feature	Specification
News	Notifications about events, programs and initiatives implemented in the Małopolska region
Events	Information on regional cultural, scientific and sporting events
POIs	Specification and description of regional tourist attractions
Favorites page	A list of content of particular interest to the user
Map	Map of the region with marked tourist attractions
Travel planner	A tool to help the user arrange their own tour plan
Thematic modules	In-app content grouped by selected topics
Tourist routes	Suggestions for tours of the region
Bicycle touring	Cycling content
Phrasebook	Dictionary of phrases useful for travel in eight languages
Postcard	Virtual postcard wizard
Field games	Routes where points and prizes are awarded
Augmented reality	Overlay with information about tourist attractions visible in the camera on the user's phone
Emergency telephone numbers	List of emergency numbers
Virtual Assistant	Tourist attraction suggestions based on user behavior within the app
Settings	Tool to manually customize the application to individual needs

Source: own research.

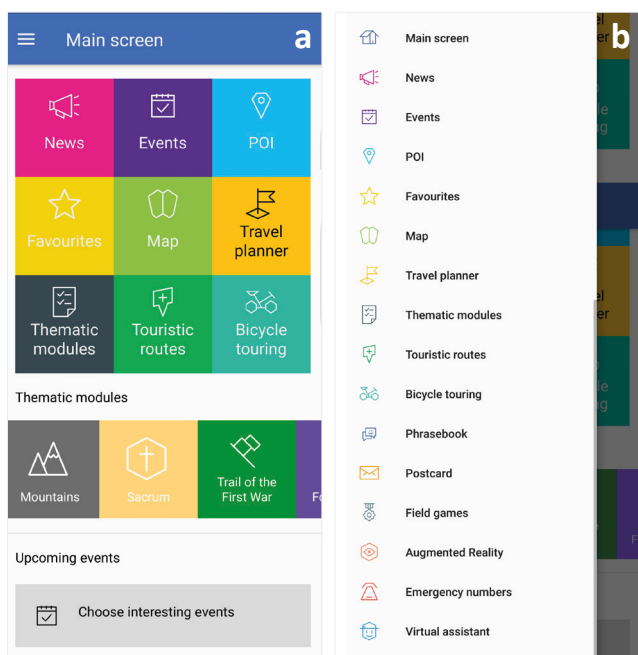


Figure 3. A screen print of the home page (a) and side menu (b) on the VisitMalopolska application
Source: own research

- the cognitive tourist – oriented towards learning about culture, nature and/or people;
- the integrative tourist – focused on group experiences;
- a task-oriented tourist – willing to take specific action;
- a high-performance tourist – oriented towards physical activity and adventure;
- a tourist for entertainment – seeker of entertainment and passive recreation;
- a contemplative tourist – interested in religious sites, pilgrims;
- the health tourist – focused on caring for health.

In order to assess the usability of particular functionalities for different target groups, the point method was used (Table 3) but it was decided not to include the category of tools concerning application performance and user safety. On the basis of the evaluation, it was assumed that for users, functionalities from the category of tools supporting travel planning may be the most important (30.5 points). Other important functionalities include the thematic distribution of content (35 points), favorites (34 points), tourist routes (31 points), maps (29 points) and POIs (29 points). In addition, features such as the travel planner (28 points), events (27 points), virtual assistant (26 points) and field games (25 points) may be useful for most target groups. It can be noted that the cognitive tourist is perhaps the main target audience of the application (66 points), and tourists for entertainment (61 points) and task-oriented tourists (56 points) should also be considered as particularly important categories of user.

Point evaluation was combined with user reviews of the software available at Google Play and the App Store.

All the functionalities of the application are focused on providing information support for tourist trips in the Małopolska region. Their wide range makes the mobile software useful for different types of tourists, including those who prefer both passive and active tourism.

Characteristic target groups can be distinguished and categorized based on the types of tourists proposed by Przeclawski (1979):

Table 3. Target audiences of the VisitMalopolska app

Feature	Tourism							Total
	cognitive	integrative	task-oriented	high-performance	tourist for entertainment	contemplative	health tourist	
Category I – tourist attractions								
News	4	4	3	2	5	3	3	24
Events	5	5	3	2	5	4	3	27
POIs	5	2	3	5	4	5	5	29
Thematic modules	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	35
Bicycle touring	5	3	5	5	2	1	1	22
Average number of points in category I								27.4
Category II – tools to support travel planning								
Map	5	2	5	5	2	5	5	29
Travel planner	5	3	5	5	4	3	3	28
Tourist routes	5	2	5	5	4	5	5	31
Favorites	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	34
Average number of points in category II								30.5
Category III – tools used during a trip								
Phrasebook	5	5	3	1	5	1	1	21
Postcard	2	5	1	1	5	1	1	16
Field games	5	5	5	3	5	1	1	25
Augmented Reality	5	1	3	2	5	1	1	18
Virtual Assistant	5	3	5	4	5	2	2	26
Average number of points in category III								21.2
TOTAL	66	49	56	50	61	42	41	365

Source: own research.

According to data from the first store, the software has been downloaded more than 5,000 times² since its release in June 2019. The evaluation involved 26 users and the rating was 3.7/5.0. AppStore does not provide information on the number of application downloads and the small number of reviews (4) indicates that it is probably lower than for Google Play. The owners of devices with iOS rated the application as 3.8/5.0. The application received a total of 30 ratings with an average of 3.71 and the most frequently cited advantages of the software were:

- interesting information available,
- frequent content updates,
- transparent features,
- useful suggestions.

The catalogue of reported disadvantages included:

- lack of information on selected tourist attractions in Galicia,
- technical problems with the display of some of the content, for example maps on some devices,

- the application continues running in the background, it is not possible to disable it.

Importantly, negative feedback on the information available in the application are rare in relation to positive feedback. It is worth noting that over the 18 months since the VisitMalopolska software was made available, the application has been systematically developed. Observations made between September and December 2020 indicate that the database of tourist attractions has been extended at a dynamic pace, often in line with the expectations of users indicated in the comments. The biggest disadvantage of the software are the technical difficulties occurring during its use. Undoubtedly, these kinds of issue should be troubleshooted by the body responsible for the application (Office of the Marshal of the Małopolska Region).

On the basis of the assessment, it was concluded that the VisitMalopolska application supports the tourist in the realization of their travel plans of various types. The software presents ways of organizing tourist

travel in the region in an attractive way and gives users an opportunity to get to know places of interest and combine them on their own or according to the suggestions of the application into a route. In addition, the user becomes familiar with cultural events taking place in the region. On the basis of the analysis, it was noted that due to the variety of available uses, the software can be considered as:

- a tourist guide to the region,
- a travel planner,
- a newsletter on events taking place in Małopolska,
- a gamification platform,
- a system that allows virtual travel in Małopolska.

It was concluded that the VisitMalopolska mobile application is an example of a comprehensive tool and it is able to meet the needs of a varied target audience. Importantly, the number of available functionalities and the number of described places, routes and events means it can be assumed that it is an innovative project among mobile applications supporting the development of tourism in a particular region in Poland.

6. CONCLUSION

The increase in the number of mobile device users is conducive to creating mobile tourist applications. The wireless communication provided by smartphones allows users to stay connected at almost any time and anywhere. As a result, mobile software can be a tool to constantly support the tourist while traveling and for this reason, more and more regions offer dedicated platforms for different kinds of tourists.

It is worth noting that comprehensive tools that combine many functionalities and provide access to a wide range of interesting content are particularly important. In order to decide to use a mobile application, the user must see the real benefits of using it, while at the same time, it is important that the software is intuitive and easy to use. The VisitMalopolska mobile application can be considered to meet these objectives. However, it may be an issue that the application has been downloaded so far only a few thousand times [the figure is estimated by the authors as between 6,000 and 7,000 downloads]. Against the background of tourism in the region, the size of which in 2019 was estimated at 17.86 million (Borkowski et al., 2020), this is an insignificant number. It should also be noted that the application has only been available since June 2019 and, importantly, since March 2020, the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic have been in force, which has greatly restricted tourism. Perhaps after these are lifted, interest in the software will increase, and so it should be developed in order to meet the requirements of potential users.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the content available in the application is updated almost daily and additionally supplemented on the basis of artificial intelligence. As a result, the program can be personalized on an ongoing basis. Such tools undoubtedly contribute to an increase in the perception of their usefulness, as well as to generating a belief in the attractiveness of a region's offer. In the future, this may translate into the effectiveness of initiated or planned promotional activities. On the basis of this discussion, it has been concluded that the VisitMałopolska application supports the tourist in making trips of various types, an example of a comprehensive tool that is capable of meeting the needs of different tourism segments.

The scope of the research as presented in the article is limited, connected mostly with use of the point method which is subject to a certain bias. However, the results are preliminary. This work will provide inspiration to conduct a broader analysis of the software based on quantitative and qualitative methods and the results of these studies will be summarized with observations made by the authors of the article. The activities proposed will involve a comprehensive analysis, including the formulation of constructive research objectives. It is also planned to make a comparison of VisitMalopolska with other applications for tourists available on the Polish market.

ENDNOTES

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² As of December 7, 2020.

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A CLUSTER APPROACH TO THE FORMATION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN WESTERN UKRAINIAN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

Vasyl Kyfyak^a, Olexander Kyfyak^b

^a Chernivtsi Institute of Trade and Economics, of Kyiv National University of Trade and Economics, Department of Management, International Economics and Tourism; e-mail: tourbuc@ukr.net

^b Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Faculty of Economics, Department of Marketing, Innovations and Regional Development; e-mail: o.kyfyak@chnu.edu.ua

ABSTRACT

The research aims at exploring western Ukrainian cross-border regions where many natural recreational resources, historical, cultural and architectural monuments, a developed transport infrastructure, strong ethnic ties and wide opportunities for tourism flows from the cross-border regions of neighboring countries are found. To achieve this goal, the authors studied foreign experience, in particular the processes of the creation and operation of clusters in Romania and Poland which helped to identify certain stages of development of tourism destinations based on a cluster approach. Comparison of the activities of already established tourism clusters in Ukraine and abroad has helped to establish a list of major business structures that might become a part of a cluster and be involved in the formation of a tourism destination. Based on an analysis of natural and recreational potential, and cultural and historical heritage in western Ukrainian cross-border regions, possible profiles of tourism destinations, and the interest of tourist and other enterprises to be brought together into tourism clusters, are determined, and this has been confirmed by a survey

KEYWORDS

cluster, approach, cross-border regions, tourism destinations, formation of destinations

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1. INTRODUCTION

Western Ukrainian cross-border regions in which the tourism organizations that produce typical services, and the businesses that offer related services, can successfully operate, use different approaches to the development of small and medium-sized businesses, create new jobs, increase revenues for local budgets, ensure investment attractiveness, etc. It is strategically important for companies operating in these areas, where creating a tourism destination is possible, to provide tourism products with basic and related services at a particular destination for an additional fee. Awareness and understanding of the need for cooperation with

other enterprises in the future destination, action on maintaining contacts with related organizations involved in the formation of a tourism product, is the key to the sustainable on-going operation of individual businesses.

At the same time, the formation of tourism destinations in western Ukrainian cross-border regions has its own characteristics and requires the definition of clear goals, priority areas for the tourism development profiles of future destinations, development of methodology of which one aspect can be a cluster approach. All this determines the relevance of this academic research.

The purpose of this article is to study the possibilities offered by using a cluster approach in the formation

of tourism destinations in western Ukrainian cross-border regions based on studying foreign experience and determining the individual stages of an approach for making tourism destinations, including tourism potential analysis and cluster model development taking into account a cross-border location.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many foreign and Ukrainian academics consider effective internal management of available resources to be decisive in the development of an area. Issues of regional development, investment attraction, resource provision, the formation of competitive advantages, economic zoning and state regional economic policy in new economic conditions are covered in the works of Algieri, Aquino, Succurro (2018); Beltramo, Rostagno, Bonadonna (2018); Bobrovska, Krushelnytska, Latinin, Lypovska, Dreshpak (2017); Melnik (2018); Mazaraki (2019); Oteshova et al. (2020); Stasiak (2007); Varnalius (2005), etc.

Thus Varnalius, in particular, believes that the resource potential of a region is “the main basis for the formation of a mechanism for the realization of its economic interests” (Varnalius, 2005, p. 78). While analyzing the resources of an area Melnik distinguishes “labor, natural resources (water, land, mineral, biological, forest), products, infrastructure, finance” (Melnik, 2018, p. 9). Gerasymenko and a group of academics confirm this, paying attention to the natural resource potential of an area which means “all available types of resources – mineral, land, water, biological, recreational, biosphere, etc.” (Gerasymenko, 2016, p. 68). The works of these authors consider the theoretical and methodological issues of resource usage in the area of their development and management, the planning of economic activities, the implementation of innovations, etc.

Porter, an American academic, has made a significant contribution to the use of the cluster approach to the development of regions. He defines clusters as “geographically concentrated groups of interdependent companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, as well as organizations related to their activities (e.g. universities, standardization agencies, trade associations) in certain areas that compete, but at the same time conduct common activities” (Porter, 2005, pp. 205–206). He describes in detail the structural factors determining the intensity of competition, as well as the development of the industry and competitive strategy at different stages of its evolution (Porter, 2016). Analyzing the organization of productive forces and their relationship with the concept of competitiveness, Porter found that the most competitive multinational companies are not located

haphazardly, but tend to concentrate in one country or region due to the desire to generate synergies through interaction with other firms.

A cluster is formed exactly on such a basis: a set of firms and industries, interacting with each other and contributing to the growth of each other’s competitiveness. As Yalçinkaya and Güzel point out, “relationships and connections of a tourism cluster are expected to be more active and complicated, utilizing network and its advantages are unavoidable for tourism companies” (Yalçinkaya, Güzel, 2019, p. 33).

Clustered enterprises are the most efficient. Thus, Naumanen emphasizes that clusters are a geographical concentration or group of closely located and interconnected enterprises in an industry (Naumanen, 2019). Experience across the world shows that “there are almost three times as many global frontier firms in specialised clusters than in other locations” (Naumanen, 2019, p. 5).

Investigating the contribution of tourism to the economic sustainability of a region and its integration into a regional development strategy, a group of non-Ukrainian academics, Bellini, Grillo, Lazzeri and Pasquinelli, conducted an analysis focusing on the development of “smart specialization strategy”. They identified the potential relevance of tourism as a factor for regional economic stability.

Regarding the use of a cluster approach in tourism, the research of Novelli, Schmitz and Spencer is important. In their research “Networks, clusters and innovations in tourism: the Great Britain experience” they emphasize that clusters develop innovative opportunities for small and middle-sized businesses and ensure their competitiveness in a tourism environment. They emphasize clusters should not be seen as a simple and spontaneous process due to the nature of the participating enterprises, but as a very complex process involving intensive stakeholder cooperation (Novelli, Schmitz, Spencer, 2006).

The academic and analytical report “The development of cross-border cooperation” released by the M. Doli-shniy Institute of Regional Research of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kravtsiv, 2015), as well as the academic researches of Benner (2017) are devoted to a regional and innovative development of tourism based on a cluster approach. Research in this area was also conducted by Korzh and Basyuk (2017), Mikula, Matvyeyev and Tymeckho (2014) and Odinkova (2019) and others.

At the same time, the use of foreign experience in the formation of tourism destinations based on a cluster approach in cross-border regions, research into their tourism potential, cluster model development and approaches to tourism destination formation, remain unresolved and require further research.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following scientific methods and approaches were used in the article:

- analysis and synthesis of tourism clusters in Poland and Romania, the determination of natural and recreational potential along with the cultural and historical heritage of western Ukrainian cross-border regions, which contributed to the establishment of certain stages in an approach to tourism destinations and the identification of possible destination profiles;
- comparison of established tourism cluster activity in Ukraine and in neighboring countries, to establish a list of the main business structures that might be part of a cluster and become involved in the formation of tourism destinations;
- a survey to identify the interest of tourism business structures in western Ukrainian cross-border regions to the creation of tourism clusters;
- generalization, to determine the advantages of the western Ukrainian border regions in the creation of tourism destinations and the use of a cluster approach;
- modeling, in the development of the project model for the “Tourism Bukovyna” (Ukrainian: *Туристична Буковина*) cluster to become a basis for the formation of tourism destinations, and to provide diverse and innovative tourism development in western Ukrainian cross-border areas, etc.

4. RESULTS

The formation of tourism destinations in cross-border areas should be based on determining the uniqueness and attractiveness of natural and human tourism resources, opportunities for their use, analysis of general and special infrastructure, marketing, staffing and financial support, taking into account foreign experience and cross-border management, while making good managerial decisions.

Emphasizing the effective management of resources, Melnik states that

The basis of local community resource management should be a clear policy of local government on resource supply, resource use and resource efficiency, based on modern academic approaches, taking into account its resource capabilities. It should be based on certain basic principles, such as import substitution, balance; efficiency, synergy, economy, structure optimization, complementarity,; and the basis for an appropriate management mechanism (Melnik, 2018, p. 18).

and she offers a mechanism for managing the resources of an area with a complex matrix of interconnected elements.

Regarding the formation of tourism destinations in cross-border regions based on a cluster approach, and the need to create and operate clusters as a tool to increase the competitiveness of tourism destination products, there are features, goals and priorities. “From the viewpoint of the tourism sector, the nonhomogeneity of tourism products renders tourism clusters remarkably different from those in other economic industries. In other words, tourism clusters contain many complementary components not only from the private sector, but also from public institutions” (Yalçinkaya, Güzel, 2019, p. 28).

Defining a tourism destination as a geographical area that has particular borders and can attract and meet the needs of various groups of tourists, the creation of a tourism cluster will help to unite enterprises and organizations involved in tourism activities within the local community and focusing on end-user medium-sized enterprises.

The study of foreign experience, in particular, the study of the creation and functioning of clusters in Romania and Poland bordering on western regions, shows a large number of enterprises and organizations united in various forms and structures. Thus, up to 1 April 2020, 76 cluster initiatives were registered in the protocols of the Directorate for Industrial Policy and Competitiveness of Romanian Ministry of Economy, including 47 that are members of the cluster association, CLUSTERO, which is the representative body for the Romanian clusters that together united more than 2,000 enterprises, 189,000 employees and had a turnover of 43.6 billion lei (*Situatia clusterelor din Romania*, 2020)¹.

Regarding the creation of tourism clusters, the study of their development in Poland confirms the integration of bodies working in the field of tourism in related sectors. They also play a significant role in activating local communities and transforming settlements and districts into tourism areas and increasing their competitiveness in the tourism market (Roman, 2013).

Analysis of tourism clusters in Poland: “Przemysł – Tourism Cluster” (Przemysł, 2016) and Małopolska Tourism Cluster (Kusa, Peszko, 2015); and in Romania: the Carpathian Tourism Cluster (*Carpathian Tourism Cluster Romania*, 2018) and the Medical Cluster “Health of Romania” (*Clusterul Medical Sanatate Romania*, 2019); confirmed the need to develop an approach where the main task is the step-by-step design of a tourism cluster and the separate stages of an approach to the formation of tourism destinations in the western Ukrainian border regions. Thus, in particular, the cluster approach to the formation of tourism destinations in cross-border areas has the following stages:

1. Diagnostic – which assesses its ecological status, natural recreational resources, cultural and historical

heritage, existing tourism infrastructure, information, finance and staffing, the business environment, and the interest of government, business and community structures in creating a tourism destination based on a cluster approach.

2. Analytical – presented by analyzing the possibilities of combining tourism and other enterprises and organizations of cross-border regions into a cluster, studying the demand for tourism services of the destination and the formation of tourist flows from the cross-border areas of neighboring countries, organizing cross-border cooperation between tourism destinations and evaluating possible projects and participants.
3. Preparatory – which includes the development of the concept of a tourism destination based on a cluster approach and the necessary data system for the analysis of features and basic characteristics, conditions and factors of development for cross-border regions.
4. Organizational and structural – which provides for the creation of necessary coordination bodies, a system of measures and management mechanisms, taking into account the participation of cross-border areas in Euroregions and other cross-border bodies.
5. Strategic and prognostic – which involves the development of strategy and for forecasting the effectiveness of a tourism destination, the enterprises and organizations united in a cluster and in general the social, economic and environmental development of the cross-border area.
6. Control-corrective – which allows correlation of preliminary results with the goals set, to generalize positive experience, and to carry out regulation and adjustment.

It is important to note that the development of the concept of a tourism destination based on a cluster approach should be based entirely on the paradigm of sustainable development and its strategy which means that all enterprises and organizations in a tourism cluster must adapt to change by modifying management, marketing and other functional programs.

Comparison of the activities of established tourism clusters in Ukraine “Lvivske Opillya (Lviv region)” (*Na Lvivshchyni zvyayovsya...*, 2020) and “Kamyanets” (center – Kamyanets-Podilsky) (*Turystychnyy klaster*, 2020) and of the above-mentioned tourism clusters in Poland and Romania, helped to establish a list of major business structures that can be part of a cluster and be involved in the formation of a tourism destination.

