

Environmental and Socio-Cultural Dysfunctions Generated by Mass Tourism: The Case of Mazuria Lakes – Poland

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Abstract

The paper discusses the correlations between different types of tourists and, so called, tourism functions and dysfunctions. The research was done in Masuria Lakes (the area of great natural interest, with very limited tourism capacity). Masuria was the candidate of Poland for new seven world wonders; however, it never had a status of landscape protected area. It gives for the research more possibilities to look at “natural” activities, not limited by the law regulations. The unique natural values and relatively short distance from tourism source areas have led to crossing tourism capacity limits. Furthermore the types of tourism present in this region (sailing, motorboats, lake camping, angling, team building, second houses etc.) are mutually exclusive. In case of high tourism intensity conflicts become unavoidable. Spontaneous, uncontrolled tourism development, lack of legal restrictions or obligatory fees for cleaning – all that has led to tourism dysfunctions on large scale.

Key words: mass tourism, types of tourism, recreational tourism, leisure tourism.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss the correlations between different types of tourist (the typology is based on their activities) and the creation of so called tourism functions and dysfunctions. The paper makes a part of larger research project aiming to identify the nature-based tourism potential, the socio-cultural dynamics and possible dysfunctions of by different type of tourists in Poland and Iceland. The research was comparative and focused on the problem of degradation of natural environment and socio-cultural tourist dysfunctions, in terms of mass tourism, from an Icelandic and Polish perspective. The results were the guidelines for lecturing on tourism faculties, books for the tour operators as well as the academic book for students (in Polish). The regions chosen for Poland were the Tatra Mountain National Park, Beskidzka 5 and the Masuria Lakes – most representatives for the topic of this article.

The Masuria Lakes Region was the candidate of Poland for new seven world wonders; however, it never had a status of national park, or landscape protected area. It give for the research more possibilities to look at “natural” tourist activities, not limited by the law regulations as it happens in most of areas of outstanding natural value in Poland (Including Tatra one) where many activities are simply forbidden.

For many years the tourism occurred in natural & landscape parks, was considered to be the most sustainable one. Several authors had used the name of eco tourism for all activities happening in the nature. Looking at negative consequences (tourism dysfunctions), the eco tourism was seen as the “good one”, a contradiction to the mass tourism (the bad one). That interpretation was almost unique in Polish Academia, and in consequence in tourism policy actors. What’s more the promotion of tourism in areas of great natural interest was seen as a kind of patriotism (Denek, 1997; Kowalczyk, 2002; Zaręba, 2000). The citizens of Poland had to visit all important attractions of the country.

In the recent years the discussion about sustainable tourism and its relation with eco tourism and the nature, become more complex (Duffy, 2002). Some authors pointed out the motivation of tourist visiting the nature (Jóhannesson, Huijbens, & Sharpley, 2010). E. Huijbens (2011) for experiencing nature motivations is distinguishing: beauty, religion, escape, challenge, romanticism and history, solitude, intimacy, learning and discovery, knowing that there is untouched nature and technology in survival. Following particular motivation, experiencing the nature, even in same place, can be totally different.

For Masuria we can find all those motivations represented by sometimes contradictory type of tourist. Ex. Challenge can be seen as sail over the whole Masuria track during one stay for the sailing boats or get a fastest speed in the same way for the motor boats. In both cases we cannot talk about knowing the untouched nature. Different type of motivation same as different types of activities influence the real impact of tourists on nature.

Talking about impact of tourism we should not forget about the abortiveness of the region – much smaller for areas of great natural interest than for others.

Tourism capacity is an indicator of the maximum number of tourists a given tourism area can accept without changing its character or lowering the service quality as such. An example of service quality lowering may be adding an extra storey to a building of an already operating hotel (which results in more crowd

at the pool, queues to the elevator, lack of sufficient number of tables in the restaurant, etc.). In extreme cases the changes caused by exceeding the tourism capacity lead to a process named *self-detriment through tourism* (Shaw & Williams 1996). For obvious reasons some places are exposed more substantially to detriment caused by low tourism capacity more than others. The examples of such areas are small islands, desert zones (due to the lack of drinking water), regions of fragile fauna and flora (due to the risk of species destruction etc). The area of Masuria Lakes is the example of limited absorption due to the nature.

