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PROBLEMS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE RESEARCH OF POLISH SCIENTIST

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ABSTRACT: The main goal of the article is to attempt to summarize scientific research into sustainable tourism which has so far been completed in Poland and especially the presentation of different ways in which this concept is understood, the identification of principal research problems within this field and the identification of new paths of scientific research. The study was conducted using the desk research method and the comparative analysis method. Research had shown that Polish scientific centers had seen a rise in the number of researchers looking into sustainable tourism. This achievement is still not very extensive and presents numerous research gaps (substantive, empirical, methodological and practical). On account of the complexity of this study subject a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, systemic and strategic, model approach to the problems of sustainable tourism is needed.

KEY WORDS: sustainable tourism, sustainable development, scientific research

Introduction

Within the last several years it is possible to observe growing interest of many Polish scientific centers with the problems of sustainable development of tourism, both in regard to theory as well as practice. It is mainly the result of the lasting nearly half a century discussion over sustained and sustainable development (as a paradigm of global development). Current discussion has entered the specialization stage which stimulates the development of studies into this concept in various regions of the economy and to a varying scale (international, national and local).

Analysis of research into sustained and sustainable development in Poland showed that the contemporary model of sustainable development in the broadest sense is associated with integrated order which encompasses several dimensions: economic, social, environmental, spatial, political and institutional, ethical and moral as well as cultural. Today, particular importance is assigned to the system of values which is the foundation and the binding agent of the new model of development (Górka, Łuszczuk, 2017). The subject of the research is, therefore, enormously complex and multidimensional. This results in diverse research problems and applied research approaches which often require interdisciplinary studies involving various fields and scientific disciplines. Tourism is an interdisciplinary field as well making the understanding of the mechanisms for its functioning and sustainable development along with the search for the solutions of many scientific problems very difficult. Doubly so, since studies into sustainable tourism are relatively new and are still within the stage of formulating ideas and research methods.

The main goal of the article is to attempt to summarize scientific research into sustainable development of tourism which has so far been completed in Poland and especially the presentation of different ways in which this concept is understood, the identification of principal research problems within this field and the identification of new paths of scientific research.

The study was conducted using the desk research method through the analysis of the newest scientific output of Polish researchers as well as the comparative analysis method.

Problem in interpretation of sustainable tourism in light of concept of sustainable development

The notion of sustainable tourism is derived from the more general concept of sustainable development which in Poland can pride itself with its immense scientific output. An interesting attempt at summarizing and organ-

izing of this output has been undertaken by Górka and Łuszczuk (2017, p. 20-34). In their research into sustainable development they have distinguished:

- Research initiation period:
 - the introductory stage – in the mid nineteen-sixties,
 - the inspiration stage – end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies – there is growing interest of the new paradigm of development and there are first attempts to identify it,
 - the maturity stage (after the publication of the G.H. Brundland report) – precise specification of terminology and the cognitive layer.
- Maturity period:
 - the fascination stage – the period directly preceding the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro – rise in interest regarding issues of environmental protection, work on implementing sustainable development into practice,
 - the uncertainty stage – controversy and doubt around this idea and the possibility of its practical implementation, growing number of skeptics standing in opposition to these changes.
- Period of gradual saturation:
 - the education stage – starting in the second half of the nineteen nineties and lasting to today – popularization of knowledge, initiation of new scientific research, numerous publications,
 - the specialization stage – at present, development of research into sustainable development within the sector, regional and local approaches.

The connection between the idea of sustainable development and tourist economy occurred as late as the end of the nineteen eighties and the beginning of the nineteen nineties although the need for the greening of tourism started to be noticed at the end of the seventies. Negative phenomena accompanying the massive development of tourism caused the initiation of the search for new, pro-ecological forms of its development. Endeavors to ensure harmony between the functioning of tourism and the protection of the natural and cultural environment of reception areas became the basis for the concept of sustainable tourism.