First, there are the powerful tour operators who produce, sell and export, travel services outside the region and the country.

Second, the network of enterprises and organizations that produce typical tourism services and supply them

to the leading operators in the region and tourists as additional services.

Third, there are various organizations that provide key tourism enterprises with qualified personnel, financial resources, appropriate infrastructure, etc.

At the same time, it is established that the main reasons for combining these and other enterprises into a cluster are advantages for both enterprises and tourism destinations. Namely:

1. Expanding ties, mutual assistance and cooperation between many autonomous bodies, achieving synergies.
2. Increasing the productivity of fixed assets and increasing the ability to generate and maintain a competitive advantage.
3. The formation of an innovative environment that enhances the competitiveness of enterprises in the cluster by reducing costs and optimizing the value of tourism products at the destination.
4. Reducing the degree of risk, increasing the quality of service and improving the image of the destination area.
5. Increasing the investment attractiveness of the tourism destination, its management efficiency and marketing activities, by creating a new brand, combining capital, knowledge and skills.

Thus, the cluster approach to the formation of tourism destinations helps to unite cooperating and competing bodies within a specific organizational structure that has common goals and objectives that need to be fulfilled at a certain time and place.

Western Ukrainian cross-border regions, which include Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Chernivtsi, have borders with the EU, have a high potential for the development of many types of tourism. Thus, in particular, these are the regions richest in mineral waters, where there are more than 800 springs and wells with a total daily flow of 57 500 m³. To date, the operational reserves of therapeutic mineral waters have been approved in only 13 places at 4600 m³/day (Mazur, 2005). In the territories of these regions there is 19.6% of nature recreational potential (NRP) of the total NRP of Ukraine (Rudenko et al., 2019). In terms of western Ukrainian border areas, the NRP distributes as follows (Table 1).

As can be seen from Table 1, the largest NRP figure is found in Zakarpattia and Lviv regions with 43 and 30%, respectively, for sanatorium treatment resources, a significant factor influencing the formation of tourism destinations for recreation and health.

The situation is even better in western Ukrainian cross-border regions with cultural and historical heritage (Table 2). Within these regions are four out of seven Ukrainian UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Cultural and historical heritage of national importance in western Ukrainian cross-border regions, as noted by

Table 1. Natural and recreational potential of western Ukrainian regions

Western Ukraine cross-border regions	Nature recreational potential		
	% of total NRP in Ukraine	including %	
		Recreational and tourism resources	Sanatorium treatment resources
Volyn	1.557	80	20
Zakarpattia	7.036	57	43
Ivano-Frankivsk	3.929	84	16
Lviv	5.377	70	30
Chernivtsi	1.744	79	21
Total	19.6	74	26

Source: Rudenko et al. (2019, p. 198).

Table 2. Cultural and historical heritage of national importance in Western Ukrainian cross-border regions

Western Ukrainian cross-border regions	Total number of attractions	Including monuments of national importance in:				
		history	monumental art	archeology	architecture	total
Volyn	1,961	7	1	16	200	224
Zakarpattia	2,051	0	2	11	137	150
Ivano-Frankivsk	3,947	2	1	10	149	162
Lviv	8,441	7	1	14	794	816
Chernivtsi	2,246	2	0	18	112	132
Total in Western Ukrainian cross-border regions	18,646	18	5	69	1,392	1,484
Total in Ukraine	131,293	142	44	418	3,541	4,145

Source: Polyvach (2012, p. 97).

Polyvach was "The distribution of cultural heritage sites of national importance in terms of administrative areas is uneven. The regions with the highest number of monuments per 1000 km² include Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia, Ternopil, Khmelnytsky, Chernivtsi, Volyn regions, Kyiv and Sevastopol" (Polyvach, 2012, p. 97).

Table 2 data show that only the Lviv region accounts for about 20% of monuments of national importance from all Ukrainian indicators, and in general the presence of such monuments in western Ukrainian cross-border regions is 35.8% of the total in sightseeing destinations at a regional level.

A survey conducted in October–December 2019 among managers of 140 travel companies and related companies in the western Ukrainian cross-border regions where tourism destinations can be established, gives grounds for claiming a great interest in creating tourism clusters. Thus, according to the results of the survey, out of 632 managers of travel and related companies, 427 would support the work of tourism clusters, business incubators and other regional bodies. Another 115 consider it less expedient to work in such associations, as it limits the activities of individual enterprises; the rest stated the need to clarify the benefits of working in a cluster.

Many academics understand the formation and development of tourism destinations exclusively by their impact on the economic condition of the area where the destination is established. In particular, this is the growth of gross regional product which, if it is a regional destination, means increasing incomes, creating new jobs, building infrastructure and other similar variables. At the same time, foreign experience and our research confirms that the effective functioning of tourism destinations in addition to economic indicators involves increased life expectancy, lower crime rates, higher education and health care, culture, sports and a number of others.

Therefore, tourism clusters should be formed not only from enterprises related to providing services to visitors, tourists, locals, but hotels, catering, transport, travel and tour companies, souvenir manufacturers and other bodies, along with individuals involved in the production and distribution of typical services located in the tourism destination. However, other enterprises and organizations, local and state authorities, educational, medical, cultural, sports, media, law enforcement, public association and others which are not related to tourism, should be fully involved. This approach is markedly different from existing concepts of tourism clusters, which, in our opinion, have limited capabilities.

Based on the example of Chernivtsi region (Bukovyna) a draft concept of tourism development in the region and a draft model of the “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster will be the basis for the formation of a tourism destination that will provide a diverse and innovative nature of tourism development in the South-Western cross-border region of Ukraine.

Chernivtsi Regional State Administration has identified six “tourism magnets” (*Chernivets'ka ODA vyznachyla*, 2020), which include the historic center of Chernivtsi with the Residence of the Metropolitans of Bukovina and Dalmatia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site (*Residence of Bukovinian and Dalmatian Metropolitans*, 2011), the Regional Museum of Architecture and Life, the Khotyn Fortress, Pamir Radar Station, a cave monastery in the village of Halytsia (Ukrainian: Галиця) and a world center for Old Believers in the village of Bila Krynytsia (Ukrainian: Біла Криниця). These and other tourism sites of the Chernivtsi region are known throughout the world as monuments of culture, architecture, history, religious pilgrimage and contribute to great tourism demand not only in Ukraine but also from abroad. Each of them is located

in a different district and together practically unite the whole territory of the region, justifying the formation of a regional tourism destination and the creation of the “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster.

The general purpose of the “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster is to provide an innovative type of destination formation which will contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development of cross-border region. The project model of “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster in Chernivtsi region is presented on Fig 1.

Offered in Fig. 1, the “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster model allows for a concentration within Chernivtsi region, as a regional tourism destination, a range of interconnected enterprises and organizations engaged in design, development, promotion, sale and provision of typical tourism services. The association of cross-border organizations, cross-border infrastructure enterprises, local and state authorities, other business and community structures can support the field of tourism.

The peculiarity of this approach to the formation of tourism destination is that it involves international cross-border missions in which the Chernivtsi region takes a significant part.

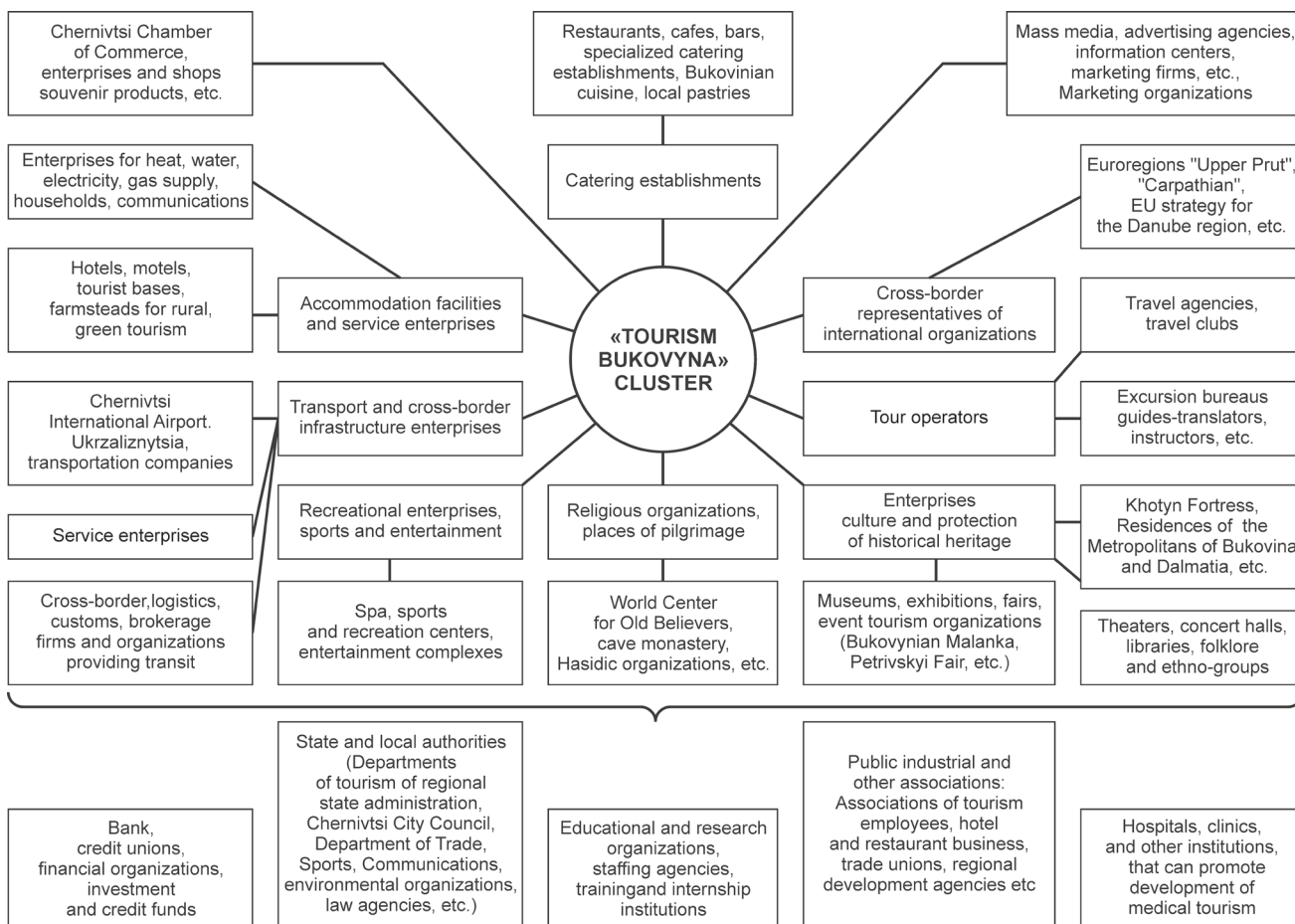


Figure 1. Project for the “Tourism Bukovyna” cluster model
Source: developed by the authors

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the results of the research we can draw the following conclusions:

A cluster approach to the formation of tourism destinations in western Ukrainian cross-border regions, which have unique tourism resources, largely depends on those regional features which form both favorable conditions for tourism development and impose certain restrictions on the implementation of cluster initiatives. Therefore, in the period of planning and creating a tourism cluster and in the formation of destinations of particular importance, the decisions of regional authorities which are aware of strengths and weaknesses, can create attractive conditions for tourism and recreation, based on local tourism resources, available infrastructure, opportunities for tourist flows, finance and staffing, etc.

A cluster approach to tourism destinations and a proposed cluster model will promote the development of the following processes in regional economies:

- unification of business, government and public structures; institutions of science, education, culture, sports and others which will ensure the diverse and innovative nature of tourism development in western Ukrainian cross-border regions;
- an increase in the number of tourists, the volume of tourism services and the rate of regional economic growth;
- increasing the competitiveness of tourism products and the quality of tourism services;
- an increase in the volume of exports of tourism services to the cross-border regions of neighboring countries and a qualitative improvement of structure;
- increasing the investment attractiveness of western Ukrainian regions and the development of general border and special tourism infrastructure;
- the development of culture, sports, science and an improvement in the quality of education;
- creation of an innovation-oriented business environment.

A cluster approach to the formation of tourism destinations is a comprehensive approach for taking advantage of regional opportunities, and is an effective use of the resource potential of trends in the development of tourism.

6. FURTHER RESEARCH

Regarding prospects for further development, it would be important to determine the principles of tourism destination formation based on a cluster approach,

SWOT-analysis as a method of assessing internal and external factors, PEST-analysis to identify political, economic, social and technological aspects, and research into the influence of coronavirus on the processes of integration in tourism clusters.

ENDNOTE










- ¹ 10.16 billion US dollars, as of June 13, 2020.

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TOWS ANALYSIS FOR SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT
AND STATE SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC: THE ARAL SEA REGION OF UZBEKISTAN

Olimjon Saidmamatov^a , Umidjon Matyakubov^b , Elbek Khodjaniyazov^c ,
Jonathon Day^d , Ergash Ibadullaev^e , Sanat Chuponov^f , Dilmurad Bekjanov^g ,
Murodjon Matniyozov^h , Bunyod Matyusupovⁱ 

^a Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0046-5521>; e-mail: saidolimjon@gmail.com

^b Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4888-3044>; e-mail: umidjan.mat@mail.ru

^c Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2937-3148>;
e-mail: khelbek1990@gmail.com

^d Purdue University, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8207-9650>;
e-mail: gjday@purdue.edu

^e Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7059-2510>;
e-mail: ergashibadullaev90@gmail.com

^f Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7388-9224>;
e-mail: chuponovsanat@gmail.com

^g Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8851-2240>;
e-mail: dilmurad.bekjanov@gmail.com

^h Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6233-2383>;
e-mail: mmurodali.matniyozov@gmail.com

ⁱ Urgench State University, Faculty of Tourism and Economics; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8094-2126>;
e-mail: bunyodbest@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Evaluating the current ecotourism situation in the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan and offering strategies for its sustainable development are the main objectives of the study. The threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths (TOWS) analysis was applied to identify the required management strategies. The article aims to review the literature on ecotourism promotion in the Aral Sea region. Based on TOWS, the results show that state support during the pandemic should be strategically coordinated to secure the sustainability of the ecotourism industry in Uzbekistan.

KEYWORDS

ecotourism, sustainable development, pandemic, Aral Sea region, Uzbekistan, exploratory study

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1. INTRODUCTION

The number of worldwide tourists has reached 1.5 billion which makes the sector a truly global force for economic growth and development, driving the creation of more and better jobs and serving as a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurship (UNWTO, 2020) while

export earnings generated by tourism in Uzbekistan have grown to 1.7 trillion USD (UNWTO, 2019). This was believed to increase further in future years but the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the situation dramatically and now tourism is said to have been affected more than other sectors. Since January 2020, various restrictions have been imposed on visits to tourism

destinations. According to the second WTO report dated 28 April, 100% of worldwide destinations have had pandemic related travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2020).

The spread of the coronavirus pandemic has had a profound negative impact on the sustainable development of tourism, as well as other sectors of economies. According to the data, the number of foreign tourists globally in January–August 2020 reduced by 700 million compared to the same period in 2019. Losses from the export of tourist services amounted to 730 billion USD. Damage caused by the pandemic is eight times greater on tourism than the damage caused by the global financial and economic crisis in 2009 (UNWTO, 2020).

Globally, many emerging economies rely largely on tourist spending (Asadpourian, Rahimian, Gholamrezai, 2020) which accounts for a significant contribution to the GDP of those countries (Azam, Alam, Hafeez, 2018). Notably, Uzbekistan is making rapid reforms in the tourism sector by cancelling visa requirements, and establishing direct flights with major European cities. It is known that the benefits of an activity cannot guarantee its sustainability and concerns are raised about what the economy wants to generate in return. In other words, what is going to happen to the host community and environment as tourist revenue increases?

In recent years, the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan has emerged as an attractive new destination for incoming foreign and domestic tourists. The development of tourism in the Aral Sea region contributes to employment and income opportunities for local people while the generated revenue can be further used to update the infrastructure in the territory (Saidmamatow, Rudenko, Pfister, Koziel, 2020). From a practical point of view, as of January 1, 2021, over 1500 tour operators are registered in Uzbekistan but only 4% of them are registered in the Khorezm region and 2% in Karakalpakstan. This means that most of the incoming investment via tourism is staying in the capital city of Tashkent and Samarkand the second-largest city leading to an imbalance in regional economic growth as well as poor destination management, marketing and the logistics of tourism in general in the Aral Sea region (UzbekTourism, 2020).

The research gap that motivated the authors to write is that there are very few academic articles available revealing the situation of ecotourism development, challenges and opportunities in Central Asia, and in the Aral Sea region which is an ecological catastrophe. The stakeholder engagement map and TOWS analysis generate strategies to support local entrepreneurs to take the lead in the tourism market of Uzbekistan. The research question is to assess the current situation of ecotourism development in the Aral Sea region and the role of state support is elaborated to strengthen the economic conditions of tourism businesses during the pandemic. The research methodology includes TOWS analysis (matrix), leading to the development

of a stakeholder engagement map, as well as a cluster approach. The research hypothesis is that the development of ecotourism in remote parts of Uzbekistan (i.e., Aral Sea region) is highly correlated with the state support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism contributes to strengthening foreign exchange rates, driving regional development, directly supporting several types of jobs and businesses and develops many local communities. The tourism sector generates 4.4% of GDP and 21.5% of service exports in OECD countries. These shares are much higher for several OECD countries. For example, tourism in Spain contributes 11.8% of GDP while travel represents 52.3% of total service exports, in Mexico these figures are 8.7% and 78.3%, in Iceland 8.6% and 47.7%, in Portugal 8.0% and 51.1%, and in France 7.4% and 22.2% (UNWTO, 2020).

Ecotourism is one of the most important activities that can conserve natural and cultural resources and bring economic benefits to both local people and national government at the same time. A successful plan for ecotourism is a function of developing precise goals and criteria (Demir, Esbah, Akgun, 2016). It is a fact that ecotourism, if developed sustainably, can have a less negative environmental impact, reduce adverse externalities, increase cultural and environmental integrity, make resource management more effective, and bring extra financial wellbeing (UNEP, 2013).

Ecotourism is about integrating conservation, communities and sustainable development. It means that ecotourism activities should be in line with key principles: to minimize negative environmental impacts; to build environmental and cultural awareness and respect; to provide positive engagement for both visitors and hosts; to provide direct economic interests for conservation; grant financial benefits and empowerment for local people; and establish sensitivity to host countries' environmental and social climate (Das, Chatterjee, 2015; Higham, 2007; Holden, 2007). Ecotourism can be explained as "environmentally engaged travel to comparatively undisturbed areas to enjoy and respect nature that supports conservation with low negative visitor impacts while offering active socio-economic wellbeing for local people" (Jalani, 2012, p. 48). Ecotourism is a new type of tourism that is a consumable resource, has an educational and adventurous character, and focuses on undeveloped and sparsely visited natural, cultural and historical sites (Lenao, Basupi, 2016; Liu, Li, 2013; Mayaka, Prasad, 2012).

Socio-economic and environmental factors were taken into account for the TOWS analysis. In the TOWS context, opportunity means the potential present to

carry out an activity to increase efficiency or improve the quality of management for any kind of organization (Hong, Chan, 2010). Although TOWS analysis is a widely preferred and easy-to-use method to define positive and negative issues, it is limited to qualitative evaluations (Demir, Esbah, Akgun, 2016).

Ecotourism calls for low-impact tourism, participation in decision-making and sensitive approaches to biodiversity and local cultures. It supports local conservation efforts and can bring financial and physical benefits to host communities as well as providing educational opportunities for travellers. An applicable ecotourism destination should include both original nature and cultural heritage (Dowling, Fennel, 2003; Rahemtulla, Wellstead, 2001; Rein, 2005; Weaver, Oppermann, 2000; Yilmaz, 2005).

Evaluating the ecotourism development prospects for the Aral Sea region can open up ecotourism which would allow local communities to benefit from recreational activity. If ecotourism is organised well, it is the best way to protect natural places and benefits both natural heritage and local people. Through tourism, public awareness can be raised to become environmental respect and can stimulate the emergence of new local economic activities (Salvatore, Marciano, 2019).

3. ECOTOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan has great ecotourism potential. Nowadays, there are 17 natural reserves in Uzbekistan including Baday-Tuqay, Kizilkum, Nurota, Zarafshon, Orol Paygamber, Zomin, Charvak and Chatqal, and these reserve areas are mainly used as a place for the protection of endangered species of animals and plants (Hoshimov, 2009). Besides, ecotourism destinations have increased from 29 to 65 covering 8,144,000 hectares with a capacity for hosting over 1074 visitors per day (Khamidov, 2016).