Methodology

The research tools were primarily semi structured interviews with key industry stakeholder, but also stakeholder focus groups, participant and non participant observation, and secondary data analysis (Belsky, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The term *dysfunctions* are understood as negative consequences of tourism development, which contradict or work against intended or planned development goals. Dysfunctions can lead to a loss of balance in natural environments (environmental dysfunctions) and/or intervene in a negative way as perceived by locals (socio-cultural dysfunctions).

The scope of factors which can generate these dysfunctions is obviously very large. But in the context of this research the aims were to identify these dysfunctions in terms of *the type of tourist*, *type of tourism attractions* and *activities*, which we deem as the most important (Dłużewska, 2009; Przeclawski, 1979).

The starting point for the analysis of tourism dysfunctions was the scheme „Tourism and its functions and dysfunctions” (Dłużewska, 2009) prepared to analyze tourism dysfunctions in the world.

Through analysing the origin of those visiting the regions under study we propose to understand the general behaviour and the generation of knowledge of the region. Whilst analysing the *type of tourist* is indicative of the travel expectations and travel organization of the participants (Cohen, 1984; Podemski, 2004; Przeclawski, 1979).

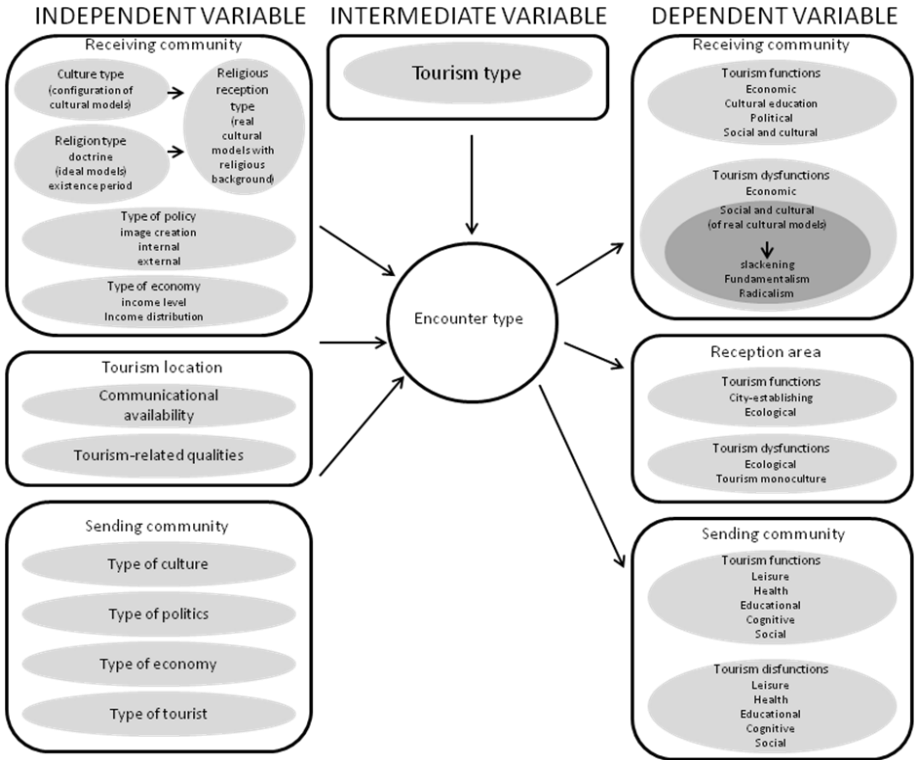


Figure 1. Tourism and its functions and dysfunctions (Dłużewska 2009)

Results

Masuria (formerly *North Mazovia, Prussian Masovia, Prussian Masuria*) is a historical and ethnographical area in north-eastern Poland. Geographically it constitutes part of the Masurian Lake District and the Iława Lake District. Administratively it constitutes a part of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodships.

The Land of Great Masurian Lakes is situated in the Masurian Lake District, with the largest Polish lake – Śniardwy – of an area amounting to 113.8 km² and a circumference exceeding 80 km. Besides the Śniardwy Lake, the largest lakes in Masuria are: Mamry, Niegocin, Beldany, Tałty, Seksty, Łuknajno, Tajty, Dargin and many others. The number of large and small lakes situated in this region is reflected in the common name of Masuria – The Great Lake Land. The largest lakes are connected by channels and sluices, built as early as in the times when Masuria belonged to Prussia, building a branched sailing route (the

so called North Masuria and South Masuria). Within the Land of Great Masurian Lakes there are numerous woods (i.e. the Pisz Forest) abounding in mushrooms and other forest undergrowth treasures. The region offers numerous bicycle and canoeing routes. The Pisz Forest holds stocks of wildy living *konek-es* (Polish primitive horses) with a breeding farm of the species managed by the Polish Academy of Sciences station in Popielno) or wild animal park in Kadzidłowo. Numerous horse stud farms are also situated in this area. Due to the unique natural characteristics the Land of Great Masurian Lakes is representing Poland in a global competition for new seven world wonders.