The still unresolved dispute about the terminology of sustained and sustainable development causes great discrepancies regarding the determination of the significative scope of the concept of sustainable tourism. This results in specific cognitive and practical problems. The term sustainable tourism is most often described as:

- any form of touristic development, management or activity which supports ecological, social and economic integrity of regions and which pre-

serves for future generations, unchanged, natural and cultural resources of those areas (Zaręba, 2000, p. 36),

- tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p. 11-12),
- tourism aimed at reducing tensions and friction occurring in the network of complex relations between the tourist industry, the environment and societies of reception areas as well as leading to greater viability and quality of natural and human resources (Bramwell, Lane, 1991, p. 1-5).

These definitions, based on the concept of sustained and sustainable development, give sustainable tourism a very broad scope. It does happen, however, that some researchers equate this concept with ecotourism an alternative tourism which is gentle and environmentally friendly. To boot this is also connected to two differing postures – either limiting sustainable tourism to a specific form of tourist flow and treating it as a “small scale” form or, conversely, treating ecotourism in the broader sense as sustainable tourism. Ecotourism is, however, a much narrower concept and, as has been correctly noted by Zaręba (2000), can become the “core” of sustainable tourism, especially in protected areas.

The concept of sustainable tourism should not be equated with a specific form of tourist flow but should refer to the manner of organization and functioning of the tourism sector as a hierarchically arranged whole, integrated with other areas of human activity, used to attain satisfying social and economic goals without harm to the tourism resource base. The main condition of sustainable tourism is the rational exploitation of natural resources based on natural boundaries or the optimal adjustment of the intensity of tourist use to the limits of tourist absorbability and capacity. Sustainable tourism should encompass all activity carried out as part of the tourist economy which is environmentally acceptable, economically justified and fulfills social needs equally from the perspective of tourists, tourist organizers as well as local communities. Sustainable tourism should be an adaptive paradigm which accepts various directions of development depending on the conditions of a given region and time.

Analysis of subject related literature allows the identification of the following major criteria of sustainable tourism (Dobrzański et al., 2014, p. 36):

- ecological (preservation of the environment, protection and sustainable use of natural resources; reducing overconsumption, maintenance of biological diversity),
- economic (income and supporting the development of local economies),
- cultural (protection and enhancement of cultural resources),

- social (acceptance by local communities and their benefits, satisfaction of leisure travellers),
- institutional and political (planning involving all stakeholders to set up tourism balancing targets),
- integration (increasing cohesion and efficiency of the tourism system, achieving greater economic, environmental and social efficiency, eliminating and resolving conflicts).

Defining of sustainable tourism goals in majority occurs on the practical basis. This is also subject to different approaches determined by the accepted scope of the notion of sustainable tourism specified by the time perspective for goal realization and the area which this development is to concern. There is, however, a need for the theoretic systematization of strategic aims of sustainable tourism in respect to interdependent spheres: economic, social, environmental and also, within a broader dimension, spatial and institutional which will form the structural basis for shaping of integrated by tourism order.

Within Polish literature other than the term “sustainable tourism” the terms “sustainable development of tourism”, “sustainable development through tourism”, “development of tourist reception areas under conditions of sustainable development” are often used. As has been noticed by Butowski (2013, p. 5-6) these phrases are often treated as describing the same phenomenon. A review of literature conducted by Burgehele et al. (2016, p. 34) shows that this approach is also prevalent all over the world with a similar perspective accepted in the present work. Sustainable tourism is perceived not as a goal in itself but as a means of reaching sustainable development aims. That is the reason that its understanding requires a systematic approach which will allow the recognition of the complex relationships between the economic, social and natural systems.

Path of scientific research on sustainable tourism in Poland

In theoretical analyses of sustainable development of tourism it is necessary to treat tourism as a part of a greater whole. Since it is such an interdisciplinary field (tourism is considered to be a “cross-sector discipline”) it cannot be treated in isolation. “The whole” can be variously understood depending on the scale of analysis. Within the global scope tourism may be scrutinized as a system which functions as part of the macro-system: economy-society-environment. The main problem often lies not in the understanding of the concept of sustainable tourism but rather in the incomplete approach to the sustainable development of tourism. As has been noted by Niezgoda (2006, p. 5) all aspects of development of individual areas making up the

cohesive environmental-economic whole must be evaluated. Ignoring of any of the dimensions decides about the deficiency of formulated diagnoses, interpretations or forecasts. An interdisciplinary approach combining tools used to identify problems and seek out solutions by various scientific fields (Economy, Management) is necessary to understand the relations occurring in such a complex system. However, in Polish scientific output the interdisciplinary approach to this very complex concept is not very common (Butowski, 2013; Gołembski, 2002). Systemic approach to tourism can be found in the works of: Niezgodą (2006) – systemic approach of tourist reception and and Kiryluk (2006) – theoretical model of an integrated system for tourism control directed at sustainable development.