Uzbekistan has developed a scientific and theoretical framework aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of ecotourism and improving ecotourism services on the tourism market (Berdiyev, 2010). Organizational and managerial forms and practices, development trends in ecotourism in developed and developing countries have been analysed, and recommendations are made for their use in Uzbekistan (Khamidov, 2017). In 2007, the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on ecology and environmental protection adopted the concept of ecological tourism in Uzbekistan. This particular document elaborated the problems of ecological and socio-economic, organizational-legal issues and goals, and the potential development of ecotourism (SCRepUzEEP, 2007).

The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly to

draw global attention to the acute ecological problems of the Aral Sea catastrophe. Overcoming the negative consequences of this in the Aral Sea region requires active international, regional and local engagement. As a result, a special UN programme was accepted to bring effective assistance to the local population affected by the Aral Sea crisis.

In December 2019, the UN General Assembly at its plenary session adopted a special resolution "Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Development in Central Asia" that was initiated by the President of Uzbekistan in Beijing at a meeting with the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, as part of the international forum "One Belt, One Road" (UzDaily, 2019). The UN General Assembly Resolution emphasizes the essence of the efforts of Central Asian countries to disseminate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, numerous international events for the further development of tourism on the Silk Road, as well as measures taken by local governments in Central Asian countries to capture international investment and finance to the tourism sector. It is noteworthy that the UN General Assembly (2019) invites member states, other stakeholders and the UNWTO to support the activities carried out by the countries of Central Asia to support sustainable tourism development in the region (United Nations, 2019), and in this regard:

- expand cooperation in the field of tourism with the countries of Central Asia;
- provide growth in the main sectors of a consolidated and comprehensive policy for sustainable tourism development in Central Asia, considering the specifics and current condition of economic advancement of each country in the region;
- promote the development of tourism and strategies to attract foreign tourists to Central Asia;
- join forces for the enforcement and application of innovative technologies for the modernization of the tourism industry in Central Asia (UzDaily, 2019).

At the meeting of the council of the heads of the founding states of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea in Turkmenistan, the President of Uzbekistan stated that providing conditions for attracting foreign investment for the development and implementation of environmentally clean technologies in the Aral Sea region, the fulfilment of the principles of the "green economy" as well as the comprehensive implementation of the principles of environmentally friendly energy-saving technologies, the elimination of desertification and the continuation of ecological migration, and the development of ecotourism are priority aims that should be realized (UzDaily, 2019).

As a result of reforms in the field of tourism in Uzbekistan, the flow of foreign tourists visiting the Aral Sea region is growing year by year. In particular, the Republic of Karakalpakstan was visited by a total

of 46,386 tourists: 21,399 foreign and 24,987 local, while a total of 2,646,597 tourists visited the Khorezm region: 420,828 foreign and 2,225,769 local in 2019. Local tour experts consider eco-tourism for those parts of the Aral Sea including Moynak district, Sudochoye Lake, Koyi Amu Darya biosphere reserve in the Beruniy district, Ustyurt plain of the Kungrad district (canyon), Barsakelmes salt lake (salt deposits), the open-air ship 'cemetery' and Eshan lakes (Uzbek Tourism, 2020).

4. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a literature review on ecotourism opportunities, challenges and promotional approaches in the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan. TOWS analysis is a research method mostly applied in business management as well as being applied to evaluate decision-making in sustainable tourism (NOAA, 2011). The following analysis helps to diagnose the existing conditions of ecotourism

development in the Aral Sea region. In the longer term, the evaluation is one of several complex strategies to promote ecotourism in Uzbekistan taking into account the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, a cluster approach and stakeholder mapping are built onto a TOWS assessment helping to develop short-term and long-term strategies to improve the ecotourism market in remote zones of Uzbekistan while the stakeholder map assists the integration and harmonisation of the functions of local authorities to mitigate weaknesses as well as minimizing expected threats.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. TOWS ANALYSIS FOR ECOTOURISM IN ARAL SEA REGION OF UZBEKISTAN

In the case of the Aral Sea region, evaluating internal and external factors is essential to develop strategic planning for sustainable ecotourism management (Table 1).

Table 1. TOWS for ecotourism promotion in Aral Sea region

Threats		Opportunities	
1	Climate change and poor environmental management	1	New target markets for visitors (Allanazarov, Alimov, 2019)
2	High migration rate from rural communities	2	Potential for desert tourism promotion (Khaytboyev, 2016)
3	Competition burden of other new ecotourism destinations in Central Asia	3	Open visas for over 80 countries (Lex.uz, 2020a)
4	The significance of seasonality in tourism (Bekjanov, Matyusupov, 2020)	4	Government programmes focusing on tourism promotion (Matyakubov, 2017)
5	Extreme weather conditions, water salinity and air pollution (Rudenko, Lamers, 2010)	5	Existence of ecotourism development in Uzbekistan (SCRepUzEEP, 2007)
6	Risk of being infected by the pandemic or having an impact on it (Matyakubov, Ibadullaev, 2020)	6	The main requirements of pandemic conditions are individual tours, opportunities for keeping distance and low density (Rudenko et al., 2010).
Weaknesses		Strengths	
1	Absence of regional integration of tourism in Central Asia (Saidmamatov, Rudenko, Baier, Khodjaniyazov, 2021)	1	Popularity of surrounding destinations: Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Nukus (Saidmamatov et al., 2020)
2	Poor quality of tourism infrastructure and associated services (Alimov, 2018)	2	Potential for the development of extreme tourism in Ustyurt and high ecotourism potential in the Lower Amu Darya biodiversity (Salaev, Alimov, 2018)
3	Less integration of the Aral Sea region as a tourism destination in tour packages (Kamaletdinov, 2018)	3	Potential for hunting tourism, agritourism, gastronomic tourism, religious and recreation opportunities, archaeo-tourism, rich flora and fauna (Matyakubov, Defrancesco, 2018)
4	Poor level of marketing (Matyakubov, 2017)	4	Existence of ancient fortress (golden ring of ancient Khorezm capitals) and Savitsky Museum of Art in Central Asia (Yagodin, Betts, 2009)
5	Lack of qualified tour operators, tour agencies and guides (Alimov, 2018)	5	Government introduced "Uzbekistan. Safe travel GUARANTEED" sanitary-epidemiologically safe tourism for tourists (Matyakubov, Ibadullayev, 2020)
6	Insufficient legislative, government support to support a cluster approach in ecotourism destinations (Kamaletdinov, 2018)	6	Because of the high risk of infection during the pandemic, the choice of tourist destinations is limited (Bekjanov, 2020)

Source: authors.

Based on field observation and conversation with local travel agencies and guides, the following approaches can be recommended to eliminate weaknesses and minimize the threats to generating inclusive and long-term sustainable development of ecotourism in Aral Sea region:

1. Developing and promoting the ecotourism strategy in the Aral Sea region.
2. Improving roads and roadside infrastructure, hygienic conditions (i.e. clean drinking water) that are baselines to attracting ecotourists.
3. Forming of mutually beneficial partnerships among tour operators, hotels, local communities, academy, think tanks and tour destinations.
4. Development of programmes (i.e. public-private partnership) to attract local and foreign direct investment for the development of ecotourism infrastructure in the Aral Sea region.
5. Organization of training for guides on ecological tourism in training centres under the Departments of Tourism Development in the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm region.
6. To promote ecotourism in the Aral Sea region, new tourist routes should include destinations such as:
 - Lower Amu Darya State Biosphere Reserve,
 - Sultan Uvays Mountain,
 - Ustyurt Plateau,
 - Sudochye,
 - Saigachi.

The main factor affecting the tourism industry as a whole is the level of competitiveness in the field of tourism. In modern conditions, it is important not only to obtain a set of high-quality tourist services (accommodation, transportation, excursions, meals, the availability of modern sanitary facilities) but also to satisfy spiritual and emotional needs, and to gain experience of living in extraordinary conditions in an unfamiliar environment.

There are several issues and problems including the number of tourists, historical places in cities and towns, and issues of transport logistics. It is difficult to compete with other tourist destinations if the response is expensive and takes a long time.

5.2. CLUSTER APPROACH

In order to implement a cluster approach to tourism development in the Aral Sea region, it is advisable to create at least four small tourist zones (STZ) – Fig. 1.

They will be developed based on ecological situation, transportation, logistics, biodiversity and the location of the ecotourism destination (Kamaletdinov, 2018):

1. So, in STZ tourists can go to Akchakul Lake, located on the Amu Darya coast in the Ellikkala district, which has a high potential for the development of



Figure 1. Small Tourist Zones in Aral Sea basin.
Source: authors development

- both archaeological and medical tourism – Photo 1. In addition, there are also opportunities to create new tourist routes using the recreational resources of Akchakul, other natural reservoirs, sites with a high concentration of minerals, etc.
2. The second STZ is proposed to be located in the Beruniy district, at the village of Oltinsay, which is located near the Lower Amu Darya State Biosphere Reserve (Badai Tugai), where endangered species of plants, fish, birds and animals live in natural conditions – Photo 2. This zone can be aimed at the development of ecotourism, historical and special programmes for pilgrimage (ziyorat) tourism to accommodate tourist infrastructure and accommodation networks (Matyakubov, Ibadullaev, 2020).
 3. The third STZ may be located in the city of Muynak where there are great prospects for the development of ecological and extreme tourism. New tourist attractions, “ship cemeteries”, where old fishing



Photo 1. STZ Akchakul
Source: authors



Photo 2. STZ Amudarya river
Source: authors



Photo 3. STZ Muynak
Source: authors



Photo 4. STZ Nukus
Source: authors

vessels and steamboats have become stranded – Photo 3. Travellers are expected to get acquainted with saxaul forest plantations on the floor of the Aral Sea, observe swans, flamingos, pelicans and other rare birds on Sudochoye Lake. Muynak also attracts those who want to feel the fragility of nature. Extreme tourists will be interested in visiting the Aral Sea and other local disaster areas. For these purposes, it is necessary to implement comprehensive measures to expand tourism opportunities as well as various cultural and recreational activities (Kamaletdinov, 2018).

4. The fourth STZ, the central zone is proposed to be created in the city of Nukus, not far from Nukus international airport and will provide travel services (Kamaletdinov, 2018) – Photo 4.

5.3. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING OF THE UZBEK TOURISM SECTOR

Stakeholder mapping is the visual representation of a stakeholder analysis, organised according to key criteria. It is a process and visual tool to clarify

and categorize the various stakeholders by drawing further pictures of who the stakeholder groups are, which interests they represent, the amount of power they possess, whether they represent inhibiting or supporting factors for the organization to realize its objectives, or the methods by which they should be dealt with (Figure 2).

The stakeholder map demonstrates that the Uzbek tourism market is regulated by the State Committee for Tourism Development and State Committee on Ecology and Environmental protection. The newly established Ministry of Innovative Development is playing an accelerating role to solve tourism problems while the Ministry of Culture controls the museums and tourism destination sites. Increasing the wellbeing and livelihood of local communities remains the key priority behind developing the tourism sector.

For support structure and service providers, it is very important to cooperate jointly with the four key regulatory bodies in order to realize strategic projects to reform the tourism industry in a complex and integrated way.

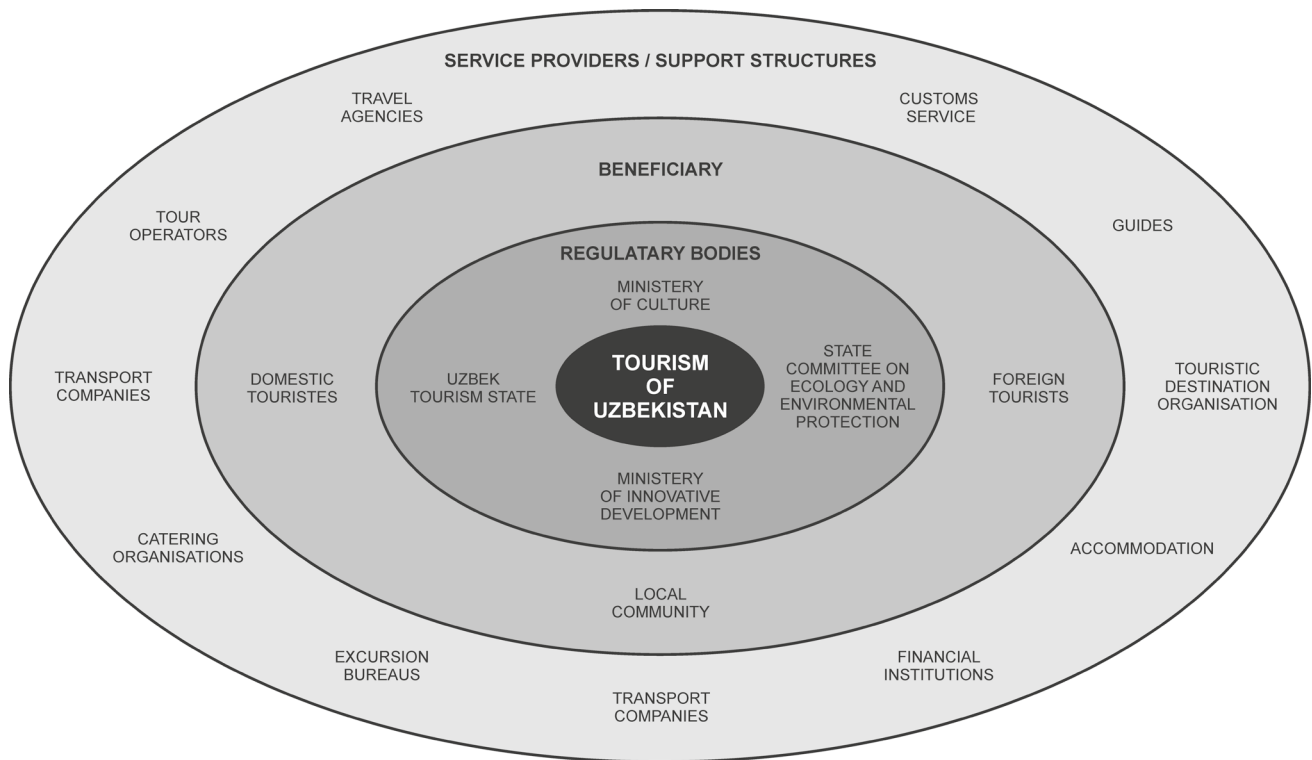


Figure 2. Key tourism industry bodies in Uzbekistan
Source: authors development

6. STATE SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC IN UZBEKISTAN

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is, first and foremost, a humanitarian crisis affecting lives, which has also triggered a global economic crisis. This has a very tangible impact on the tourism sector which is critical for many people, places and businesses, with the impact particularly felt in countries, cities and regions where tourism is an important part of the economy. The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has disrupted lives and livelihoods worldwide and has limited travel within and across borders. Like other countries, the coronavirus pandemic has affected Uzbekistan's tourism destinations very badly. In March 2020, the first patient was recorded and the government had to establish strict regulations against spread of the pandemic. In this kind of harsh economic

situation, tourism entities are not working and they need the support of the government to maintain their businesses. Subsidies were introduced to the tourism sector by a state fund to support entrepreneurship (Table 2).

In order to accelerate the recovery of tourism and the formation of new development directions after the stabilization of the sanitary-epidemiological situation in the country, as well as to ensure the execution process, the Presidential Decree No. PD-6002 on 28 May 2020 "On urgent measures to support tourism to reduce the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic" was passed. The presidential resolution No 4755 "Additional measures to the development of the tourism sector in following the demands of the strengthened sanitary-epidemiological security regime" was accepted on June 19, 2020. In this resolution, the main actions to restart international tourism in the country are below (Table 3).

Table 2. Post-pandemic relief measures for Uzbekistan

No.	Period	Relief measures
1	From 1 March to 1 June 2020	to compensate the expenses of tourism entities on loans previously issued by commercial banks for the construction of accommodation facilities
2	From 1 June 2020 to 31 December 2021	to subsidize accommodation at 10% of the cost (hotel services), 15 USD, except for those bought by a compensatory charter flight allocation of incentive subsidies in USD, provided that they stay in the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan for at least five days

Table 2. (cont.)

No.	Period	Relief measures
3	From the date of resumption of inbound tourism at the expense of the fund until December 31, 2020	for foreign tourist groups of at least 10 people, provided that they organize a tour in the Republic of Uzbekistan and spend at least five nights in their accommodation, partial subsidization of air and rail ticket expenses of tour operators at 30% of the ticket price
4	By 1 June 2021	the fund will reimburse the cost of renovation, reconstruction and strengthening the material and technical base for the acquisition or upgrading of hotels, provided that the category is maintained for the next three years, 5 million soums for each room in 3-star hotels, 10 million soums for each room in 4-star hotels, 15 million soums for each room in 5-star hotels
5	Until January 1, 2022	legal entities for construction, reconstruction and equipping machinery, their components and spare parts, buildings and structures for disinfection, imported into the territory of Uzbekistan are exempted from payment of customs duties (except for customs clearance fees and value added tax) for contactless controlled equipment, as well as odourless disinfectants. Besides, the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan was ordered to allocate 20 billion soums to start the execution of the measures
6	July 1, 2020 to July 1, 2023	income tax, property and land taxes and turnover tax rates on the main activities of non-governmental (private) museums, art galleries and craft centres will be reduced by 50% compared to the established amount

Source: UzbekTourism (2020).

Table 3. Actions taken during the pandemic

Actions taken during the pandemic	Description
Uzbekistan. Safe travel GUARANTEED	Establishment of a sanitary-epidemiological situation in tourist destinations. All expenditures are covered by the government
Digital menu	Minimizing physical contact between customers and staff
Compensation	Government pays 3000 USD per tourist if they become infected with COVID-19 during their stay in Uzbekistan
Tourist <i>makhallas</i> (Tourist neighbours)	These will be created in traditional architecture using modern building materials. They will be leased to local <i>dehkans</i> (farmers) who are ready to receive tourists as part of rural and ethnographic tours, demonstrating the traditional way of life, crafts and cuisine of the regions
Family guest houses in rural places, mountains, desert zones	support local entrepreneurs by compensating certain amount of the cost of a project that intends to establish family guest houses in remote rural and mountainous areas if they meet certain requirements such as running the accommodation for at least five years and to setting up a special automated electronic programme that registers visitors coming to the accommodation. The amount of compensation should not surpass 10 mln UZS, which should be 30% of the cost

Source: Lex.uz (2020b).

Table 4. Prospects for the development of ecotourism in the Aral Sea region

Actions	Funding source
Establishment of a large tourist complex "Aral Oasis" with a closed protected area	Entrepreneurial funds and loans from commercial banks, grants
Aral Sea, Sudochoye Lake, Kungrad State Forestry, new routes with maximum involvement of the local population living in the vicinity of the "Kazakdarya", permanent tourist accommodation and tourist infrastructure facilities	Funds and grants from entrepreneurs
Akchakul Lake ecotourism complex	Partnership with government
Establishing Lower Amu Darya State Biosphere Reserve ecotourism complex	Partly by the government

Source: Lex.uz (2020c).

Furthermore, the government is paying special attention to Aral Sea region tourism development as the region has great potential. In 2017 presidential decree No. 2731 "The state programme for the development of the Aral Sea Region" tourism (especially ecotourism) is believed to be one of the leading sectors in future directions for this process. In this document, the exact position for ecotourism was indicated (Table 4).

7. CONCLUSION

The exploratory study focuses on ecotourism development in the Aral Sea region of Uzbekistan. TOWS analysis has generated possible scenarios and strategies to transfer weaknesses into strengths via a cluster approach and stakeholder engagement mapping. In this context, accelerating the development of inbound and domestic tourism in the Aral Sea region by implementing a tourist cluster is one of the most important factors for sustainable socio-economic development of the region, and will contribute to the transformation of the tourism sector into one of the leading sectors of the regional economy with the widespread promotion of ecological tourism. The analysis of stakeholder mapping plays an essential role in overcoming the mutual conflicts of interest, expected risks and misunderstandings of stakeholders in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan. In addition, it possesses an important role in the development of organizational and economic mechanisms that have a positive impact on stakeholders in the development of tourism in the region.

In order to utilise the potential, there must be professional management and a cooperation strategy among authorities to plan and implement ecotourism development in short and long-term scenarios. The management should focus more on the opinions of the tourists as end-users while considering foreign experience to produce a roadmap to develop successful ecotourism development in the Aral Sea region. Hence, making ecotourism a financially attractive business leads to an enormous improvement in the living conditions of the rural population which is the main motive behind promoting ecotourism in rural parts of Uzbekistan.

