

Changes In Tourism After the Covid-19 Pandemic: Results of Qualitative Research*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify post-pandemic COVID-19 changes in tourism. For the purposes of the study a qualitative approach was taken. The article presents the results of virtual interviews conducted with representatives of selected entities operating in tourism in Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland. The obtained research material was used to indicate tourist phenomena that will be characteristic in the near future. The certain amount of attention was also paid to the directions of development of inter-organizational cooperation in the opinion of research participants. This article overviews the literature concerning the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism. The key part of the presented considerations lies in an outline of the applied research approach, including a discussion of the obtained results. On the basis of the aforementioned discussion, answers to the research questions were formulated.

Keywords: Tourism, Covid-19 Pandemic, Qualitative Research, Virtual Interviews.

Introduction

Tourism is an example of the sector that has suffered the most from solutions implemented in the current crisis (Madani et al., 2020; Kaushal, Srivastava, 2021). Not only everyday activities and basic social responsibilities, but also common behaviors of tourist participants, including ways of spending and organizing leisure time, have changed significantly (Seyfi et al., 2020). The group of key determinants that have had a direct impact on the functioning of the global tourism sector included, inter alia, closing of national borders, stopping air traffic and limiting the movement of people to strictly defined purposes (business, health) (Wells et al., 2020). The highlighted solutions prevented tourism, as well as stopped the activities of the tourism industry.

It is worth noting that the pandemic - like various other crisis situations- in extreme cases can definitely lead to fundamental transformations, including transformations related to selected sectors of the economy. As a consequence of such cases, the process of stabilizing the phenomena that inhibit or slow down economic development will be extended or spread over time. Importantly, there may also be a situation in which it will not be possible to restore the condition of selected industries to the state before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The aim of this article is to identify changes following the COVID-19 pandemic in tourism. For the purposes of the conducted research, a qualitative approach was used. The article presents the results of virtual interviews conducted with representatives of selected entities operating in tourism in Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland. Their participants were people who were treated as experts. The obtained research material was used to indicate tourist phenomena that will be characteristic in the near future. Careful attention was also paid to the directions of development of inter-organizational cooperation.

Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Tourism - a Research Overview

Natural disasters and crises caused by human activity have a huge impact on the development of tourism and the volume of tourist traffic. Maditinis & Vassiliadis (2006) believe that the main types of crises that affect the global tourism industry are: terrorist attacks, natural disasters, political instability, wars, and epidemics - diseases. Many tourist destinations have developed crisis mitigation tactics and strategies over the years (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

The disease called COVID-19 caused by infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus first appeared in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019 (Aqeel et al., 2020). In March 2020, WHO announced a global pandemic that spread to more than 200 countries in the first quarter of 2020 alone (Haryanto, 2020). As of February 14, 2022, more than 411 million Covid-19 infections have been recorded and more than 5.8 million people have died from the disease (COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, 2022). In order to prevent the spread of the virus, the governments of virtually all countries in the world have introduced a number of serious restrictions.

The economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most significant and unpredictable experiences of recent years (Chen et al., 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020). The introduction of all kinds of restrictions due to the dynamic spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus had an enormous and dramatic effects on the global economy (Nicola et al., 2020; Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). As a result of such circumstances, certain actions were taken in order to work out scenarios that could contribute to the stabilization of a number of unfavorable socio-economic phenomena. Government stands as essential factor to maintain economic stability (Singh, Roca & Lib, 2021).

Tourism is an example of a sector that has suffered the most severe consequences, introduced by solutions implemented in the current crisis (Sigala, 2020; Madani et al., 2020; Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). Not only everyday activities and basic social responsibilities, but also common behaviors of tourist participants, including ways of spending and organizing leisure time, have changed significantly (Seyfi, Hall & Shabani, 2020). The group of key determinants that have had a direct impact on the functioning of the global tourism sector included, inter alia, closing of national borders, stopping air traffic and limiting the movement of people to strictly defined purposes (business, health) (Wells et al., 2020). As a result of the pandemic, global tourist traffic decreased by almost $\frac{3}{4}$, from 1.5 billion foreign trips in 2019 to 380 million in 2020 (UNWTO, 2021). Also in Poland, the number of tourists has drastically decreased. In 2020, less than 19 million tourists used tourist accommodation facilities, about a half less than the year before. The number of domestic tourists decreased by over 40%, and foreign tourists by 70% (Tourism in 2020, 2021).