Every new year in Polish scientific centers sees the expansion of the number of researchers looking into sustainable development (table 1).

Polish scientific output dealing with sustainable development, despite the systematically growing number of publications, is still characterized by an inadequate theoretical base and diversity of opinions (Butowski 2013, p. 6). Discussion excessively focuses on ideological aspects or promotion. There is considerable “definition chaos” and defined terms are often used without deeper reflection and appropriate level of understanding. Only within the more recent years attempts to organize the terminology of issues concerned with sustainable tourism and make more precise its cognitive layer are made more frequently. The works of Butowski (2013), Niezgodą (2006), Mika (2014) and Dobrzański et. al (2014) are exemplary of this. This path of study should be continued because diversity in the interpretation of sustainable tourism is one of the reasons there are so many difficulties in its implementation.

The Polish scientific research of sustainable tourism allowed the identification of numerous specific research problems including:

- the problem of interpreting the concept of sustainable tourism,
- the problem of identifying goals, rules and criteria of sustainable tourism,
- analysis of mechanisms and conditionings of sustainable development of tourism and the identification of factors determining this process,
- modeling of the sustainable tourism development processes including management of sustainable tourism,
- search for effective and efficient instruments for controlling the sustainable development of tourism,
- the problem of implementing the concept of sustainable tourism into practice (including the identification of barriers in attaining the goals of sustainable tourism),
- the role of local community and local government in sustainable development process,

Table 1. Scientific centers and their chosen representatives carrying out research into sustainable development in Poland

Scientific center	Research scientists	Paths of scientific research
Białystok University of Technology	Borkowska-Niszczoła (2006, 2014) Kiryłuk (2006, 2014) Panfiluk (2011) Szymańska (2014, 2018)	tourism policy, organization and management of tourism, sustainable tourism in protected areas, modeling of sustainable development of tourism processes, innovation in tourism,
Cracow University of Economics	Zawilińska (2008)	problems of sustainable development of tourism in protected areas
Jagiellonian University in Kraków	Mika (2014)	determinants of local development of tourism
Poznań University of Economics and Business	Nieżgoda (2004, 2006, 2008)	tourism and sustainable development in region
Poznan University of Technology	Królikowska-Tomczak (2015, 2016)	sustainability indicators
Poznań University of Life Sciences	Kasprzyk (2011)	sustainable tourism in protected areas
Rzeszow University of Technology	Woźniak (2016)	sustainable development, rural tourism
University of Lodz	Gontar, Gontar (2016)	tourism space, urban sustainable tourism,
University of Physical Education, Krakow	Szczechowicz (2011)	development of tourism destinations
University of Silesia in Katowice	Jędrzejczyk (1995) Myga-Piątek (2011)	ecological aspects of sustainable tourism development concept of sustainable development in tourism
University of Warsaw	Kowalczyk (2010)	planning and tourist infrastructure
Warsaw School of Economics	Dziedzic (2008) Zawistowska (2008)	economic aspects of sustainable tourism development tourism policy
Warsaw School of Tourism and Hospitality Management	Butowski (2012, 2013)	organization and management of tourism, model of sustainable tourism
Wrocław University of Economics	Rapacz, Gryszel, Jaremen (2008, 2011)	problems of development of tourism – regional and local approaches

Source: author's own work based on selected items in relevant Polish literature.

- the problem of monitoring the sustainability of tourism (ways of measuring, the correct selection of indicators, assessment of the current level of sustainability of tourism in tourist destinations).