Finally, the unexpected situation with the pandemic disturbs (pre-COVID) development strategies. Importantly, government support is essential in the case of the pandemic to encourage private sector participation as well as easing negative economic consequences to the tourism industry. This article suggests further research with micro and macro perspectives in considering the consequences caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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CHANGES IN CROSS-BORDER TOURIST TRAFFIC ON THE POLAND–BELARUS BORDER,
AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE AUGUSTÓW CANALAliaksandr Cyargeenka^a ^a Stanisław Leszczycki Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences, Department of Urban and Population Studies; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9714-4128>; e-mail: aliaksandrc@twarda.pan.pl

ABSTRACT

The Augustów Canal is one of the unique tourist attractions of a Poland–Belarus borderland known for its highly valuable natural, cultural-historical and tourism-related features. From the beginning of the 21st century, following total renovation as well as the opening of both water and road versions of the Rudawka–Lesnaya border crossing (in 2005 and 2017 respectively), it has been possible to observe a many-fold increase in tourist traffic within the Augustów Canal tourist space. The present article thus helps fill a research gap with an up-to-date description of this intensification and an analysis of its dynamics in terms of the countries of origin of visiting tourists, its seasonality and choice of transport, be it by water (by boat) or by road (by bicycle or on foot). This study continues investigations into the influence of the easing of the border regime in Belarus (introduction of a visa-free zone) on the volume of tourist traffic. Factors influencing cross-border traffic on the Augustów Canal have been studied at local, regional, national and international levels (multi-scalar). Fieldwork has also been organised, using the participant-observer method, and statistical data from the Polish Border Guard has been analysed. Results confirm that the greatest use made of the Rudawka–Lesnaya crossing is by tourists from Poland and Belarus, with smaller numbers from Lithuania, Russia and Germany. Poles are the nation most often availing themselves of opportunities to cross the border by water, while Belarusians show a preference for the road crossing.

KEYWORDS

Augustów Canal, border traffic, visa-free zone, tourism, Poland, Belarus

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Canal” is a term used for an artificial watercourse, and thus a type of inland waterway, perhaps as a canalised river or lake, or else purpose-built. Typically, canals serve to link drainage basins, in this way lowering transport costs and/or facilitating the transport of goods (cargo) and people (passengers). The Augustów Canal under study here likewise served such functions, while more recently as a tourist attraction located in the Augustów Forest, an area of exceptional natural value (*Around Augustów Canal*, 2018; *Pogranicze...*, 2018).

The Augustów Canal is described by researchers as a “phenomenon” when set against other hydrotechnical monuments, above all reflecting the way in which this is the only artificial waterway crossing the eastern external frontier of the European Union (in the borderland region of Poland and Belarus, as well as parts of Lithuania), forming a unique cultural and natural borderland area which is of steadily-growing significance to tourism (Cyargeenka, Więckowski, 2020; Marin, 2017; Sialverstava, Bogusz and Roman, 2018). The functioning of this system with its features of transboundary tourist space is dependent on many

factors including those relating to the river network, nature conservation, transport and the geopolitical relations between the states involved (Kałuski, 2016). A condition for the development of the tourist function in the Augustów Canal area is the establishment, promotion and diversification of the tourist product on the basis of local spatial and natural resources, and the shared culture and history of neighbouring states (Bogusz, Sialverstava, 2018; Kul-Sialverstava, 2014).

The area “hydronode” of the Augustów Canal mostly draws tourists from Poland, Belarus and Lithuania and constitutes an element of cross-border tourism of a “sentimental” nature back to the time when Polish lands once extended beyond today’s border. The canal serves as a kind of backbone, around which many items of cultural heritage are situated (Lenart, 2008; Sialverstava, Bogusz, 2018). Furthermore, this area is perceived to be one of the possible “bridges” to transboundary and cross-border cooperation in the name of environmental protection and the development of ecotourism, and this has become a reality on local, regional, national and international levels (Marin, 2011, 2017).

State borders offer a reflection of relations between neighbours, with a changing mix of conflict, competition, subordination and cooperation, as well as different aspects relating to how the border is viewed and perceived (Kolosov, Więckowski, 2018). The Augustów Canal is a good subject with which to study the ever-changing cross-border socioeconomic and political processes of both an integrative and disintegrative nature (Cyargeenka, Więckowski, 2020; Marin, 2017). In its original period (1820–1840), it served as a transport artery linking the western borderland of the Russian Empire with the Baltic Sea. However, it rather soon lost its main economic significance, while from the Second World War onwards found itself in two different states, i.e. Poland and the USSR. However, from the 1970s on the Polish side, and from the beginning of the 21st century in the Poland–Belarus borderland area, the Augustów Canal has steadily taken on the features of a key element of tourism space with canoeing and kayaking dynamically developing along with other forms of active tourism (Cudowski and Górniak, 2008).

Research into the kinds of visitors and their motivations, combines with consideration of the means of crossing to highlight organisational, financial and psychological issues capable of either retarding or accelerating tourism within the Augustów Canal space (Bobowska, 2018; Yeliseyeu, 2017). An exceptional aspect is the introduction and extension of a visa-free border zone for visits into Belarus made available to citizens of around 70 states, brought into effect in 2015–2016 but facing many challenges currently (Kudźmaitė, 2019; Więckowski, Cyargeenka, 2019). The subject literature lacks both up-to-date research on

the Augustów Canal space in terms of the circumstances leading to the intensification of cross-border tourist traffic, and analyses founded on primary statistical data (only appearing relatively recently). This article and the work underpinning it have thus been intended to fill this research gap.

Against this background, the investigation described here has above all sought to identify the changes along or adjacent to the Augustów Canal and the factors operating on these changes relating to the nature of cross-border tourist traffic, by reference to statistical data from the Rudawka–Lesnaya border crossing between Poland and Belarus. In essence, the research hypothesis advanced here is that the establishment and then expansion of the Belarusian visa-free travel zone involving the Augustów Canal “Tourist and Recreational Park”, together with the introduction of the opportunity to cross the border on foot or by bicycle, has exerted a positive influence in increasing tourism for the citizens of both Poland and Belarus.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This is a study of both a descriptive and an analytical nature. In the first stage, a search through the entire current literature was made in order to determine what the relevant cultural-historical, institutional and infrastructural, formal-legal and other conditions might be. As the analysis of factors impacting on cross-border tourist traffic involving the Augustów Canal was pursued on local, regional, national and international levels, a multi-scalar approach can be said to have been taken (Marin, 2011; Stoffelen, Ioannides, Vanneste, 2017).

In July 2019 fieldwork was organised as an opportunity to apply the participant-observer method with the border being crossed at Rudawka–Lesnaya on foot, and with a visit made to the Kurzyniec and Valkushyk Locks (in Poland and Belarus respectively). The process of crossing the border comprised the three stages of “before”, “during” and “after” (Kudźmaitė, 2019; Zichner, Beurskens, Miggelbrink, Bruns, 2017). Prior to travel, information was gathered on visa and visa-free regimes and opportunities to hire a canoe/kayak or bicycle; while the necessary documents were also being made ready. During the stay on the Polish side of the border, on the border itself, and beyond it, fieldwork sought to check procedures, times taken, accessibility, and the state and adequacy of signposting and the marking of infrastructure. Photographs were also taken.

Use was furthermore made of statistical analysis with regard to types and changes of tourist traffic, relating to the different countries of origin of tourists, the seasonality of tourism, and preferences shown for

modes of travel: by water (by boat) or by road (by bicycle or on foot). Source data here originate from the reports of the Polish Border Guard, and relate to traffic across the Polish border involving individuals. Methods of both selection and systematisation were applied to all of the data on crossings, countries of origin and length of stay. Results were generalised in the form of tables and diagrams, with the most important trends indicated.

3. THE AUGUSTÓW CANAL AS THE MAIN ELEMENT OF TOURISM SPACE

This article features an analysis concerning tourist traffic via the Rudawka–Lesnaya border crossing in the context of tourism space and with account taken of local, regional and international levels. The concept of tourism space is in fact understood rather differently by researchers around the world on the one hand, and by those in Poland on the other. The most frequent definition relates to the consequences of the overlap of selected geographical spaces. In turn, from the work of Kowalczyk (2014) is the idea that tourism space is simultaneously both an objective and a subjective category, and one which exists in four forms traditionally encapsulated as “space of the tourist”, “space of tourists”, “tourism space” and (most appropriately) “tourist space”. Indeed, the relevant issues of delimitation and classification have, among others, been taken up by Włodarczyk (2014) who defines it as that part of geographical space in which tourism takes place. The space associated with the Augustów Canal has certain features of a subecumene where tourism is concerned. Given the nature of its (real, landscape related, riparian-lacustrine) attributes or its tourism management (related to recreation and sport), it supports tourism characterised by seasonality, lack of continuity and sporadicity (Więckowski, 2014; Włodarczyk, 2014).

The Augustów Canal *sensu stricto* is a water axis as well as a “backbone” linking two separate (Polish and Belarusian) transboundary tourism spaces. The Augustów Forest region as conceived in its broader sense (together with Augustów itself and Grodno/Hrodna) constitutes a tourism space *sensu largo*. Most of the forest and canal are located on the Polish side and lies adjacent to Wigierski (Lake Wigry) National Park to the north west and the Biebrzański National park to the south. Within the forest there are also four Areas of Protected Landscape (Augustów Forest and Lakes, Rospuda Valley, Sejny Lakeland and the Biebrza Valley). There are a large number of nature reserves here (Perkuć, Brzozowy Grąd and so on). In contrast, on the Belarusian side the canal area includes the Sapotskin and Hoża Reserves, the Porzecze Botanical Reserve,

Sviatsk Landscape Park and the Landscape and Nature Park in Radzivilki (Kopciała, 2000b; Pozlevich, 2016). To the north-east, the Augustów Forest also links up with Lithuania’s Kapčiamiestis and Dainava Forests.

The Augustów Canal tourism space is of interest to visitors as relatively primordial (natural), but also on account of its anthropogenic space within historical times. Specifically, the canal was constructed between 1824 and 1839 on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, which then formed part of the Russian Empire (Romanowa, Szirokova, Ozierowa, Czesnow, Sobisiewicz, 2018). The main reason for its construction was a “customs war” with Prussia that resulted in a many-fold increase in the fees needing to be paid for Polish grain to be transferred to Gdańsk (Górewicz, Orłowski, 1973). The canal was designed in such a way as to link the basins of the rivers Vistula and Nieman, as well as the Nieman and the Venta (via the Windawski Canal), making it possible for the Baltic to be accessed via the region of Livonia (known as Inflanty in Polish).

Only the first part of the plan was actually put into effect, and this was for several reasons. In the first place, once work on building the Augustów Canal had begun, Prussia had little choice but to reduce the duties imposed in order to avoid losses (Górewicz, 1974). In the second place, Poland’s November Rising of 1830–1831 stood in the way of further work (Rutkowski, 2017), with the Tsarist authorities coming to see the idea of building the Windawski Canal as unnecessary. This ensured a downgrading of the Augustów Canal, in existence already by then, to the role of local transport involving what is today the borderland between Poland, Belarus and Lithuania. The main use of the Augustów Canal was as a way of transporting salt from Poland to Lithuania and Belarus; while the whole period through to the 1970s saw it as a route for the floating of timber. Nevertheless, by 1860–1880, the rapid development of railways was already reducing the significance of the canal in transport terms, and more generally from an economic point of view.

The Augustów Canal tourism space also catches the interest of tourists on account of the cultural (and especially the hydrotechnical) heritage that is present here. The canal features 18 locks (with a total of 21 chambers), 14 of these in Poland, three in Belarus with one actually on the border. Among these, there are nine in Poland, three in Belarus plus the one on the border itself that retain their original structure from the first half of the 19th century. In fact only the facing has changed (Batura, 2005). The Augustów Canal differs from other similar constructions in its large dimensions (it is 101 km long), and the presence of a great many excavated sections, weirs and basins; as well as the absence of any disasters concerning leaks.

Thus the Augustów Canal has remained in an almost unchanged state since the time it was built, albeit this

reflecting a dramatic decline in its economic significance. It is thus unique among European canals in never having undergone modernisation or remodelling (Górewicz, Orłowski, 1973). As early as 1968 it came to be recognised by Poland's Ministry of Culture and Art as a monument of engineering and architectural achievement, becoming a Historical Monument as such in 2007, with this representing a key factor in the development of the tourist space. In turn, in 2010, an application was submitted to UNESCO with a view to the canal being included on the World Heritage List (though it in fact failed to pass the verification procedure).

4. CHANGES IN THE FUNCTIONS OF THE BORDER AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROSSING

In the days of the Russian Empire, the Augustów Canal was not divided by a border, and the Kingdom of Poland had a measure of administrative autonomy. It was even, back at that time, that the first opportunity for tourism to develop here began to emerge as 1909 brought the organisation of a hiking trip under the auspices of the sightseeing organisation *Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze*, taking in Augustów, Studzieniczna and Swoboda. Then in 1912 there was a combined walking and wagon trip following the "Napoleon Trail" from Suwałki via Wigry to Grodno and further on to Babruysk (Kopciała, 2000a).

In the inter-war period, the whole of the Augustów Canal was again contained within a single polity at state-level; a fact that helped dynamise the development of canoeing with the encouragement of Polish Scouts. The canal also attracted the interest of the Polish Canoeing Union (*Polski Związek Kajakowy*), the Officers' Yacht Club of the Republic of Poland, the State Water Board (*Państwowy Zarząd Wodny*), and also private enterprises offering cruises whereby barges with passengers were towed (both Augustów and Grodno being linked regularly in this way). In addition, there was an intensive development of health-resort tourism. Thus, the Augustów Canal area had started to take on the features of genuine tourism space.

In the years 1945–1989, the tourism area of the Augustów Canal was of course divided between the Polish People's Republic and the USSR. Despite the countries being ostensibly friendly, the actual effect was for tourism to vanish from this region for two reasons. In the first place, the state border was treated very inflexibly, and in the second there had been serious destruction or damage by this time to the hydrotechnical infrastructure.

However, from the 1970s onwards, the Polish side witnessed a renewed period of tourist activation along the canal, even as the Soviet (Belarusian) side was

totally neglected. The 1989–2007 period coincided with a facilitated process for crossing the border, as the visa regime was at last lifted in reality. Yet this situation reversed again thanks to events in 2004 and 2007: Poland's accession to the EU and then to the Schengen Zone. The result was an emergence of a closed external European Union frontier, with border checks very much strengthened, and it once again became difficult to cross in either direction (Więckowski, 2010b).

From the time of Poland's Schengen accession (i.e. from 2007), the cost of the visa needed by Belarusians was 60 euros. But from the time when the EU Visa Code came into force (i.e. 2.02.2020), that price had increased to 80 euros, even though half a year later (on 1.07.2020) it was to cost just 35 euros. What is more, through to January 2019, there was a chance to obtain a so-called shopping visa (of short duration and without any extra formalities), and rather wide use was made of this by Belarusians for tourist purposes. On 22nd September 2020, the Polish government reversed the earlier (late-March) closure of the border on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, making it possible once again for Belarusians to pay tourism-motivated visits to Poland. From October 29th 2020, crossing from Poland to the territory of Belarus via road was again suspended, the decision on this occasion being made by Belarus.

A Belarusian visa for Polish (and other EU) citizens has recently been priced in the range 20–120 euros (currently 35 and 75). The decisive factors here are the type (private, service-related, tourist, etc.), length of stay, number of visits anticipated, the ways in which this visa is granted and delivered (with a wait of between 2 and 10 working days), and the potential commission that travel agents are likely to take. Visa applications may be submitted in Warsaw, Białą Podlaska and Białystok. However, in the 2007–2010 period, there was also the seasonal opening of a Consular Office in Augustów itself. Ultimately, this closed down in the face of the rather low number of tourist visas actually being issued.

A unique phenomenon in terms of the easing or relaxation of the ways in which the border might be crossed was the introduction of a so-called visa-free zone for Belarus in the shared borderland area with Poland, and also in part in Lithuania (Więckowski, Cyargeenka, 2019). The process was first trialled in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (adjacent to Poland's Białowieża NP) in 2015, with it becoming possible to take a trip into the Belarusian part of the same forest on foot or by bicycle via the Białowieża–Pierarova crossing. In the case of the Augustów Canal, a similar zone of visa-free travel, within what was identified as a 'Tourist and Recreational Park' associated with the canal, began to operate from October 26th 2016, by virtue of Decree No. 318, whose provisions related not only to the canal itself, but also to the city of Grodno (Table 1).

Table 1. Transboundary visa-free traffic in the Augustów Canal region

Borderland visa-free zone	Augustów Canal Tourist and Recreational Park		Brest–Grodno visa-free zone
Date of opening	26.10.2016	1.01.2018	10.11.2019
Length of stay	up to 5 days	up to 10 days	up to 15 days
Area accessible to visa-free traffic	The city of Grodno, plus the districts (selsoviets) of Hoża, Kapciouka, Odelsk, Padlabiennie and Sapotskin	City of Grodno and Hrodna District	The city of Grodno and Districts of Grodno, Bierastavica, Vawkawysk, Voranava, Lida and Svislach; the city of Brest and Districts of Brest, Zhabinka, Kamyanyets and Pruzhany
Border Crossings open for visa-free traffic	Rudawka–Lesnaya (PL–BY), Kuźnica Białostocka–Bruzgi (PL–BY), Privalka–Švendubrè (BY–LT) and Privalka–Raigardas (BY–LT)	Kuźnica Białostocka–Grodno (PL–BY), Grodno Airport (BY)	Białowieża–Pierarova (PL–BY), Byenyakoni–Shalchininkai (BY–LT), Bobrowniki–Bierastavica (PL–BY), Połowce–Peschatka (PL–BY), Sławatycze–Domachewo (PL–BY), Terespol–Brest (PL–BY) and Brest Airport (BY)

Legend: BY – Belarus, LT – Lithuania, PL – Poland, RU – Russia, UA – Ukraine.
Source: author.

The privilege associated with a visa-free trip into the near-border area of Belarus applies to citizens of some 70 states, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany and the USA. For a crossing of the border to take place, the essential documents are:

- a valid passport,
- insurance (medical, as well as the so-called ‘Green Card’ if the crossing is being made by car),
- a permit (issued by an authorised tourist operator),
- purchased entry tickets to at least two tourist attractions in Belarus,
- confirmation of reserved places in overnight accommodation (where the stay is to exceed 10 days).

The territorial cohesion of the Belarusian visa-free zone and the tourism space steadily taking shape have both encouraged visitors to make a longer stay and thus to visit not only the Augustów Canal itself, but also Grodno and its surroundings including the Royal Castle and the Orthodox Church in Kalozha, places associated with the life of the Polish novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa, bunkers along the Molotov Line, and the palace-park complex of the Wołłowicz family at Sviatsk. These sites (mainly of a military, religious, cultural-historical or natural profile) represent the shared heritage of the old Polish Commonwealth and are thus an objective for sentimentally motivated travel on the part of both Poles and Lithuanians (*Otwierając białoruskie pogranicze...*, 2018). The chance to travel visa-free through western Belarus makes possible visits to three out of four of the UNESCO World Heritage sites listed for Belarus (i.e. along the Struve Geodetic Arc, the castle in Mir, and Belovezhskaya Pushcha – the area of forest across the border from Poland’s Białowieża NP), along with

a number of cultural and historical monuments present in Brest, Lida and Navahrudak.

The consequence of the opening-up of the border is the appearance of many routes to enter the Belarusian visa-free zone (including the tourism space along the Augustów Canal). In total, there are 14 border crossings, and many means by which they can be crossed, not least by canoe or kayak, or bicycle, on foot, by car or coach, and by train or aircraft. At present, tourists may cross into Belarus for a period as long as 15 days via the Rudawka–Lesnaya crossing, visit Grodno, but then leave via the Terespol–Brest and Białowieża–Pierarova crossings, or else by canoe into Lithuania via the Privalka–Švendubrè crossing. In the case of Rudawka–Lesnaya, however, the inclusion of certain options looks debatable as, for example, there are no permanent connections by plane between Poland and either Grodno or Brest. There are also other problems in organising visits: difficulties with the hiring and also leaving of canoes or bicycles on the opposite side of the border, limits on public-transport (coach or train) accessibility, and further limits on physical opportunities available to tourists.

5. TRANSBOUNDARY OR CROSS-BORDER STATUS AND THE LEVEL OF PREPARATION OF TOURISM SPACE

A further important element of tourism space is the matter of the delimitation of the functional sub-region of cross-border cooperation defined by researchers

as *Puszcza Augustowska*, i.e. Augustów Forest (Suliga, 1996), the Białystok–Grodno region (Eberhardt, 1996) or the Augustów–Grodno Forest area (Roman, Sawośko, Żendzian, Niesterek, 2018) (Fig. 1). A key question relating to studies of cross-border tourist traffic is whether account is taken of the immediate vicinity of the forest only, or a more extensive tourism space taking in the cities of Białystok (Poland), Grodno (Belarus), or even Druskininkai (Lithuania). From 1997 on the Augustów Canal area came within the Niemen Euroregion and included the border area of Poland's Podlaskie voivodeship, the Grodno/Hrodna District of Belarus in its entirety, and certain local government areas in Lithuania and the Russian Federation's Kaliningrad District (Kowalewska, Słoma, 2015). Such peripheral transboundary euroregions associated with the River Niemen (Neman), but also with the Białowieska/Belovezhskaya Forest (Poland and Belarus) and the River Bug (Poland, Belarus and Ukraine) form key areas for green or ecotourism, as well as tourism falling within cultural and nostalgic categories (Marin, 2017).