Masuria offers various possibilities of tourism activities: sailing, motorboat, angling, leisure (second houses, holiday camps, campsites), agritourism, canoeing, cycling, urban weekend activities (e.g. Mikołajki), sightseeing, integration tourism (*team building*) and many more. Masuria is visited not only by tourists interested in its natural values, but also by ethnical tourists from Germany. The locals assign the greatest prestige to German tourists and those who stay at private houses and guest houses.

The tourists representing various categories have different, often mutually exclusive motivations. They frequently enter into conflicts and mutually prevent proper recreation. Conflicts emerge repeatedly also between the locals and tourists. The most important motivations of travelling in respect of tourists representing different categories are provided below.

Sailing tourism

Until the change of the political system in 1989 sailing yachts in Masuria were rather a rare view. Tourists used their own boats and sailing tourism was therefore a privilege available for a confined group of people. Since 1990 numerous yacht chartering companies emerged in this area. Officially in 2011 over 40 large chartering companies conducted business activity in the region, of which the most important ones (Ahoj, Sailor) have a few hundreds of yachts of various categories at their disposal. Sailing yachts are made available also within the so called grey economy – many locals have several yachts which are available for tourists in the sailing season. Thanks to the impressive range of sailing yachts offered and very competitive chartering prices the number of tourists spending their vacation under the sails is growing every year. The proportions have turned and at present in Masuria the number of chartered yachts exceeds the number of private boats which are at present a true rarity. The lakes have become crowded. The sailing route is often quite narrow, therefore it is important to know who has the right of way in a given situation. No sailing li-

cense is required to charter smaller units. The crews on chartered yachts are not always apt at sailing, they sometimes fail to recognize the right of way and therefore constitute a threat to others.

The character of sailing harbors has also changed. They are loud, numerous integration parties with large amounts of alcohol consumed are organized there. No wonder that old sailors started avoiding these places. Unlike western Europe Masuria has no club harbors where only members are allowed to stay. As a result, the sailors overnight at lake shores more and more often. They avoid places which can be reached by car, they do not moor at campsites, in order to avoid contacts with other types of tourists. Every year the number of places where sailors can moor their boats for the night is dropping. Numerous private residences are being built at lake shores, taking over the areas where boats used to moor. The Polish law allows for mooring at every shore, but not for going ashore. Therefore, the competition among sailors is vast due to the lack of places to stay overnight.

Another reason for conflict are discrepant motivations of people participating in this type of tourism. Sailors used to seek for peace, quiet and close contact with nature; now many of them are looking for loud entertainment.

The participants of sailing tourism who „squat“ on shores for the night generate environmental dysfunctions – they often leave garbage right at the mooring site (even if they bury it, the present intensity of tourism makes this disposal method ineffective) and treat the forest as a toilet.

Sailing tourism is a major landscape attraction for the remaining groups of tourists. Yet the locals perceive it negatively, you could even say it is considered as the worse type of tourism in Masuria, for usually it does not bring any profits for the locals: the sailors do not spend money on accommodation, food or entertainment and additionally they pollute the environment. They pay for the chartering, yet the chartering companies are usually owned to people from outside the region.

Motorboat tourism

Eight companies providing motor yachts chartering services are registered in Masuria. The motorboats are also provided by sailing companies (such as Ahoj). Vast number of the motorboats available belong to private owners. In any case we are dealing with a large percentage of sea motorboats which should be sailing on far larger waters. In order to sail on a boat safely on the sea, and even on sea gulfs, sailors need special qualifications. Masuria's condi-

tions are easier. There are no legal restrictions specifying the minimum size of the reservoir for such a boat, which makes Masuria one of the most popular places to sail for motorboat tourists. These tourists most frequently visit Mikołajki, where at night they can visit pubs and discos. Often the party is later "relocated" to the lake shore. Tourists drink alcohol while sailing or listen to very loud music. The participants of motorboat tourism constitute substantial danger to other tourists, especially tourists doing recreation and canoeing. High waves caused by large, sea motorboats often capsize canoes. The number of dangerous collisions with people swimming at the shores or lying on air-mattresses is growing. Motorboat amateurs also reduce the comfort of sailors' recreation (large waves destroy the yachts moored at the lake shore).