There is especially a need for research into ways in which sustainable tourism can be realized so that it is not only a theoretical paradigm. From the assessment of studies dealing with sustainable development completed up to

now it can be seen that both in Poland as well as all over the world it has not yet been possible to answer the basic question: "how do we, sustainably and in harmony with the natural environment, develop society and the economy (Górka, Łuszczuk, p. 21). Many skeptics claim that this concept is strictly postulative, non-scientific and downright utopian. Discussion on the subject of the scientific usefulness of this concept was one of the objects of debate at the scientific conference organized in 2008 by the Warsaw School of Economics titled: *Sustainable tourism – a real concept, illusion or a marketing gimmick?*

Normative, axiological and ethical issues concerning mainly the value system are a desired subject of scientific discussion in this area. Changing of the model of tourists' consumption is a fundamental element of moving toward sustainable tourism. More and more often scientific studies attempt to develop a model of sustainable tourism.

Studies into sustainable tourism are carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods. Empirical research in the form of quantitative studies (most often diagnostic surveys using questionnaires) mainly focuses on the following research problems:

- attitudes and behaviors of various groups of sustainable tourism stakeholders, primarily tourists, inhabitants, service providers and local governments (Rapacz, Gryszel, Jaremen 2011),
- knowledge concerning sustainable tourism, the perception of and attitudes toward this concept,
- perception of economic, social and environmental consequences of the development of tourism – both positive and negative,
- activities initiated for sustainable tourism at various types of tourist destinations (such as valuable natural areas, small cities).

Surveys, however, are quite costly and, as a result, often concern only selected aspects or are conducted on small sample groups. Diverse methodology and the scope of research carried out in individual scientific centers often do not allow the making of comparisons. Especially desirable would be the performance, on the basis of a uniform methodology, of an assessment of the level of the sustainability of tourism in individual regions of Poland.

Qualitative studies dealing with sustainable tourism concern mainly the implementation of this concept into practice and finding innovative solutions. The case study is one of the most often utilized research methods (Godlewska, 2016).

Tourism is perceived as an important instrument of sustainable local (such as protected areas or small cities) and regional development. Niezgodą (2006, p. 6) postulates that the subject of research into tourism should include regions and small administrative units, whose economic functions

should be strengthened, that can contribute to the desired model of development. Since sustainable tourism is based on natural resources, it can be an active form of protecting their valuable natural capital as well as, at the same time, an important tool for local development which can raise the quality of life. Sustainable tourism is mainly perceived as the new paradigm in the development of protected areas. Hence, there is a great demand to find new solutions in the area of managing its development in a way that would minimize the negative impact on the natural environment and maximize general socio-economic benefits in places frequented by tourists.

Many researchers have noticed that the concept of sustainable tourism is still very ambiguous which causes problems in its implementation into practice in Poland as well as around the world. Despite relatively common declarations in various program documents (Bosiacki et al., p. 179) sustainable practices in the tourism sector have limited character and scope and sustainable destinations are still the exception rather than the rule.

Problems with implementing sustainable tourism

The implementation of the concept of sustainable tourism into practice causes particular problems (Butler, 2005; Dodds, 2005) and provokes certain uncertainties with the following two questions being asked most often:

- is it possible for tourism to be sustainable?
- how should it be implemented, monitored, assessed and measured?

A fundamental difficulty is caused by the assessment of the achievement level of economic, social and ecological goals of sustainable tourism since it requires the acquisition of appropriate knowledge from many different sources (primary and secondary). According to the opinion of Butler (2005) without the introduction of a suitable system for the monitoring of developmental processes in tourism the use of the term "sustainable" is completely meaningless.