Beyond even that, the years since 2007 have seen Belarus join five other countries within the Eastern Partnership of the EU and as a part of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument within the framework of the Poland–Belarus–Ukraine and Latvia–Lithuania–Belarus Transboundary Cooperation Programmes. These are addressed to such matters as environmental protection, tourism, cross-border security and cross-border contacts between local social and economic centres. Nevertheless, given the geographical locations characterising both Ukraine and Latvia (and even Lithuania to a lesser degree), issues relating to the Augustów Canal are only of secondary importance.

The small-scale local border links developed on the basis of three separate agreements that Belarus concluded in 2010 with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia respectively were capable of favouring increased tourism traffic. However, it was only in fact with Latvia in 2012 that an agreement actually entered into force. And it was mainly for economic reasons that Belarus ultimately said no to the enactment of Local Border

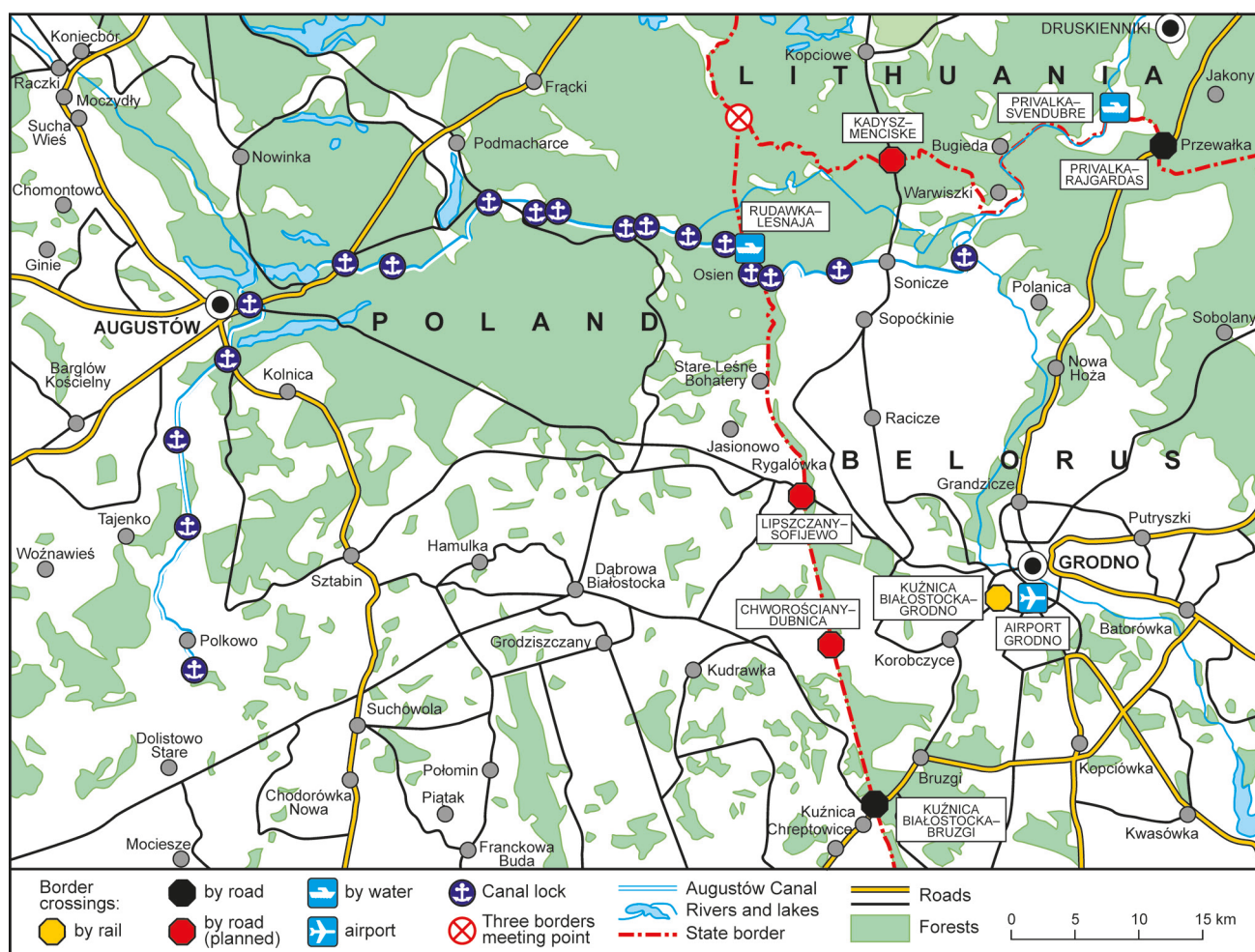


Figure 1. Location of the Augustów Canal
Source: author

Traffic agreements with Poland and Lithuania; its fear being simply that around 1.5 million Belarusians would avail themselves of an opportunity to do lower-cost shopping in the neighbouring countries (Yeliseyeu, 2017).

6. FACTORS INFLUENCING LOCAL TOURIST TRAFFIC

The most important events exerting a major impact on the Augustów Canal tourism space should include the 2005 opening of a water Poland–Belarus border crossing located at Kurzyniec Lock (Photo 1). In 2004–2006 there was a general renovation of the canal's locks, weirs and basins on both the Belarusian and Polish sides. Furthermore, removal of a meander, enhanced erosion and a lowering of the water table (to about 1.4 m) changed the channel of the Niemian, giving rise to a fourth (additional) chamber for Nemново Lock (Ber, Graniczny, Kowalski, Marks, Urban, 2007).



Photo 1. Kurzyniec Lock on the Augustów Canal at the Polish–Belarusian Rudawka–Lesnaya border crossing
Source: Marek Więckowski (July 2019)

A further stimulus to the development of local tourist traffic came with Belarus's October 2016 introduction of a visa-free regime for access to the Augustów Canal 'Tourist and Recreational Park'. This decision was followed by steady increases in the size of the visa-free zone and the Augustów Canal tourist space, as well as in the numbers of border crossings serving visa-free movement, and lengths of stay. Successive enlargements of the zone and increases in the numbers of crossings made in the visa-free context (between Belarus and both Poland and Lithuania) took place on January 1st 2018 and November 10th 2019 (Bobowska, 2018; Więckowski, Cyargeenka, 2019) (Table 1).

It is worth stressing the benefits for the Augustów Canal region accruing from the use of EU funding to redevelop cross-border tourist infrastructure involving repair work and the building of a new network of roads. However, some of this activity failed to pay heed to the lack of cohesion of the transboundary tourist space. It has been typical for local roads in Belarus, Poland and Lithuania to be modernised entirely in isolation of each

other, with no account therefore taken of the overall transport situation. There are also cases of "roads to nowhere" being built, in the sense that these lead towards a stretch of the border not equipped with any crossing. For example, in 2014 work was done on the H-6049 Ratichi–Polnyje Bogatyri motorway in Belarus, as well as provincial road no. 664 in Poland, with the intention to link the Belarusian part of the Augustów Canal and the city of Grodno to Augustów. It was not achieved, given the non-appearance of the planned road crossing at Lipszczany–Sofievo. A similar situation was found at the Kadysh–Menciškė crossing on the Belarus–Lithuania border.

A major hindrance to the process by which border traffic at a local level is increased comes with the dilemma over whether to protect the environment or further develop infrastructure. On the one hand, the transboundary status of Augustów Forest ensures the presence throughout this region of protected areas that do not allow infrastructure (even for tourism) to develop, or at most permit it to do so only to a very limited extent (hence the major conflict surrounding construction of the Augustów Bypass in the years 2007–2009). On the other hand, the development of infrastructure in the Augustów Canal area (taking the form of roads, transport links, cycle trails, walking trails, cross-border tourist trails, routes along inland waterways, viewing towers, local border crossings and so on) was what made possible the further development of tourism (and the growth of tourist traffic) in this area (Więckowski, 2010a).

7. CHANGES IN TOURIST TRAFFIC EXEMPLIFIED BY THE RUDAWKA–LESNAYA BORDER CROSSING

Analysis of individual-level tourist traffic at the Rudawka–Lesnaya Crossing gave rise to the separate identification of three periods of operation (Fig. 2). The first, encompassing 2005–2016, had a low intensity, as well as a clear disproportion between numbers of people leaving and arriving (in line with their citizenship). Then, in the first years following opening of the crossing, very many more left Poland than arrived. Indeed, in 2005, 16-times more people left for Belarus than travelled into Poland, while the equivalent 2016 disparity was a mere 1.6-times. However, the scale of this traffic is found to be minimal in absolute terms. The highest figure travelling out of Poland was 275 in 2010, while the most coming in was 175 in 2012. The minima (10 people in each case) were found in 2005 (arrivals) and 2006 (arrivals and departures).

The second period encompasses the years 2017–2019 and is characterised by an abrupt increase in individual traffic. In 2017 compared with 2016, the numbers crossing

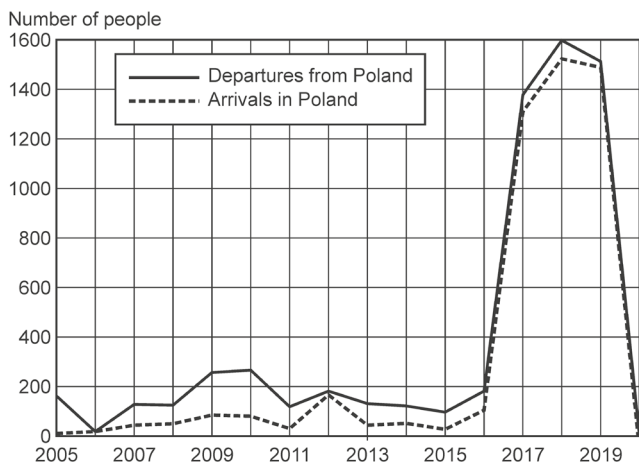


Figure 2. Numbers of people crossing the Poland-Belarus border at the Rudawka-Lesnaya crossing in 2005-2020
Source: author on the basis of data from Poland's Border Guard

over from Poland were more than eight times greater, while the numbers crossing into Poland were over twelve times greater. The peak was noted in 2018 when the border was crossed by 1615 people in the Belarusian direction and 1533 people in the Polish direction. The main cause of the increase was the introduction of visa-free travel into border areas (especially the Augustów Canal and Grodno), as well as permitting crossing by bicycle or on foot. As a consequence of the political and administrative decisions, Poland's *Green Velo* Eastern Cycle Trail was extended into Belarus, taking the name of the *August Velo* Cross-Border Cycle Trail (*Tourist Passport*, 2018) (Photo 2).



Photo 2. Information board with a map of the *August Velo* and *Green Velo* cross-border cycle trail which runs along the Mikaszówka-Rudawka-Nemnovo-Grodno route
Source: Marek Więckowski (July 2019)

2019 brought a slight reduction in cross-border traffic. Those most interested in what was on offer here, above all visitors keen to travel by canoe or kayak or bicycle, or else participate in sentimental tourism and the like, had already taken advantage of the opportunities, and were not planning to make a return visit in the near future.

The latest period began in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and late March saw the crossing of the Poland-Belarus border limited to just the three border crossings that remained open (i.e. Terespol-Brest, Kuźnica Białostocka-Bruski and Bobrowniki-Bierastavica). The Rudawka-Lesnaya crossing was simply closed, ensuring that there was no border traffic at all here in 2020.

Where seasonality influences the rate of border traffic, it needs of course to be stressed how periodic the operations of this crossing are (indeed by definition). For opening here takes place in late April or early May and goes through only to the end of September or beginning of October (and then only in daylight hours). Furthermore, the 2005-2016 period was associated with what might be termed crossing at least in part "by appointment". Simply speaking, it is not always the case that customs officials are present, making it necessary for trips by water to be announced at least a day in advance, if a wait of several hours is to be avoided. Further obstacles to a smooth visit have related to the very low intensity of the traffic overall, as well as the renovation work done along the canal in 2005-2007. Information from the Border Guard reveals days, or even months, in which there was no border traffic at all. Equally, data from the years 2017-2019 make it quite clear that traffic is always heaviest in July.

Traffic at the Rudawka-Lesnaya Crossing is dominated by Poles (Fig. 3), whether it is departures or arrivals that are involved. However, exceptions were noted in 2010 and 2017, when more non-Poles came into Poland (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, detailed data on the nationalities of foreigners involved from 2005 to 2010 and in 2014 are lacking. Data from the Border Guard concerning 2011-2013 and 2015-2019 point to a considerable (80-90%) prevalence of Belarusians. Where other states are concerned, most are from Lithuania, Russia and Germany. In 2019, 53% of those coming into Poland were Poles, while 37% were Belarusians, 3% Lithuanians,

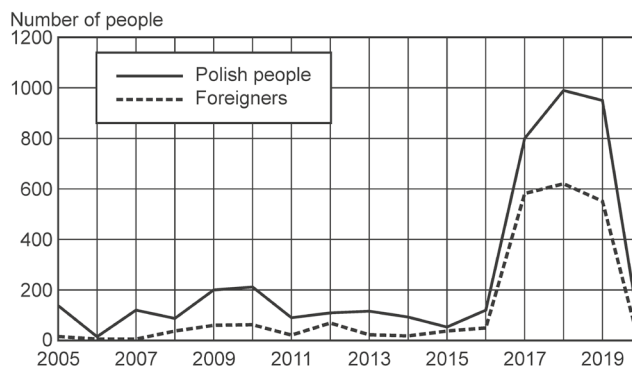


Figure 3. Numbers of Poles and foreigners travelling from Poland via the Rudawka-Lesnaya border crossing in 2005-2020
Source: author based on data from the Polish Border Guard



Figure 4. Numbers of Poles and foreigners crossing into Poland via the Rudawka-Lesnaya Border Crossing in 2005–2020

Source: author based on data from the Polish Border Guard

3% Russians, 2% Germans, and 2% citizens of other countries. Among those travelling out of Poland, it was: Poles – 63%, Belarusians – 32%, Lithuanians – 2%, Russians – 1%, Germans – 1% and others – 1% (Table 2). It is thus clear how the factor of geography does much to influence division as regards origins of those crossing the border. Equally, sporadic cases involving travellers from distant countries are interesting, with the presence of the UK, Spain, the USA, Australia and China.

It is also worth noting differences between the numbers of given nationalities arriving and departing, especially among Poles and Belarusians. In 2019, around

150 (one-fifth) more Poles left than arrived, while 80 (almost one-fifth) fewer Belarusians left than arrived. This may reflect returns to the given country via a different border crossing, or else a longer stay in the country being visited.

Interesting results are also supplied by the analysis of border traffic in relation to the type of crossing made at the border (by road or water), as well as the citizenship of those travelling. As crossing the border on foot or by bicycle only became a reality from May 2017 onwards, the only data available are for 2017–2019 inclusive (Table 2). From these it can be learnt that:

- a higher (55–60%) share of Poles leave Poland by means of transport on water than return in that way (the figure being around 35–40%); (in contrast) fewer Belarusians (around 30%) travel out of Poland by water than arrive into the country (around 70%);
- where (by-bicycle or on-foot) use of the road crossing is concerned the departure-arrival difference is of the order of 1–2% for both Poles and Belarusians.

It needs to be stressed that just 10–20% of the Belarusians travelling from Poland chose water, while the proportions of those arriving fluctuated greatly over the three years (at 28% in 2017, 43% in 2018 and 16% in 2019). Percentages of Poles taking the opportunity to cross the border by water are higher, and also less prone to fluctuation, with figures at 38–47% in relation

Table 2. Numbers crossing the border via the Rudawka-Lesnaya Crossing in 2017–2019: by permanent place of residence, type of crossing and direction (departures from Poland and arrivals into Poland)

Year	Direction	Type of crossing	Poland	Belarus	Lithuania	Germany	Russia	Other states	Total
2017	departures	road	455	453	6	0	5	18	937
		water	343	54	28	14	0	8	447
		total	798	507	34	14	5	26	1384
	arrivals	road	416	450	9	2	10	19	906
		water	203	177	1	8	1	11	401
		total	619	627	10	10	11	30	1307
2018	departures	road	619	407	3	12	14	6	1061
		water	374	119	41	8	3	9	554
		total	993	526	44	20	17	15	1615
	arrivals	road	608	379	2	4	14	10	1017
		water	204	290	9	0	7	8	518
		total	812	669	11	4	21	18	1535
2019	departures	road	501	438	2	21	16	8	986
		water	452	38	14	4	3	11	522
		total	953	476	16	25	19	19	1508
	arrivals	road	502	471	31	20	39	29	1092
		water	298	87	14	2	10	2	413
		total	800	558	45	22	49	31	1505

Source: author on the basis of data from the Polish Border Guard.

to departures from Poland, as well as 25–37% when it comes to arrivals into Poland.

The following factors have been exerting an influence on the disproportions present between water and road traffic:

- a markedly better tourist infrastructure on the Polish side: an autonomous and many times larger base for water sports, with conditions more favourable when it comes to the hiring of boats of various kinds;
- a far weaker set of options in Belarus when it comes to hiring canoes, kayaks, pedalos, and so on, with this being confined in the sense of general access to the area around the Dambroŭka (Dambrowka) Lock jetty;
- a lack of opportunities for the state border to be crossed by a means of transport hired in Belarus (according to data collected from 10 Belarusian firms prior to the field trip);
- the ease with which the Augustów Canal can be travelled where people go with the flow in the Poland–Belarus direction and possibly on further via the Nieman into Lithuania, as opposed to going against the current;
- the presence of other border crossings via which people may enter into or exit from the Augustów Canal area.

8. SUMMARY

In summing up the work carried out it is possible to claim confirmation of the research hypothesis put forward at the outset. Thanks to the relaxation of the border regime for Belarus, as well as the steady expansion of the visa-free zone in the years 2015–2016, there was a marked increase in foreign tourist traffic at both the national level¹, and local, i.e. in the Augustów Canal area. The increase in traffic along the canal route to the Rudawka–Lesnaya border crossing was also influenced by the introduction in 2017 of a way of crossing by road (although only on foot or by bicycle). The years 2017–2019 in fact represented the period of greatest enlivenment of tourist traffic using this crossing, especially when it came to citizens of states in the Nieman Euroregion, which is to say Poland, Belarus, Lithuania and Russia (with the first two clearly dominant, accounting for around 90% of the total). A preference for the water route was shown by Poles, even as Belarusians mainly opted for the road (on foot or by bicycle only). It was possible to note marked disproportions between arriving and departing tourists, with the details here found to depend on the direction of movement, country of origin, means of crossing and season of the year. There were days (and even whole weeks) when it was not possible to note any border

traffic at all; as well as situations in which a given day saw a single-direction crossing by canoe or bicycle, or on foot, by several dozen citizens of Belarus, Poland and Lithuania, even if nobody went the opposite way (perhaps over the span of an entire week).

The opening up of the Rudawka–Lesnaya crossing along the Augustów Canal to individuals, combines with the access thereby granted to numerous (aquatic, natural and cultural-historical) attractions to generate, in and of itself, a basis for intensive development of tourism. The greatest potential for cross-border tourism is that offered by the Augustów Canal itself, in its role as an axis of cooperation. The most-advanced product here at present is provided by organised trips for active and specialised tourists along the canal, the product in question being a route or trail (i.e. level-II integration after Stasiak and Włodarczyk, 2008). However, it remains too soon to speak of the shaping of a transboundary tourist area. The positive trends of the past several years may weaken / stop due to a number of negative processes and phenomena. Equally, from 2020 on, traffic relating to the Augustów Canal has of course been influenced above all by a succession of pandemic-induced lockdowns announced as COVID spread. There is also the matter of the complex political situation in Belarus which led to a worsening of both Polish-Belarusian and Belarusian-EU relations, manifested even at the level of regional or local co-operation.

ENDNOTE

¹ In 2014, Belarus was visited by 1700 organised and one-day visits from Poland, as compared with around 6000 in 2015, around 8000 in 2016, 22,700 in 2017 and 46,300 in 2018 (Więckowski, Cyargeenka, 2019). Numbers of tourists and single-day visitors from Lithuania also increased from around 2000 in 2014 to 59,500 in 2018. However, the share of Lithuanians using the Rudawka–Lesnaya crossing has remained at the same (1–3%) level for years now, possibly because of the location of the crossing in the Poland–Belarus borderland, the difficulties in canoeing against the current from Lithuania (via the Nieman and then the Augustów Canal), and the non-tourism-related (actually shopping-related) purposes associated with visits to Belarus by Lithuanians.