In response to the crisis caused by the coronavirus, the World Tourism Organization (2020) recommended the following strategies for the tourism industry: crisis management and mitigation, stimulating recovery and accelerating reconstruction in order to prepare for the future. When assessing the implementation of the strategies and tactics recommended by the UNWTO in order to fight the ongoing pandemic, Collins-Kreiner & Ramb (2020) stated that among the 7 countries they surveyed, none implemented more than 30% of the recommendations and the vast majority did not take the recommendations into account at all.

Forecasts regarding the prospects for the further functioning of the tourism sector have focused on the estimates related to international tourism size (Korinth, 2020, Fotiadis, Polyzos & Huan 2021) as well as changes regarding tourists' behaviors and operating models of tourism enterprises (Sigala, 2020, Seraphin & Dosquet, 2020, Sharma et al. ., 2021). Many researchers have also emphasized the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic largely contributed to a critical view towards tourism and the reorientation of modern tourism business towards responsible tourism (Dash & Sharma, 2021), sustainable tourism (Jiricka-Pürner, Brandenburg & Probstl-Haider, 2020, Goh, 2021) or socialize tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Purpose and Applied Research Method

The aim of the conducted research was to identify changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. The study covered selected tourist entities from Lesser Poland and Lower Silesia. As part of the adopted assumptions, qualitative research was carried out with the participation of experts. The research approach based on the expert method is applicable to the analysis of phenomena from the management sciences point of view (Sudol, 2009). The technique of focus group interviews (Barbour, 2007) as well as individual in-depth interviews were used and were conducted online, in real time, via Zoom

platform. Due to epidemic restrictions, virtual interviews were the right solution for conducting research (Murgado-Armenteros, Torres-Ruiz, Vega-Zamora, 2012). Their participants were experts, representing entities operating within the framework of tourism, including related entities, from Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland. The respondents came from the hotel industry, the meetings industry, tourist offices, transport companies, tourist attractions, ROTs (Regional Tourist Organizations), tourist guides and local government (city and voivodship level). A representative of the POT (Polish Tourism Organizaton) also participated in the study and gave their opinion on the research problems during an in-depth interview. The research was conducted in series from December 2020 to February 2021. In total, five remote interviews were carried out, in which 17 people participated.

Experts formed a homogeneous community for the purpose of the study (Kruger & Casey, 2009). The interviews were conducted based on a pre-designed scenario (Maison, 2010), the structure of which determined the general research orientation. The same scenario was used during each meeting. The conducted observations show that the respondents willingly spoke up and showed great commitment during all discussions. The course of each interview also depended on the responsiveness of experts, including the nature of the issues indicated by individual interlocutors. In order to facilitate the discussion, in-depth questions were prepared to obtain detailed data (Thomas, 2016). Experts were asked to comment on the following issues:

- Imagine it is 2022, the pandemic is over. How does your organization operate, who is its client, what are the goals pursued in the course of your business?
- What is / will be the role of inter-organizational cooperation under conditions of changes related to Covid-19?

Discussing Obtained Results

In the course of the research, it was decided to recognize changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. On the basis of the obtained research material, thematic areas were identified that allowed to organize the statements of experts as well as to formulate leading characteristics. These areas included:

- Phenomena illustrating changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic,
- Directions of development of inter-organizational cooperation among representatives of the tourism sector.

Based on the analysis of the participants' comments, it was found that their assessments or identified changes were significantly related to the type of business conducted, including the experience gained during the economic crisis.

Table 1 summarizes experts' statements depicting the phenomena in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. They should be considered as premises for future changes that may only take place or intensify in the near future. First of all, attention was drawn to the fact that companies will go through recovery process at least several times (R2, R17). Taking into account the presented position, it can be concluded that their activity will be the result of not only the identified or the most predictable economic phenomena, but also of the future ones that can only become apparent or will be noticed in the socio-economic landscape. It should be added that the problem of managing the restrictions will not disappear from the political agenda in the near future, and will also have an impact on the conditions related to business activities (Mozdzen, 2020).