Within the Polish scientific output there are many works relating to indicators of sustainable development as a primary concept (Borys, 2005). This was followed by studies concerning the development of sustainable tourism indicators as well as new methods and methodologies for measuring the level of sustainability, for example, in the works of Królikowska-Tomczak (2015) and Dobrzański et al. (2014) (Dobrzański made a significant contribution to the scientific development of the concept of sustainable tourism. A research project No. N N114 269734 of the Białystok University of Technology titled "Tourism in the Podlasie Voivodeship in light of sustainable development rules" was realized between 2008 and 2011). Research concerning the assessment of the sustainability level of tourism in Podlasie Voivodeship

conducted by the center in Białystok may be important both from the methodological as well as from the practical point of view. On the one hand it contains an original methodology for a system of indicators for sustainable tourism and on the other these studies are the first attempt of a comprehensive evaluation of the level of tourism sustainability within the Voivodeship (in respect to the social, cultural, economic, environmental and institutional aspects). Additionally they consider the problem of tourism sustainability including various groups of stakeholders: tourists, local communities and service providers in their research. The practical significance of these types of studies, showing the directions and level of tourism sustainability within the region, can become a basis for the verification of regional tourist policy goals and assumptions.

Extremely varied, sometimes even disputable, propositions for the monitoring of tourism sustainability processes are the result of problems connected with the interpretation of sustainable tourism. Varying methods of measuring sustainable tourism hinder comparison analyses on the scale of countries and regions.

Within the last several years the world has seen many different attempts at implementing into practice the rules and corresponding criteria of sustainable tourism (for example, through the development of the "European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, 1999; "European Tourism System of Indicators for Sustainable Management at Destination Level ETIS", 2013). One significant barrier concerning the implementation of sustainable tourism in Poland is the insufficient knowledge of entities within the tourist economy regarding this concept, its meaning and instruments of its implementation. Often within Polish scientific research there is a lack of specific proposals for creative and innovative solutions for this field which would work in a specific time and place.

An important role in stimulating the development of tourism in the region is played by territorial governments. The extent and scale of changes in tourism depends largely on local and regional tourism policies developed by local governments which possess a high potential for coordinating the cooperation of entities and projects implemented within the region as well as to initiate actions. One important principle of sustainable tourism development is the deep involvement of all stakeholders (especially local communities) in the tourism economy, the decision-making process and the practical implementation of this concept. The local community plays an important role in the sustainable development of tourism. Behavior and economic activity conducted by local communities have a significant impact on the condition and protection of natural and cultural values of tourist reception areas (consumer of local resources). They become the "recipient" of the positive and

negative effects of tourism development as well as an important element of the complex tourism product of the area (Kiryluk, 2012, p.256).

Conclusions

Polish scientific research concerning sustainable tourism is still not very extensive and presents numerous research gaps (substantive, empirical, methodological and practical). These include problems connected with the ambiguous interpretation of these categories (which affects the adopted research perspective) as well as difficulties with the operational expansion of its theoretical assumptions within the research process (Mika, 2015). Additionally, to a large degree, this output relates to the implementation of this concept into practice. These problems result, among others, from the fact that Polish scientific achievement concerning sustainable development is characterized by considerable terminological disorder which is not conducive to the suitable understanding of this category.

In Poland there is still not enough comprehensive research dealing with sustainable tourism which would use the significant achievement concerning sustained and sustainable development. Most studies relate to selected scientific problems, programming of sustainable development of tourism, the impact of tourism on the sustainable development of regions, criteria, aims and rules of sustainable tourism as well as indicators of tourism sustainability. Within the scientific output there is often excessive concentration on ideological aspects. There is, however, a significant need for works concerning the model approach of sustainable development of tourism processes which would allow, in a simplified way, the discovery and understanding of a complex reality.

On account of the complexity of this study subject a comprehensive, holistic, interdisciplinary, systemic and strategic, marketing and innovative, model approach to the problems of sustainable tourism is needed. The process of solving new research problems often requires the ability to overcome stereotypical thinking and the application of methods from various scientific fields.

In Poland, important is not only the popularization of knowledge dealing with the sustainable development of tourism but, most of all, the continued identification of new research problems and specific solutions for implementing sustainable development into practice. To reach this goal the broad cooperation and contribution of not only academic centers which carry out scientific research but also of other entities (non-government organizations, regional governments, government and local authority administration and entrepreneurs) enabling, among other things, the exchange of experience

and promotion of good practices nationally and abroad, is important. The exchange of information and experience in the science-business-administration system can significantly contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of the implementation of sustainable development into practice.

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