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AN ANALYSIS OF HEALTH TOURISM: THE EXAMPLE OF KOŁOBRZEG

Natalia Oleszczyk^a , Natalia Dominiak^b 

^a West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Faculty of Economics, Department of Regional and European Studies; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8441-8054>; e-mail: Natalia.Oleszczyk@zut.edu.pl

^b West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Faculty of Economics, Department of Regional and European Studies; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8287-6350>; e-mail: Natalia.Dominiak@zut.edu.pl

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a growing global interest in spa tourism, as well as a significant increase in social awareness of the need to care for health, physical fitness and well-being. Apart from spa tourism, 'spa & wellness' tourism is also very popular. Kołobrzeg, in addition to being a town largely geared towards patients, also attracts tourists who take advantage of 'spa & wellness' treatments. The purpose of this article is to define the essence and characteristics of spa tourism based on the example of Kołobrzeg. Spa activities are carried out in health care entities operating in the zone of the spa, places where patients are undergoing treatment or rehabilitation. These benefit from the healing natural conditions of the areas in which they operate and their microclimates. The main part of the article presents the history of spa tourism in Kołobrzeg along with an analysis of its spa offer and therapeutic profile. In addition, the empirical part discusses the results of an analysis among patients using the survey method; a large proportion of respondents were over 65, mainly female. During the study, the respondents rated various aspects of their spa stay (on a scale from 1 to 5) at a level above 4.0, which indicates the healthy condition of the spa itself and general satisfaction among patients.

KEYWORDS

health resort, spa tourism, tourism, Kołobrzeg

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spa tourism, along with medicinal (medical) and 'spa & wellness' tourism, are kinds of health tourism. According to Wolski, this is understood as "conscious and voluntary going away for a certain period of time outside the place of residence, during free time, in order to regenerate the system by means of active physical and mental recreation" (Wolski, 1970, p. 11).

Similarly, health resort tourism is defined by Gawarecki (2003), and Kornak and Rapacz (2001), as activity carried out in health resorts, connected with treatment (among others rehabilitation, preventive medicine). In their discussion, a health resort is defined

as a defined area where health resort activities are carried out.

Currently, Poland has an aging society (Adamczyk, 2017). Life expectancy is increasing (in 2019 for women it was 81.8 years, and for men 74.1, an increase compared to 2018 by 0.1 years for women and 0.3 for men (GUS, 2020)). Hence, spa tourism is considered very popular among domestic customers. Natural resources with healing properties found in Poland, such as mineral springs, peloid deposits and microclimates, constitute a factor in its growing competitiveness on the international market thanks to their effective use.

In addition to these, the main factors influencing the development of spa tourism include:

- the fashion to lead a healthy lifestyle;
- growing expectations of patients, and tourists who are not patients;
- the great popularity of spas with a rich history;
- the opportunity to shorten the time needed to return to health and fitness as a result of using the treatments offered and the frequency of their performance;
- visible differentiation of the tourist offer in terms of the quality of services provided and prices (Januszewska, 2004).

It should also be noted that more and more people are looking for places close to the natural environment where there has been little human interference. Spa tourism facilities are often located near forests, parks, national or landscape parks and nature reserves.

The status of a health resort or health resort protection area may be granted only to a zone that meets strictly defined conditions resulting from the Act of 28 July 2005 on spa treatment, health resorts and spa protection areas, and on health resort municipalities (*Ustawa*, 2016), e.g.:

- there are deposits of natural resources and a climate with healing properties confirmed by appropriate studies;
- meets all the requirements that have been strictly defined in the environmental protection regulations;
- efficient technical infrastructure is maintained there, mainly in the field of water, sewage and energy management and waste management, as well as public transport;
- there are facilities and appropriate spa treatment devices specialized in the provision of therapeutic treatments (Bernat, Harasimiuk, 2019; Makała, 2016).

In a situation where the first three are met and the fourth is not, the municipal authorities may apply for the status of a spa protection area. There are 45 health resorts throughout Poland (*Uzdrowiska*, 2020; *Wykaz uzdrowisk*, 2020). Spa tourism in Poland is undertaken in zones of health resort protection and in spa communes, where apart from therapeutic, spa and health activities, tourist services are also provided. In the coastal belt of the Zachodnio-pomorski (West Pomeranian) Voivodeship these include Świnoujście, Kamień Pomorski, Dąbki, Kołobrzeg and Połczyn Zdrój. Kołobrzeg is the most popular spa in northern Poland.

2. THE ESSENCE AND FUNCTIONS OF A SPA

The earliest mentions of spa treatment appeared in the 5th century BC and the first physician who became interested in using natural resources in the treatment of the human body was Hippocrates (Trzeciak, 1997). However, trips to spas have been a form of relaxation from earliest times. Areas with warm springs became the destination for Roman magnates to spend a good

time and they were pioneers in the field of bathing. The taste for bathing was later taken up by Muslims, mainly Arabs and Turks, and it was the latter who created the type of bath known to this day as a Turkish bath (Małecka, Marcinkowski, 2007).

Traveling to the ‘waters’ on a large scale, however, did not develop until the 18th century. Stays in spas, often with ancient roots, became fashionable among social elites all over Europe. Peak popularity was in the following century when, along with the construction of railway lines, transport and economic accessibility improved. Health resorts have become a favorite place of treatment and relaxation for professionals: writers, painters, singers and actors. In the 20th century, spas were further democratized and members of all social strata appeared among patients at sanatoria (Kaczmarek, Stasiak, Włodarczyk, 2010).

Currently, spas are treated as tourist attractions in the subject literature (Kruczek, 2012). Any element of the tourism product which are defined as specific in terms of their ability to attract tourists and are of key importance in making a decision on the choice of a holiday destination, is considered as such. Together with tourist services, this creates a ready tourist product (Kruczek, 2011). So far, attempts have been made relatively rarely to examine the attractiveness of health resorts in Poland. According to Szromek (2013), when analyzing the attractiveness of an area, research on the values that determine it (mainly tourist attractions) should be focused on.

Polish spas operate according to the Act of 28 July 2005 on spa treatment, health resorts and health resort protection areas, and spa communes (*Ustawa*, 2016). In this document, the term ‘health resort’ was defined as „an area in which spa treatment is carried out, set aside for the purpose of using and protecting its natural healing resources”.

The Polish Committee for Standardization (*Polski Komitet Normalizacyjny*) defines a health resort as an area with deposits of natural resources, access to sea waters and a climate showing healing properties (it is enough for at least one of these three factors to be met), as well as devices and facilities enabling spa treatment (Burzyński 2005).

Spa facilities are located in every landscape area in Poland, but most of them occur in the mountain and coastal belts. Thanks to the direct access to what is of natural, landscape and geographical value, apart from the treatment, it is undoubtedly an opportunity to develop tourism (Gotowt-Jeziorska, Wyrzykowski 2005).

According to Gaworecki (2003), there are three main motives for tourism: the will to explore the world (cognitive); willingness to renew physical and mental strength, including improvement of health and well-being (leisure); the need for active recreation (specialist

themes). These determinants of tourism are applicable in the case of health tourism along with, for example, active tourism.

3. SPA TOURISM IN KOŁOBRZEG

In the 19th century, Kołobrzeg belonged to the Prussian state and bore the German name of Kolberg. The history of the spa here is unusual. In 1802, Hans Heinrich von Held, a customs advisor in Poznań, served a prison sentence in Kołobrzeg fortress. After publishing a book, in which he described that he owed his health to the waves of the Baltic Sea, more and more people started to visit the town but the difficulty in establishing bathing areas was the status of a fortress (Cieślukowski, 1975).

In 1830, Gottlieb Keutel established the first saline bathing establishment. However, it was Dr. Moses Behrend who was hailed as the father of the Kołobrzeg spa resort (Heider, Kierzek, Laber, Kotuła 2019). Behrend, after purchasing the equipment from Keuttel, began to treat people professionally. Afterwards, saline and warm sea baths were set up. The drinking of saline water and ewe's milk was introduced but it was only after losing the status of fortress from 1872 was it transformed into a resort (*Historia uzdrowiska*, 2020).

In 1899 the first cure house, *Pałac Nabrzeżny*, was opened, a sanatorium built in a German Renaissance style. In 1911, during an international congress on spa treatment, Kołobrzeg was granted the rank of first-class health resort (Heider, Kierzek, Laber, Kotuła 2019).

The next period of the health resort's splendor was in interwar times. Kołobrzeg was then called the Pearl of the Baltic and was considered the best among the 125 German health resorts. In 1939, the number of patients in Kołobrzeg was 46,000. After World War II, the city was within the borders of Poland, but as a result of the siege in 1945, 90% of it had been destroyed.

The reconstruction of Kołobrzeg and its spa zone began in the early 1950s but systematic spa activity was resumed only in 1952. The town received the status of a health resort in 1967 (Urząd Miasta Kołobrzeg, 2020).

In the 1980s the economic and investment crisis in centrally-controlled Poland meant that all tourism and spa investments and renovations were suspended. In 1989, the period of great political changes began. The town of Kołobrzeg and the tourism facilities operating within it had to be in line with the requirements of the capitalist free market economy. The changes that took place in Kołobrzeg in terms of structure and ownership form along with the diversification of spa facilities can be described as a breakthrough and revolutionary (Miedziński, 2011). Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 coincided with the commercialization of spa enterprises and the introduction of a new spa act.

This was a period of opportunities for the economy, through EU subsidies to local authorities and spa companies, and the use made of them. At that time, great progress was made in the promotion of health resorts, development of communication, sanitary conditions, and the improvement in the quality of public space (Wójcikowski, 2015).

Kołobrzeg, after 20 years of systemic changes and the development of the free market economy, is now the largest, most modern center for spa and leisure tourism in Poland (Miedziński, 2011). Stays at the spa are associated with the treatment of diseases of the nervous, respiratory and skin systems, as well as in the field of orthopedics, cardiology, rheumatology, endocrinology, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis, as well as for recovery from injuries (Kołobrzeg, 2020).

Among the health resorts in Poland, Kołobrzeg is distinguished by its climate and large deposits of brine and mud (Gillert, 1964). In the zone of this most popular health resort there are healing waters whose use includes treatments for rheumatism, sciatica, inflammation of joints, muscles and bones, as well as atherosclerosis and many other diseases. Mud treatments are a great asset from the point of view of spa tourism. In addition, natural features undoubtedly include the microclimate of the coastal area, its beautiful natural environment and its vegetation. The Parsęta river flows through the town (Kroczyński 1969), with 27 species of fish living in its waters, while its valley, due to its ecological character, is included in the 'Natura 2000' program (*Przyroda Kołobrzegu i okolic*, 2020). The most important human features include the pier, the lighthouse, the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Polish Museum of Armaments, the Museum of Amber, the Powder Tower and the Monument to the Wedding of Poland with the Sea (*Atrakcje w Kołobrzegu*, 2020).

Healing treatments are carried out by institutions of various types. Table 1 lists the accommodation facilities, where spa and treatment services are provided, along with their treatment profiles. A wide range of spa treatments are carried out in a large number of the facilities in Kołobrzeg. An interesting example is Magnolia SPA, which although it offers only general rehabilitation has the possibility of PFRON co-financing and a week-long therapeutic stay including rehabilitation treatments.

During a stay in the facilities listed in Table 1, patients benefit from a wide treatment base. They also have at their disposal many additional recreational and leisure facilities which include swimming pools, saunas, salt and iodine caves, iodine sessions and Nordic walking paths.

Most institutions listed in Table 1 deal with treatment and rehabilitation related to asthma (19), sinusitis (18) and post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones (17). Only one center deals with the treatment of skin allergies.

Table 1. Profile of treatments at curative and spa facilities in Kołobrzeg

No.	Center name / facility type	Breathing allergy	Skin allergy	Food allergy	Psoriasis	Asthma	Infertility	Sinusitis	After myocardial infarction	Thyroid gland	Post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones	Rheumatoid arthritis	Neuralgia	Other
1.	Arka Medical Spa Hotel****	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
2.	Centrum Rehabilitacji Rolników KRUS Niwa	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	history of strokes
3.	Centrum Zdrowia i Wypoczynku Ikar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	migraines, diseases of the venous system
4.	Centrum Zdrowia i Relaksu VERANO	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	cerebral palsy in children
5.	Jantar Hotel & Spa	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	chronic bronchitis, rehabilitation after arthroplasty
6.	Kurhotel Etna	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	chronic bronchitis, migraine, arterial hypertension
7.	Magnolia SPA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	Mona Lisa Boutique Wellness & Spa	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	sciatica, diabetes
9.	Olymp II	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	chronic bronchitis
10.	Ośrodek Lecznico-Wypoczynkowy Kormoran Sp. z o.o.	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-
11.	Ośrodek Phoenix – Obiekt Sanatoryjno-Wczasowy	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	migraine, root syndromes
12.	Ośrodek Rehabilitacyjno-Sanatoryjny Perełka	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	catarrh of the respiratory tract
13.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wczasowy Poznanianka	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	chronic bronchitis, rehabilitation after arthroplasty, degeneration of the spine
14.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wypoczynkowy Bursztyn	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	chronic bronchitis, migraine, obesity
15.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wypoczynkowy Olymp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	migraine
16.	Sanatorium Mewa 1, Pawilon A – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Sanatorium Mewa 1, Pawilon B – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
18.	Sanatorium Mewa 2 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
19.	Sanatorium Mewa 3 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-

No.	Center name / facility type	Breathing allergy	Skin allergy	Food allergy	Psoriasis	Asthma	Infertility	Sinusitis	After myocardial infarction	Thyroid gland	Post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones	Rheumatoid arthritis	Neuralgia	Other
20.	Sanatorium Mewa 4 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
21.	Sanatorium MSW w Kołobrzegu	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	diabetes
22.	Sanatorium Perła Bałtyku (Kombatant)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	tuberculosis, degeneration of the spine, rehabilitation after mastectomy
23.	Sanatorium SAN	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Bałtyk	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
25.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Kielczanka-Albax	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
26.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Koral-Live	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	sciatica, hypertension
27.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Lech	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	chronic catarrh of the respiratory system
28.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Mesko	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
29.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Posejdon	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	rehabilitation after mastectomy, diabetes
30.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Wistom	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
31.	Szpital Uzdrowski Muszelka – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-
32.	Szpital Uzdrowski Słoneczko – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	treatment after thoracic surgery
33.	Willa Fortuna	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	rehabilitation after arthroplasty

Source: authors based on Sanatoria.org (2020).

It should be remembered that spa treatment is a continuation of outpatient or inpatient treatment to help a patient regain fitness after an accident or illness using natural medicinal resources and the properties of the microclimate. At the spa, patients also attend physiotherapeutic treatments and during their stay each participant can take advantage of free diagnostic tests as well as medicines and medical devices that are necessary for the treatment (Spa Treatment, 2020).

4. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study was to determine the most common reasons for patients to come to Kołobrzeg (including their health problems), as well as their expectations regarding their stay at the spa. In the empirical part, a questionnaire was used, carried out personally by both authors in Kołobrzeg in 2019. The selection of the sample for study was random

and 118 people from Poland staying there took part. The research was exploratory in nature. The respondents answered closed questions including the purpose of coming to Kołobrzeg, their main diseases and the tourist attractions that they want to make use of during their stay. The survey also provided information on patient evaluations (e.g. price of stay and food), as well as sources of finance for the trip. The results are presented in tabular form and on a graph.

5. ACADEMIC RESEARCH RESULTS

More women (69%) than men (31%) took part in the research. Those aged 55–65 and over-65 accounted for almost 86% of the respondents with the smallest under-45 (6%) and aged 45–55 (8%). The respondents most often answered that they go to a sanatorium every two years (28%). Over 50% of respondents choose 21-day stays, with less than 8% 7 days. Most of the respondents had higher education (50.8%) and their monthly income exceeded PLN 2,000. The vast majority

of patients who come to Kołobrzeg live in cities (66%). More than half had already been to Kołobrzeg before (52.5%).

The first question in the survey concerned the main motive for the trip (Table 2). The most frequently indicated reason was the desire to improve their general health, the need to treat illnesses or to improve their physical and mental condition. Willingness to make new friends was the least frequently considered main reason (18 responses, only 17.1% of women).

The respondents were also asked about the health problems that caused them to come to Kołobrzeg. They most often mentioned rheumatoid arthritis (36%), respiratory diseases (30%) and diabetes (29%). It should be noted that neuralgia appeared only in responses given by women. The disease most frequently mentioned by men was cardiovascular, while women most often indicated rheumatoid arthritis and bone inflammation.

The next question concerned the procedures in which the respondents participated during their stay (Table 3). The answers provided show that patients most often used massages (51%), baths in a brine pool (32%), kinesitherapy (32%) and inhalation (31%), and

Table 2. Main theme of the trip

Main theme of the trip	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Improving health	35	30	27	32.9	8	22.2
Treatment of medical conditions as prescribed by a doctor	23	19	13	15.9	10	27.8
General improvement of physical and mental condition	22	19	16	19.5	6	16.7
General rest	20	17	12	14.6	8	22.2
Willingness to make new friends	18	15	14	17.1	4	11.1

Source: authors based on questionnaire research

Table 3. Treatments used by patients during their stay in Kołobrzeg

Treatment	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Massages	60	51	52	63.4	8	22.2
Brine pool	38	32	26	31.7	12	33.3
Kinesitherapy	38	32	27	32.9	11	30.6
Inhalations	37	31	20	24.4	17	47.2
Cryotherapy	37	31	26	31.7	11	30.6
Laser-therapy	35	30	24	29.3	11	30.6
Electrotherapy	30	25	17	20.7	13	36.1
Brine baths	29	25	19	23.2	10	27.8
Mud treatment	24	20	19	23.2	5	13.9
Mud pool	18	15	11	13.4	7	19.4

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

least frequently used peloid treatments (13.9% of men and 23.2% of women).

Determining the reason for coming to Kołobrzeg (Table 4), the respondents mentioned its location in the coastal belt as the most important factor influencing their decision, as well as recommendations from friends and family. Neither distance from home nor the ease of getting there mattered very much.

In response to the question about expected health benefits (Table 5), the respondents primarily mentioned changes in eating habits, as well as improving general health and physical fitness. They least often expected

a reduction in inflammation (17%) or an improvement in mental condition (14%).

The respondents were also asked to define their preferences regarding the additional attractions that they want to use in Kołobrzeg. The respondents most often chose walks (25.4%) and concerts (26.3%) with a willingness to use spa & wellness treatments the least frequently indicated. This is probably due to the fact that such services are quite expensive, but also available all over Poland and not only in this particular spa.

The respondents, when asked about their source of financing (Table 6), indicated that these trips were

Table 4. Main reasons for coming to Kołobrzeg

Main reasons for coming to Kołobrzeg	Total		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Seaside location	29	25	20	24.4	9	25.0
Recommendation by friends/family	25	21	21	25.6	4	11.1
Price for spa stay	21	18	12	14.6	9	25.0
Tourist attractiveness	18	15	9	11.0	9	25.0
Ease of journey	13	11	11	13.4	2	5.6
Distance from home	11	9	8	9.8	3	8.3

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 5. Health expectations of respondents after a sanatorium visit

Expectations of spa guests	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Change of diet adapted to the disease	49	42	33	40.2	16	44.4
Improving overall health	35	30	27	33.0	8	22.2
Improving circulation	31	26	15	18.3	16	44.4
Improvement in physical condition	28	24	17	20.7	11	30.6
Improvement in immunity	26	22	20	24.4	6	16.7
Pain relief	26	22	22	26.8	4	1.1
Reduction of inflammation in joints and bones	20	17	15	18.3	5	13.9
Improvement of mental condition	16	14	11	13.4	5	13.9

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 6. Source of financing a stay in Kołobrzeg

Source of financing	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Private	43	36	27	32.9	16	44.4
NFZ referral	41	35	33	40.2	8	22.2
ZUS referral	14	12	12	14.6	2	5.6
PFRON	10	8	4	4.9	6	16.7
KRUS referral	8	7	5	6.1	3	8.3

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 7. Place of accommodation in Kołobrzeg

Type of tourist resort	Total		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Sanatorium and holiday resort	47	40	35	42.7	12	33.3
Spa sanatorium	36	31	20	24.4	16	44.4
Rehabilitation center	16	14	13	15.9	3	8.3
Spa hospital	10	8	6	7.3	4	11.1
Hotel with spa & wellness treatments	8	7	7	8.5	1	2.8

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

financed entirely from private funds (36%) or from the Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia (National Health Fund) (35%). Only eight had had a KRUS referral.

The information on accommodation in Kołobrzeg for spa stays (Table 7) shows that patients most often stayed in sanatorium-recreational centers and spa sanatoria. The spa hospital was indicated by ten respondents while 88% of the women surveyed were accommodated in spa sanatoria.

The last question concerned an assessment of patient satisfaction (on a scale of 1 – very bad to 5 – very good) – Figure 1. In their responses men rated much higher. The exception was the question about the attitudes of medical personnel (4.03) which was perceived as worse than by female patients.