Angling tourism

Only few participants of this type of tourism use accommodation available at private houses. The majority overnights in their own tents or camping cars situated at campsites. Their expenditures for accommodation are at a minimum level. The anglers go to bars and restaurants extremely rarely. They prepare their meals on their own, with the use of gas bottles. They usually arrive in their private cars, which allows them for bringing large amounts of food reserves. The profits of local inhabitants on this tourism type are scarce. Some (usually the more affluent ones, staying at guest houses, in agritourism farms, or having their own summer houses) angle sitting on the boards of small, usually private boats. They choose small, non-sailable water reservoirs. This group of tourists usually does not come into conflicts with the tourists of other categories. Yet vast number of angling tourists angles directly on water routes. Due to large fish shoals in the channels and by the bridges anglers occupy mostly these areas. They angle „from the shore” – sit on camp chairs and cast their fishing rods mostly in the very middle of the waters, which prevents yacht sailing, motorboat sailing or canoeing. These anglers are a nightmare for sailors and motorboat enthusiasts, which causes frequent conflicts.

Recreational tourism (second houses)

The most important source area for this type of tourism is Warsaw (time to destination: ca. 3-4 hours) and the Tricity: Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot (time to destination: 3 hours). The relative vicinity of Masuria from the perspective of large agglomerations is the decisive factor for its popularity in terms of weekend tourism. The increasing financial wealth of the Polish society has created conditions for buying the so called second houses. Second houses take over more and

more lake shore areas every year. Private residences emerge in areas where sailors used to moor their boats, thus creating an obstacle for sailing tourism. At the same time they are constructed exactly in those spots where sailing tourism is booming and ensures increased attractiveness of cultural landscape. An extreme example of such situation is the Warsaw Lake – Jezioro Warszawskie – situated in the ultimate vicinity of the capital. In 2000 it provided several places for mooring yachts. In the summer season 2011 only 2 such places on the whole lake remained. This influenced substantially the reduction of sailing tourism on this reservoir and as a result also the reduction of attractiveness of this area for stationary tourists.

Leisure tourism (holiday centers, campsites)

Similarly to private residences, the holiday centers and campsites are often located at lake shores visited by sailors due to their landscape richness. Leisure tourists are often conflicted with “water” tourists (sailors, motorboat enthusiasts). In the areas taken by the holiday centers there is no possibility to moor a boat, and besides these locations are often loud (the noise is carried further by the lake waters). The tourists staying at holiday centers are not familiar with water regulations – they let themselves be carried away on their air-mattresses right into sailing routes, they complain that sailors should make turns like cars to bypass them, etc. They disturb, cause a threat to sailors and motorboat users and remain in danger themselves.

Team building

Integration camps, unlike motivation camps, are usually organized for large groups of employees, sometimes for whole company teams (50–300 people). The integration events are crowded, loud and accompanied by large amounts of alcohol. The participants of integration tourism often take part in sailing and motorboat activities (in most cases just as an “additional” activity, since typical integration programmes are usually realized on boats). They overnight in hotels or aboard the yachts moored in city harbors. These tourists “disturb” all other tourists (even those who seek entertainment). On the other hand the locals treat them positively due to the money spent by the companies organizing these events.

Conclusion

The listed types of tourism are mutually exclusive by definition. In case of small tourism intensity their coexistence does not necessarily lead to conflicts.

On the other hand in case of intense tourism conflicts become unavoidable. The unique natural values of and relatively short distance to the Masurian Lake District from tourism source areas (Warsaw, Tricity) have led to crossing tourism capacity limits in this region. Already on the current tourism level numerous dysfunctions are noticed both within the local society and the tourist groups, as well as in the natural environment. Woods are full of human excrements, empty cans, glass. Spontaneous, uncontrolled tourism development, lack of legal restrictions for most invasive types of tourism, lack of obligatory fees for cleaning – all that has led to tourism dysfunctions on large scale.

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