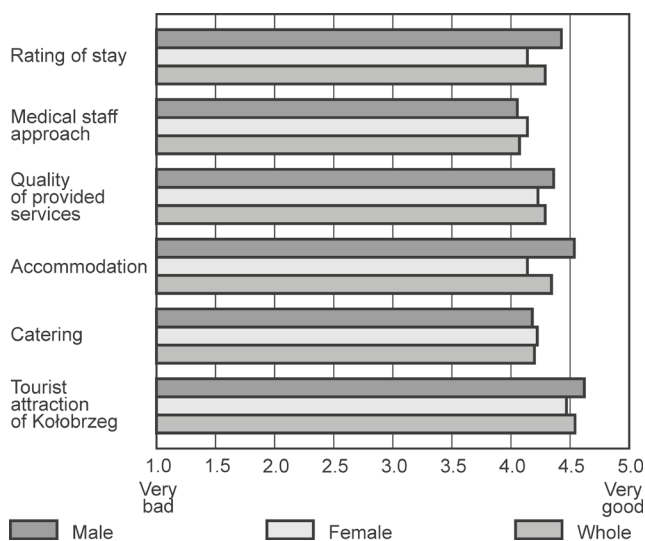


Figure 1. Average rating for patient satisfaction
Source: authors based on questionnaire research

On the basis of the research, it can be seen that spa tourism in Kołobrzeg is popular among people over 55 years old. Patients assessed their stays positively, not only in terms of accommodation and cleanliness in the rooms, but also the prices. They were least satisfied with the medical staff which resulted from incomplete

matching of the treatment procedures to the type of disease. The survey results show that Kołobrzeg, due to its tourist attractiveness, is a popular destination and is often visited for other purposes than health.

6. DISCUSSION

Krzyżanowska (2016) conducted similar research on a national scale a few years before. The results she obtained demonstrated that the main goals of spa trips are the desire to improve health, the need to treat diseases and to rest. The most common diseases are rheumatological, and the rarest are ailments related to the digestive system and respiratory tract. The most important benefits for the respondents turned out to be improved well-being and physical fitness. The respondents, when assessing the services related to spa stays in Poland, perceived the quality of the treatments offered and the professional approach of medical personnel as the best.

Similar conclusions were also reached by, among others, by Środa-Murawska, Grzelak-Kostulska, Biegalska (2015) and Parzych (2015). The research conducted by these authors shows that spa services and professionalism were highly appreciated by tourists. On the other hand, the research carried out by Parzych in Dąbki (a seaside village in Pobrżeże Koszalińskiego with the status of a health resort since 2007) revealed that tourists indicated that the main purpose of visiting the town was its spa activities: care treatments, walks, regeneration and rest.

The results of the preliminary research presented in this article fully correspond to the results of the studies by Krzyżanowska (2016) and Parzych (2015). However, the authors have identified additional factors that determine the choice of Kołobrzeg as a health resort. In addition to highly-rated benefits of access to natural healing resources, the respondents also emphasized their interest in sports and recreation facilities. Pro-health services however were rated lower.

7. CONCLUSION

The article presents the results of an exploratory questionnaire preceding actual research which will be conducted among patients in health resorts throughout Poland in the coming years. The results obtained so far demonstrate that Kołobrzeg is a destination eagerly chosen by spa tourists and most of the respondents had visited before.

Kołobrzeg is widely recognized as one of the most beautiful and largest health resorts in Poland, which has a rich history and valuable healing resources including peloid deposits. Typical treatment and rehabilitation programs as part of spa tourism are determined individually and adjusted to the needs of each patient. Trips to a sanatorium are organized so that they are tailored in terms of specialization in treatment of ailments.

The development of modern spas, therapeutic (medical) tourism, as well as spa & wellness is due to the fact that guests are not only patients with specific ailments, but also those without major problems who want to lead a healthy lifestyle and take care of their bodies, using various beauty treatments. Therefore, in many facilities, tourists and patients have the opportunity to take advantage of spa and wellness stays. Undoubtedly, apart from the attractive offer of curative and spa visits, tourists who go to Kołobrzeg are also attracted by unique tourist attractions (including the pier, sea port and lighthouse) and numerous cultural festivals and outdoor events taking place in the summer (e.g. on the beach).

To sum up, today's Kołobrzeg should be seen as a thriving health resort, not only stimulating local development, but also supporting the economy of the region and Poland as a whole. It is a destination of varied tourist attractions (sightseeing, recreation, spa), has well-developed tourism and a high attractiveness rating among patients. This allows us to forecast further dynamic development in spa tourism. It is important that the offer meets the constantly changing expectations and requirements of visitors. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly invest in development, modernize the tourist and para-tourist infrastructure so that it can satisfy the comprehensive needs of its visitors.

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PERCEPTION OF INNOVATION IN TOURISM WITH REGARD TO CONTROVERSIAL TYPES OF TRAVEL: A STUDY OF POLISH CONSUMERS

Grzegorz Godlewski^a 

^a Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Faculty of Geographical and Geological Sciences, Department of Tourism and Recreation; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5860-1795>; e-mail: grzgod@amu.edu.pl

ABSTRACT

The aim was to determine how tourism innovations, including controversial types of tourism, are perceived by consumers. The hypothesis adopted was that there would be statistically significant correlations between demographic variables, the respondents' perception of innovations and their propensity to engage in non-normative behaviour during tourism trips. The study was conducted using the CAWI surveying technique by means of an online questionnaire (N = 407). The respondents had noticed significant changes in the tourism industry and the majority were in favour of those innovations. These mainly related to the development of tourist service infrastructure. The study found a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents with more males in favour of introducing controversial tourism offers to the market. Male respondents were also more likely to engage in deviant behaviour.

KEYWORDS

consumer behaviour, innovations in tourism, controversy in tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, an industry which is developing rapidly at both regional and national levels, is becoming a desirable area of activity to allow local potential to be fulfilled. Research has shown that there is a positive relationship between long-term economic growth and the development of tourism (Samimi, Sadeghi, Sadeghi, 2011). Thanks to a relatively strong global economy, a growing middle class in emerging countries, technological developments, new business models, the affordability of travel and visa facilitation, international tourism grew by 5% in 2018 compared to 2017, reaching 1.4 billion trips (UNWTO, 2019). However, it should be noted that the tourism industry is vulnerable to threats, mainly from political instability in many regions of the world, terrorism, conflicts and disease,

a notable example being the current pandemic and the administrative decisions of authorities that restrict, if not prevent, tourism. Such negative impacts lead to a significant loss of income and jobs and, in extreme cases, may eliminate tourism altogether. Its subsequent restoration would entail a significant investment in terms of time and money (Scott, Laws, Prideaux, 2013; Teitler-Regev, Shahrabani, Goziker, 2013).

Overtourism, too, has negative consequences, especially in terms of the degradation of the environment and problems for the social life of local residents. These negative developments often result in restrictions imposed on travel to tourist destinations as well as amendments to legal regulations that inhibit tourism. Given an increase in travel, this may result in customers searching for other, as yet "undiscovered", equivalent or substitute destinations.

One factor that may slow down those negative processes in the tourism sector is the creation of innovative solutions which are not necessarily limited to conventional, uncontroversial products or types of tourism.

The aim of the article is to bridge a research and literature gap regarding the analysis of controversies in the Polish tourism market in relation to innovations.

2. INNOVATION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE

Innovation is perceived as a driver of modern economies and a critical factor for economic growth. In micro-economic terms, it is seen as an opportunity for companies to strengthen their offer and position in the market. Over recent years, interest in innovation has increased significantly in many sectors, including the tourism industry whose complex, multidimensional nature facilitates the creation of economic reality into all the components of the tourism market. Hjalager (2010) lists several types of innovation associated with tourism relating to products, processes, management, marketing and institutions, with the service sector combining these different categories of innovation.

The constant evolution of markets forces companies to systematically develop and implement innovations, defined as the use of a new or substantially improved product or process, a new marketing method or a new organisational method in business practice, workplace organisation and relations with the environment (OECD, Eurostat, 2005). According to Schumpeter (1960), innovation involves putting a new solution into practice (however, it should be noted that Schumpeter focused mainly on technological innovation and its economic impact). Innovation is also understood as a continuum of technological and organisational change covering, on the one hand, simple modifications to existing products, processes and practices (which may be new to a company, but not necessarily new to the industry) and, on the other hand, fundamentally new products and processes (both to the industry and to a company). The development of such innovations involves a wide range of scientific, technological, organisational, financial and commercial activity (Porter, 1990). Innovations are implemented in all economic sectors. For instance, tourism businesses introduce innovations by developing a new tourism offer or improving existing ones, and using new technologies in distribution and/or promotion to implement innovative solutions in terms of business management, forms of organisation and rules for cooperation. One other interesting area of innovation is the use of unique architecture, facility design, location of an enterprise

and development of the surrounding area. The changes caused by innovations can be radical (pioneering) and/or imitative (adaptation, modification) (Dolińska, 2010).

A high level of innovation translates into a competitive advantage in the market. The determinants of the diffusion of innovation in tourism can be divided into external and internal factors. External factors include activity in the tourism economy, the development of tourism research, the following of economic trends, state tourism innovation policies, the level of competition within the market, observation and analysis of needs, fiscal and tax instruments for promoting innovation, and institutional infrastructure supporting innovation. In turn, internal factors include the commercial viability of innovations for tourism businesses, their creative mentality and intellectual capital, the minimum investment necessary to implement innovations, the complexity of the innovation process and accidental impacts (Januszewska, 2008).

Given the great importance of tourists' experiences and the strong link between tourism and space, innovative activity in the area discussed has unique features. The diffusion of new solutions takes place at a faster rate in tourism compared with other economic sectors. Intellectual property is usually of minor importance for tourism businesses as research and development work, which has a significant impact on business, is undertaken and implemented outside the tourism sector (Łażniewska, 2012).

According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), companies may create offerings enriched with experiences which are perceived as a new source of customer value and are the basis for customer satisfaction. This was also stressed by Urry (1990) and MacCannell (1973, 1976) in their publications.

The factors behind the creation of experiences include the presence, knowledge and sensitivity of an individual as well as the presence of raw materials, goods and/or services. In an economy in which experiences are considered tradable commodities, customers purchase other products provided that they offer them the experiences they expect – usually positive ones (Marciszewska, 2010).

The key ways to intensify experiences include (Stasiak, 2013):

- transforming the tourist infrastructure into unique attractions,
- ‘wrapping’ experiences and emotions around traditional packages of services,
- creating augmented reality experiences using new technologies that make tourist space more attractive,
- discovering new tourist spaces offering unique and extreme experiences,
- developing new forms of tourism which develop the skills, creativity and personality of tourists.

As the experiences and emotions of tourists are considered tradable commodities, tourists expect, for whatever demands they voice, a professional and comprehensive tourist offer, and this includes those needs that raise ethical questions.

3. CONTROVERSIAL TYPES OF TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVIANT TOURIST BEHAVIOUR

Deviant tourist behaviour (DTB) is defined in the literature as tourist behaviour which causes various types of damage (social, cultural, environmental and economic) to tourist-receiving areas. Such behaviour, which is quite common, includes violence (Hughes et al., 2008; Kerr, de Kock, 2002), destruction of native flora (e.g. plants, corals) by taking it home as a souvenir (Weaver, 2006), lack of respect for cultural traditions (Bhati, Pearce, 2016) and putting illegal graffiti on buildings (Thirumaran, 2013). The behaviour is damaging for tourist assets, but it can also hinder consumption and negatively impact the tourist experiences of other visitors, causing tangible losses to tourism businesses. Deviant tourist behaviour includes behaviour that may be considered liminal, at the edge of social legitimacy and even illegal (Ryan, Kinder, 1996). At the same time, a growing number of tourists are interested in 'civilised' activities and it is those tourists who may provide a major contribution to a reduction of the impact of dysfunctions on tourist-receiving areas (Juvan, Dolnicar, 2016).

Ongoing research on deviant tourist behaviour mainly focuses on emphasising and exploring its patterns and causes as well as possible corrective measures (Juvan, Dolnicar, 2016). Based on their sociological study, Uriely, Ram and Ayala (2011) even suggest that tourism activity as a whole encourages deviant tourist behaviour in a natural, involuntary way. Such behaviour will be reinforced by marketing pressures, which stimulate the involvement of market relations.

A study by Li (2015) on the causes of deviant behaviour in individuals and groups showed that the main causal factors behind the behaviour are the inappropriate habits of tourists. However, the available literature does not provide solutions as to how to deal with the problem. Therefore, models should be developed that can help adopt an optimum strategy for action to change the attitudes and needs of tourists.

Stebbins (1996) refers to the deviant behaviour of consumers which is tolerable to an extent (e.g. gambling, alcohol abuse, use of soft drugs, pornography viewing, visiting nudist beaches) as 'deviant leisure'. Where these activities are undertaken during a temporary tourist visit, they are treated as deviant tourism (Ryan, Kinder, 1996; Uriely, Belhassen, 2005, 2006). Tourism

may be considered a unique realm, as it is associated with an escape from the routine of everyday life. Some authors try to explain the deviant behaviour of tourists by comparing tourism to an alternative domain of life different from the everyday and in which the suspension of social norms and values is possible, tolerated or even necessary (Goffman, 1963, 1967; Shields, 1992; Turner, Ash, 1975). In line with this approach, Wang (2000) ambiguously referred to tourism as 'Eros-modernity' where an individual is allowed to engage in socially irrational behaviour, as in the theory of deviant behaviour by Hirschi (1969). Turner and Ash (1975) even suggest that temporary distance from their usual environment allows tourists to suspend the norms and values governing their everyday lives. Similarly, Shields (1992) associated tourist spaces, such as beaches, with the suspension of social constraints, mainly due to anonymity and weakened social control.

One of the key models of the systemic concepts used to explain it, is the sociocultural model of tourism of Jafari. The model assumes that there are two opposing systems in the global macro-system – the tourist-sending system, which is part of the daily life of a tourist and is based on the definitional 'usual environment'; and the tourist-receiving system, which is separated from everyday life, comprising tourist-receiving areas where the tourist can satisfy needs and grasp the opportunity for mental and physical regeneration through recreation. It is within the latter system that unfamiliar "foreign bodies" (tourists from different places), characterised by different behaviours and cultures, come into contact with one another leading to uncontrolled interpersonal and intercultural interactions. According to Jafari (1987), these may result in changes to tourist-receiving systems posing a threat to their identity.

This area of social life, which legitimises and even encourages non-normative behaviour, may be precisely explained by Goffman's theory of social interaction. This theory states that when interacting with others, people want, in fact, to make a good impression on the 'public', as they believe it will be beneficial for them. This allows an individual to show others those aspects of their personality that they want noticed and remembered. According to the theoretical parameters developed by Goffman (1963, 1967), each person strives to build a desirable public image for him or herself. By participating in different forms of entertainment and using tourism-related facilities (e.g. discos, resorts, casinos, amusement parks) – so-called "*backspaces*" or "*action spaces*" – people can experience what they cannot have in everyday life.

The literature on deviant tourist behaviour seems to be based on an assumption that it is relatively strongly correlated with the routinisation of everyday life, but this is not always in line with postmodern conceptualisations of tourism (Lash, Urry, 1994; Munt,

1994; Uriely, 2005; Urry, 1990) and analyses by other authors (Larsen, 2008; Larsen, Urry, Axhausen, 2007; Uriely, 2010). Modern theories underline the time and space factors that legitimise or even encourage a temporary suspension of the norms of everyday life.

The term 'tourist awareness' includes reference to a tourist's knowledge and understanding of unethical and deviant behaviour, its definition and essence as well as possible penalties and the inconvenience associated with particular activities. The higher the awareness, the greater the likelihood that the behaviour of tourists will be guided by positive habits and norms.

Different types of tourism are associated with different types of deviant behaviour. The most controversial types include sex tourism, drug tourism, some forms of medical tourism (pharma-tourism, abortion tourism and euthanasia tourism), LGBTQ tourism, slum/poverty tourism, disaster tourism, extreme tourism and thanatourism (Panasiuk, 2015). Each of those types may provoke the behaviour referred to above and, at the same time, be a source of innovative change in businesses.

4. AIMS, MATERIAL AND METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The paper addresses the issue of innovation and controversies in the Polish tourism market. The analyses presented are part of a study titled "The role of tourism in the contemporary consumption model: controversies in the Polish tourism sector" carried out by the author between 2015 and 2018, which used a wide range of research methods and techniques (desk research, 'mystery shopping', individual in-depth interviews, CAWI, expert panel) enabling an in-depth analysis, including one of real demand, and the identification of factors affecting the consumption of controversial tourism services. For obvious reasons, it was not possible to present all the results in this article due to length constraints.

The main aim was to determine how consumers perceive tourism innovations, including controversies, which are attracting an increasing interest from consumers. The author also aimed to answer the question of what innovations in the tourism sector

Table 1. Independent variables/features characterising the respondents

Place of residence	Number of answers	Percent
Metropolitan area (over 500 000 inhabitants)	52	12.8
Large urban area (between 100 and 500 000 inhabitants)	74	18.2
Medium-sized urban area (between 20 and 99 000 inhabitants)	80	19.7
Small urban area (up to 20 000 inhabitants)	52	12.8
Rural area	149	36.5
Total	407	100.0
Education (highest level completed)	Number of answers	Percent
Primary/lower-secondary education	9	2.2
Basic vocational education	36	8.9
Secondary education	131	32.2
Post-secondary education	64	15.7
Bachelor degree	34	8.4
Master's degree	133	32.6
Total	407	100.0
Sex	Number of answers	Percent
Female	206	50.6
Male	201	49.4
Total	407	100.0
Age (years)	Number of answers	Percent
18–24	53	13.0
25–34	81	19.9
35–44	65	15.9
45–54	79	19.4
55 and over	129	31.8
Total	407	100.0

Source: author.

have been noticed by Polish consumers, including those types of tourism that are debated and contentious, and are considered controversial.

According to the hypothesis adopted there would be a statistically significant correlation between dependent and independent variables (demographic characteristics of respondents), with respect to their perception of innovation, and controversial types of tourism, especially in terms of determining whether consumers who live in large cities, are better educated (and thus often earning higher income), and are not in a formal relationship, are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour and controversial types of tourism.

When designing this part of the research, the author ensured that the sample was as representative as possible (essential for quantitative analyses) and that the activities to be carried out and their conditions were standardised. Efforts were also made to minimise the risk of classic measurement errors (Sztabiński, Żmijewska-Jędrzejczyk, 2012).

When investigating innovations in the tourism sector and its controversial forms, the author was aware that the issues addressed are potentially sensitive. The study was conducted using the CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) method by means of an interview questionnaire (to be self-administered) provided to 407 respondents over the internet. Analyses were carried out on a nationwide sample of the Polish population aged ≥ 18 , with age, sex, education and the size of their places of residence as independent variables (Table 1).

One basic limitation of the research method used is the geographically diversified and, until recently, the low level of access by households to the internet (so-called internet penetration) and the resulting coverage error. Another limitation was that the researcher had no control over who actually completes the questionnaire. Despite its structured nature, e-mail contact with the respondents enabled a relatively free exchange of information between the researcher and the respondents.

5. RESULTS

The vast majority of the respondents (80.5%) stated that Poland has a strong potential for the development of innovative tourism offers¹. Slightly over 5% of the respondents stated that Poland does not have potential for the development of innovative tourism offers while almost three times more (14%) were unable to give a clear answer and selected "I don't have an opinion".

According to the respondents, consumer needs are the most crucial factor for the development of innovative tourism offers in Poland (65.4%). Other factors were cited less frequently. The factors that were considered important include competition on

the tourism market (47.4%), the creativity of managers (44.2%) and the ability to obtain external sources of finance for innovative ventures (38.3%).

The largest proportion of respondents were in favour of innovation, subject however to certain limitations (42%) (relating, for instance, to the accessibility and promotion of controversial tourism offers), whereas 31% were in favour of all innovation in the tourism sector. One-fourth (25%) had no opinion on the subject and only 2.5% were against innovation. The largest proportion had noticed offers relating to the development of the tourist infrastructure (providing services to travellers – accommodation, catering facilities, tourist information, travel agents, etc.) (42.5%). Only some declared that they had noticed innovations related to controversial offers (15%). This means that such tourism products are not primarily perceived as particularly innovative.

A more detailed analysis was carried out based on closed questions. The respondents could choose from a list of several answers pertaining to accessibility to natural and cultural assets, development of the tourist infrastructure, new offers for visitors in tourist-receiving regions and controversial products. The respondents could also declare that they had not noticed any innovations in tourism.

When analysing the relationship between independent variables and the perception of innovations in the Polish tourism sector, no statistically significant correlations were found in most cases. However, there were certain exceptions.

Statistically significant correlations were found when analysing the responses of the respondents (divided by sex) concerning new tourism offers (e.g. tours to previously lesser-known regions and using available attractions). The number of female respondents in favour of such innovations was greater than that of male. Statistically significant differences were also found for the respondents' perception of controversial innovations. Statistically significantly more men than women were in favour of the introduction of such tourism offers into the market. Significant correlations were also found for the age of the respondents and their place of residence. Moreover, statistically significant differences were found when analysing the distribution by education of those respondents who stated that they had not noticed any innovations in the Polish tourism market (Table 2).

The opinions of the respondents (those in favour of all innovation, those in favour of innovation, subject to certain limitations, and those against innovation), as regards Polish tourism products involving controversial tourism offers, also varied. The differences were statistically significant, in particular in the case of a comparison of the respondents who were in favour of all innovation and those who had no opinion on the subject (Table 3).

Table 2. Categories of innovation in the Polish tourism product noticed by respondents over the past five years (statistically significant correlations)

Sex of the respondents	Innovations in the Polish tourism product relating to new regions and the tourist attractions they offer				Pearson's chi-squared test
	No		Yes		
	Number of answers	Percent	Number of answers	Percent	
Female	118	57.28	88	42.72	$df = 1$ $p = .03041$
Male	136	67.66	65	32.34	
Sex of the respondents	Innovations in the Polish tourism product relating to the marketing of controversial tourism offers				Pearson's chi-squared test
Female	184	89.32	22	10.68	$df = 1$ $p = .01322$
Male	162	80.60	39	19.40	
Age of the respondents	Innovations in the Polish tourism product relating to the marketing of controversial tourism offers				Pearson's chi-squared test
18–24	42	79.25	11	20.75	$df = 4$ $p = .00062$
25–34	58	71.60	23	28.40	
35–44	56	86.15	9	13.85	
45–54	70	88.61	9	11.39	
55 and over	120	93.02	9	6.98	
Place of residence	Innovations in the Polish tourism product relating to new regions and the tourist attractions they offer				Pearson's chi-squared test
Rural area	103	69.13	46	30.87	$df = 4$ $p = .03044$
Small urban area	23	44.23	29	55.77	
Medium-sized urban area	47	58.75	33	41.25	
Large urban area	47	63.51	27	36.49	
Metropolitan area	34	65.38	18	34.62	
Place of residence	Innovations in the Polish tourism product involving the marketing of controversial tourism offers				Pearson's chi-squared test
Rural area	130	87.25	19	12.75	$df = 4$ $p = .01428$
Small urban area	39	75.00	13	25.00	
Medium-sized urban area	65	81.25	15	18.75	
Large urban area	70	94.59	4	5.41	
Metropolitan area	42	80.77	10	19.23	
Education	Innovations in the Polish tourism product relating to the development of tourist infrastructure				Pearson's chi-squared test
Primary, lower-secondary education	7	77.78	2	22.22	$df = 5$ $p = .02295$
Basic vocational education	28	77.78	8	22.22	
Secondary education	78	59.54	53	40.46	
Post-secondary education	31	48.44	33	51.56	
Bachelor degree	15	44.12	19	55.88	
Master's degree	75	56.39	58	43.61	
Education	I have not noticed any innovations				Pearson's chi-squared test
Primary, lower-secondary education	3	33.33	6	66.67	$df = 5$ $p = .0038$
Basic vocational education	22	61.11	14	38.89	
Secondary education	94	71.76	37	28.24	
Post-secondary education	45	70.31	19	29.69	
Bachelor degree	298	5.29	5	14.71	
Master's degree	109	81.95	24	18.05	

Source: author.

Table 3. Respondents' perception of innovations and controversies in the tourism sector (statistically significant correlations)

Respondents' answers	Innovations in the Polish tourism product involving the marketing of controversial tourism offers				Pearson's chi-squared test
	No		Yes		
	Number of answers	Percent	Number of answers	Percent	
taking into account all the answers					
Respondents who are in favour of all innovation	98	77.78	28	22.22	$df = 3$ $p = .00086$
Respondents who are in favour of innovation, subject to certain limitations	144	84.71	26	15.29	
Respondents who are against innovation	7	70.00	3	30.00	
Respondents who have no opinion on innovation	97	96.04	4	3.96	
taking into account the greatest statistical variation between the answers					
Respondents who are in favour of all innovation	98	77.78	28	22.22	$df = 1$ $p = .00009$
Respondents who have no opinion on innovation	97	96.04	4	3.96	

Source: author.

It was found that respondents who were in favour of all innovations in tourism were statistically significantly more likely to believe that the offering of controversial tourism products is acceptable as compared with those who had no opinion on innovation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a dynamic global phenomenon and an agent of change which heralds controversies in the sector. The evolution of the tourism industry has various dysfunctional social, cultural and technical consequences. In order to obtain a complete picture of those implications, critical analyses of the accompanying contexts, causes and effects are needed. A lack of understanding of the roots of controversies in tourism may result in systemic failure to meet the expectations of the main stakeholders – investors and consumers. The situation is complicated by a variety of views on controversies as well as conflicts both within the tourism sector (endogenous controversies) and in external multidimensional contexts (exogenous controversies) (Moufakkir, Burns, 2012).

Discussion of findings based on both Polish and foreign literature seems to be limited due to a shortage of analyses treating controversial tourism and its products as innovations. However, this context is increasingly discussed in public discourse (Godlewski, 2019; Panasiuk, 2015, 2018; Stasiak, 2015) and includes the development and marketing of innovative products and services in the tourism

sector. According to Maráková and Medvedová (2016), the development and marketing of such products and services is currently one of the most frequently studied issues as regards tourism. Increased domestic and international competition and saturation of the market provide an incentive to implement innovations (Pechlaner, Fischer, Hamman, 2006; Weiermair, 2004). The creative use of production factors and customer orientation are a prerequisite for the development of innovative tourism offers, which is of relevance for all stakeholders in the market (in functional and structural terms). Product and service innovations are usually noticed by consumers and, in that context, they may be perceived as pioneering and associated with a given company. From the perspective of customers, those factors affect their purchasing behaviour (Maráková, Medvedová, 2016), which is all the more important since the 'massification' of tourism entails a specific homogeneity of behaviour and imitation of recurrent traits, including the seeking of hedonism, amusement, relaxation, escape from everyday life, prestige, satisfaction of curiosity and physical pleasure (Fodness, 1994; Jang, Cai, 2002; Park, Yoon, 2009; Pearce, Lee, 2005), which are also characteristic of controversial forms of tourism.

The findings from the study provide an answer to the research hypothesis put forward in the present paper and yield the following conclusions:

1. The respondents declared that they had noticed significant changes in the tourism industry and the majority of them are in favour of such innovations. However, they believe that the innovations should be subject to certain limitations – it can be concluded

that these relate to controversial areas of the tourism market.

2. Significant differences were found within the group of respondents in the case of certain variables, which suggests that perceptions of innovations and the potential introduction of controversial tourist services into the market based on innovations are no longer unusual.
3. The limitations indicated by the respondents regarding innovation in the tourism market confirm that it is worth aiming at a model of informed tourists who recognise and understand the values of the places they visit, who are empathetic and actively seek experiences, especially those which are non-invasive in areas with high tourist potential.
4. While in practice the behaviour of tourists at the places they visit varies, it should be noted that some tourist destinations are conducive to deviant behaviour. Examples of such places are large urban centres, which are characterised by anonymity and a 'loose' atmosphere, as well as destinations where tourism carrying capacity and absorptive capacity have been exceeded.

Do Poles approve of controversial deviant tourism offers and treat them as innovative? The study has shown that it is too early to definitively confirm that this is the case. However, the buyers' market must be monitored on an ongoing basis. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that given the changing behaviour of consumers, more strongly emphasised needs, a lack of hesitation in expressing them and even a certain shamelessness and, at the same time, the search for new target markets by producers in the tourism sector (who often offer shocking, exceptional products), controversial forms of tourism must be treated as part of the tourism economy.

The analyses presented in this paper do not exhaust the ways of interpreting market phenomena related to perceiving controversies in the tourism sector as innovation. Therefore, in-depth studies are needed on these issues, including those relating to the supply side of the market.

ENDNOTE

¹ Respondents could choose from the following set of answers: innovation – a) related to accessibility to natural assets (national parks, landscape parks, nature reserves); b) related to accessibility to cultural assets (e.g. museums, galleries, cemeteries, folk art); c) related to the development of tourist infrastructure (to provide services for travellers – accommodation, catering, tourist information, travel agents, etc.); d) related to new tourism offers (e.g. tours to previously lesser-known regions, using available attractions, market controversies); e) related to controversial offers; f) other (what kind?); g) I have not noticed any innovations.

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HAS COVID-19 BROUGHT A TEMPORARY HALT TO OVERTOURISM?

Pinaz Tiwari^a , Nimit Chowdhary^b 

^a Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (India); <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0631-3377>; e-mail: tiwaipinaz@yahoo.com

^b Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi (India); <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7335-2379>; e-mail: nchowdhary@jmi.ac.in

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has caused radical changes in the lives of people as well as economies. These changes are deemed as evolutionary and would bring a new phase of transformation. However, current practices of both people and businesses might cease once the crisis disappears. In the tourism context, going back to unsustainable and irresponsible practices would lead to the re-emergence of tourism aversion. This research note addresses the possibility that COVID-19 has only brought a temporary halt to the pre-existing issue of over-tourism and its related unsustainable practices. Even though the travel restrictions imposed by several countries amidst the spread of coronavirus have created a situation of “zero tourism”, the tourism sector has now resumed its operations in most of the world. By presenting a conceptual framework, this note stresses that if the sector continues to act in the same way as before the virus, the situation of overtourism will re-emerge in the post-COVID-19 phase. Therefore, to prevent this issue, emphasising quality tourism, inculcating responsible behaviour, and the incorporation of technology are suggested.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, overtourism, zero tourism, responsible behaviour, sustainable tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 brought a sudden halt to social and economic activities globally from the beginning of 2020. Being one of the most vital socio-economic sectors, tourism has faced the repercussions of the imposition of restricted movement of people and transport. This restriction led abruptly to a situation of zero-tourism which led to the closure of businesses, unemployment and bankruptcy in the sector (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). As the world is fighting the pandemic and its adverse impacts, discourses on the “new normal” have amplified across different countries. Recent studies have addressed the pandemic as a transformative force in the field of tourism and hospitality (Brouder, 2020) and it is stated that the pandemic could be both a destroyer

and a teacher which could create new habits despite the catastrophe (Tomes, 2010). However, immobility, the sudden halt of tourism activities, and the prevalence of social distancing measures have manifested themselves in a dilemma seen in the desire to “go back to normal” while rejecting the probable “new normal” (Brouder et al., 2020). Having said that, going back to normal would probably imply going back to unsustainable practices. The tourism industry is much criticised for focusing only on the “number of tourists” or “quantitative growth” rather than “qualitative growth” (Benner, 2020; Koens, Postma, 2018) which subsequently led to the existence at famous destinations of overtourism, tourismphobia, anti-tourism movements etc (Zerva, Palou, Blasco, Donaire, 2019). Indeed, a critical obstacle in the sustainable growth of tourism is the short-term vision

of economic benefits that blurs a long-term desire for sustainable development. The ‘agglomeration of adversities’ caused by tourism is reflected through these issues. Despite the complexities that the concept of overtourism possesses, it is clear that the issue is widely prevalent in some popular tourist destinations (Bertocchi, Camatti, Giove, van der Borg, 2020; Hughes, 2018). However, after the outbreak of COVID-19, the issue has at least temporarily disappeared.

This research note emphasises that the pandemic has caused only a temporary halt to the pre-existing situation of overtourism and overcrowding. This work is future-oriented and centres on tourism’s volatile nature while probing the re-emergence of overtourism after a vaccine is discovered and made available globally. The COVID-19 crisis apparently pressed the “reset button” on Earth. Nature felt alive, waters were clean (take the example of Venice), and the environment as a whole was cleaner than before (Muhammad, Long, Salman, 2020). Unquestionably, the pandemic is a blessing in disguise that has persuaded the world to rethink its actions.

2. OVERTOURISM

– A RECAP OF THE PRE-COVID-19 PHASE

Over the past decade, the exuberant growth in tourism attracted an increasing number of investors to the sector (World Tourism Organization, 2004). The year 2018 witnessed the movement of approximately 1.4 billion international tourists globally, and the target set for 2020 was swiftly achieved in 2018 itself. This unprecedented growth in the sector delivered not only economic benefits but also negative effects on communities (Murzyn-Kupisz, Holuj, 2020; Perkumienė, Pranskūnienė, 2019), the environment (Benner, 2019; Weber et al., 2017) and on destinations themselves. Several famous destinations like Venice, Barcelona, Maya Bay in Thailand, Dubrovnik, Amsterdam, and Machu Pichu had been significantly affected by the unprecedented growth in tourism and tourists. In 2018, overtourism became one of the controversial topics discussed in media as well as among academics (Goodwin, 2017; Muler Gonzalez, Coromina, Galí, 2018; Peeters et al., 2018), and subsequently became the “word of the year”. The issue of contention is that “too” many tourists converge in the same destinations during the same period (Kuščer, Mihalič, 2019; Perkumienė, Pranskūnienė, 2019). The major causes that lead to this are an increase in disposable income, a desire to explore the world, rising options in accommodation and better connectivity than before supported the proliferation of tourism (Tiwari, Kainthola, Chowdhary, 2020a). Nevertheless, overtourism is not new (Wall, 2020) as

the negative consequences of tourism were discussed implicitly if not explicitly in the 1960s. Like Doxey (1975) and Butler (1980), several authors have discussed the complications that host communities and destinations might face due to excessive tourism. Recently, Butler (2019) revisited the concept of capacity constraints as a leading cause of overtourism. In 1975, Pizam’s study indicated that substantial tourism at a destination results in dissatisfaction among the host community and is reflected in their unhealthy attitudes (Pizam, 1978). This phenomenon is also manifested in the definition given by Harold Goodwin who defined overtourism as “destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably” (Goodwin, 2017, p. 1). In simple terms, overtourism occurs when the number of tourists is much greater than the capacity of a destination to withstand. Regarded as the antithesis of responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2017), overtourism is a fuzzy concept (Bertocchi, Camatti, Giove, van der Borg, 2020) as it involves specific perceptions related to tourists (Milano, Novelli, Cheer, 2019) and residents (Kuščer, Mihalič, 2019). Thereby, it is possible to realise that some of the occurrences are affecting popular destinations globally (Benner, 2020).

3. HAS COVID-19 BROUGHT A TEMPORARY HALT TO OVERTOURISM?

Harold Goodwin cautioned that overtourism could be expected in several destinations if tourism continues to grow unmanaged at the current pace (Goodwin, 2017). However, the world is so volatile that in 2020 the issue of overtourism has temporarily vanished. Due to the outburst of COVID-19, there has been a transition from overtourism to zero tourism. The researchers’ most apparent prediction is a change in both tourists and locals’ outlook. However, as the borders are set to re-open and restrictions on travelling are easing, the tourism sector is set to take steps to meet tourists’ demands. Accordingly, this work conceptualises that overtourism might re-emerge in a post-COVID-19 phase as depicted in Figure 1. The ‘return of overtourism’ begins with the discovery and availability of a vaccine, followed by crisis of forgetfulness which would reduce the perceived risk and travel constraints. This phenomenon will influence tourism organisations and destination to adopt extensive growth strategy to recover the losses incurred due to the COVID-19. Ultimately, an increase in demand would lead to unsustainable and irresponsible practices disguised within a growth of the number of arrivals at destinations. Together this would cause overtourism to re-occur in the post-COVID-19 phase.

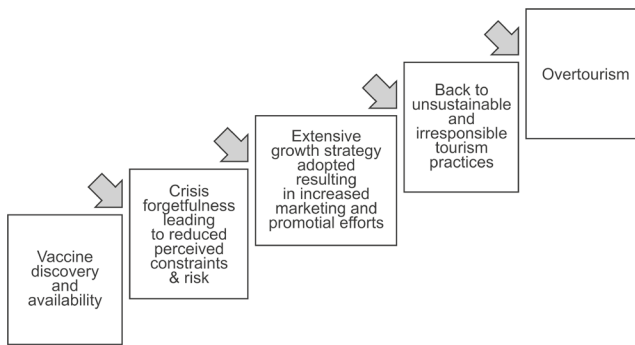


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the re-emergence of overtourism
Source: authors

In the context of tourism crises, Farmaki (2020) has discussed tourists' post-crisis behaviour that reflects forgetfulness as evidenced by their travel resumption patterns. The author emphasised that tourists tend to forget about the crisis and resume travelling after being affected indirectly and after a large interval. This prospect is reinforced by changes in travel desires and motivations like visiting family and friends (Zenker, Kock, 2020) or the emergence of a 'tourist bubble' in the current situation (Lapointe, 2020). Extensive growth would be adopted by tourism organisations, to revitalise the sector and meet emerging demand, though less than usual. After COVID-19, the growth strategies are proactively developed by all tourism organisations i.e. both destination management organisations (DMOs) and tourism businesses to attract more tourists and revive the sector. Seraphin & Ivanov (2020) introduced an extensive growth strategy that focuses on increasing the number of arrivals which requires an increase in marketing efforts by destination. To recover the losses incurred amidst the global health crisis, the tourism sector would increase its marketing and advertising to get back into the market, after the perceived risk decreases. Several tourism organisations have started issuing vouchers for future travel, and price deals would be found in the short-term. The national carrier of Germany, Lufthansa, anticipates that hundreds of their aircraft would be grounded by 2022, and the possibility of demand exceeding supply in the recovering phase could take place (Fanthorpe, 2020). The recent case of 'revenge tourism' promoted by the Chinese government (Kuo, 2020) is a suitable example to support our conceptual model.

Indeed, the tourism sector is far from perfect as evidence of pollution, economic costs on the host community and deterioration are prevalent, however it also brings enjoyment and transformative experiences for tourists and economic benefits for society (Butler, 2020). Thereby, a balanced approach is a pre-requisite for sustainable tourism. This approach implies synchronised steps towards acknowledging tourists' rights

to travel and residents' rights to a quality of life. Making tourism a luxury service post-COVID-19 would restrain tourists from taking advantage of it. Likewise, excessive discounts and marketing campaigns could cause excess demand. Hence, more tourists at specific destinations could bring back overtourism and hamper residents' quality of life.

4. THE WAY FORWARD TO A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO OVERTOURISM

Any phenomenon can render both positive and negative effects if not monitored effectively and monitoring through policy implementation could assist in designing policies and strategies appropriate for a destination. Certainly, issues related both to overtourism and zero-tourism are undesirable and have related adverse impacts on local communities and the industry. Undoubtedly, uncontrolled tourist numbers do not imply sustainable growth of a destination (Seraphin, Ivanov, 2020) nor did the absence of tourists demonstrate sustainable development. It is imperative to ensure that the world does not go back to its toxic attitudes and takes into account the recurring warnings that tourism has received for its unsustainability. Likewise, 'de-growth' in tourism would impoverish millions of people dependent on the sector for their livelihood. This calls for a balanced approach to prevent the issues of both overtourism and undertourism. Seraphin & Ivanov (2020) consider that focusing on intensive growth related to revenue management would yield profits and avoid both overtourism and undertourism. Similarly, several solutions offered by researchers and policymakers such as the incorporation of demarketing strategies into the marketing mix (Tiwari, Kainthola, Chowdhary, 2020a), technological solutions to manage overtourism (Hospers, 2019), and tourism education to make destinations smart and sustainable (Tiwari, Kainthola, Chowdhary, 2020b) etc. However, most of the strategies are related to travel limitations, price differentiation, and increasing prices for a product which raises the question of tourists' right to travel. Moreover, considering that those who spend more at a destination would behave responsibly is an underlying myth.

Thus, this research note suggests that the adoption of quality tourism, the incorporation of technology in the consumption process and coordination among different components of tourism at a destination, along with re-analysing emerging trends in markets, followed by a repositioning of existing marketing strategies and the adoption of innovative products, would mean making a sustainable 'mandate' helpful in combating the ill effects of tourism in the post-COVID-19 phase

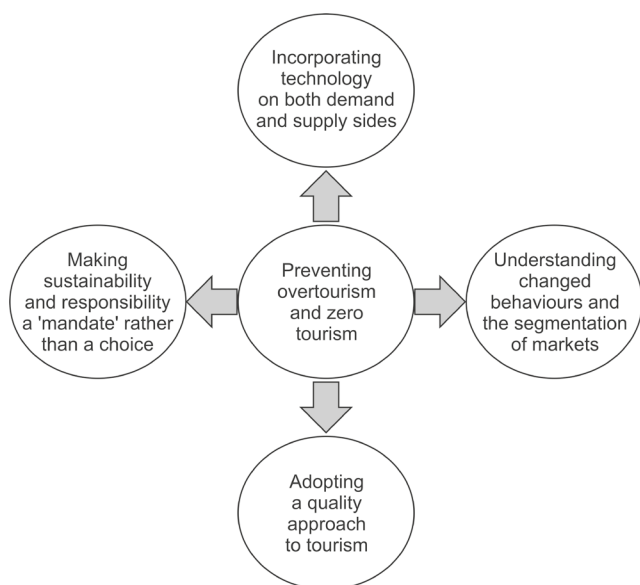


Figure 2. Preventing overtourism and zero tourism in the post-COVID-19 phase
Source: authors

(Fig. 2). Covid-19 challenges mankind to ponder on the unsustainability of pre-COVID-19 travel. Nevertheless it is imperative that the tourism sector does not go back to practising the same negligent conduct that gave rise to its unsustainable practices.

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