Another constraint depicting key determinants from the point of view of tourism activities concerns supply (R17). Compensation of losses incurred by tourism enterprises during the crisis depends on the indicators of the tourist traffic load (Kruczek, 2018). One of such indicators is tourism capacity, which shows the possibilities of using particular elements of tourism infrastructure without reducing the scope and level of supply of individual services and disorganizing socio-economic life. In a situation of high demand, it is not always possible to create such a volume of tourist services that will meet the needs reported by all participants of tourist traffic.

There is a belief among researchers that the contemporary crisis has led to a reevaluation of the approach towards the ways of conducting economic policies and some assumptions behind the actions of decision-makers (Grzeszak et al., 2020). The aforementioned position explains the changes that are progressing on the macro- and microeconomic scale. From the point of view of the conducted research, it is important to list those changes that reflect the decisions made by enterprises. During one of the interviews it was stated that we are currently observing the phenomenon of savings policy, characterizing the activities of various market participants (R1). This phenomenon can be seen as a manifestation of any businesses actions related to reducing expenses or abandoning projects implemented before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly, the outlined approach will have a key impact on the activities of the tourism industry. As part of reducing expenses, many economic entities may significantly reduce or even resign from organizing business trips and conferences in the traditional formula.

Consequently, it may translate into a decrease in the number of business customers and a decrease in revenues generated as part of business tourism (R2). The implementation of corporate savings policies will undoubtedly affect companies, and will be also faced by, not only the meetings industry, but also the hotels, catering, gastronomy and providers of accompanying services.

According to some interviewees (R1, R2, R17), defrosting process regarding tourism can be firstly expected at the national level. It will translate into an increase in the number of trips around Poland. One respondent (R8) stated that in some cases a return to pre-pandemic behavior, including Poles' interest in foreign travel, can also be expected. As part of the tourism of the future, tourist destinations offering contact with nature, which do not necessarily provide access to the Internet, will become very popular (R3). Therefore, agrotourism and ecotourism can be included into the group of prospective forms of tourism. It was also pointed out that tourist activities can be of a therapeutic dimension in times of recovering from economic crisis (R14). One of the experts (R7) has noted that in the era of limited access to shopping malls, tourism should be considered as a way of spending free time. It is worth mentioning that the forthcoming years will be branded by a large dose of uncertainty and recovering from the crisis, also by tourists themselves. As a consequence, there may be changes in the scope of consumer behavior, as well as a re-evaluation of the approach towards consumption, including the intensification of the deconsumption phenomenon.

An important factor encouraging to become a tourism participant is not only the need to recover and combat the effects of the pandemic, but also the implementation of safety rules (R17), which can significantly mitigate negative psychological phenomena (e.g. fear or concerns regarding traveling) and would allow the return to tourism activity as it is remembered from before the outbreak of the pandemic. According to a representative of travel agencies (R8), important changes, depicting tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic, include smaller groups within organized tourism framework, as well as an increased interest in the popularity of health-oriented or family-oriented offers.

Careful attention was also paid to the neighboring countries of Poland, which should be treated as key issue markets in the near future (R1, R17). The POT promotional campaign in 2021 was exemplified by activities carried out not only in the markets closest to and neighboring with Poland, but also those with easy access to our country (R17). A return to the situation before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic will not be possible without the development of international tourism. Studies prepared by experts of the Polish Economic Institute show that the greater openness of the domestic market towards foreign tourists leads to increased profits for the tourism industry and the entire economy (Czernicki et al., 2020).

According to one of the respondents (R4), a phenomenon illustrating post-pandemic changes in tourism lies in the reprogramming of promotional budgets, including the reformulation of selected cost items. There will be a redirection of funds from marketing activities carried out in the traditional way for the benefit of campaigns initiated in a virtual environment. Undoubtedly, such decisions will be made in various industries and should be considered as a leading and justified activity.

According to representatives of the meetings industry, the solutions implemented during the pandemic will determine the directions of their business activities development (R5, R6). Importantly, experts noted that these changes do not solely originate from the fact of using technologies that enable the organization of online events, which will undoubtedly continue to be developed and applied more widely (R6). During one of the interviews it was stated that the trade fair formula may also undergo significant transformations. The argument regarding narrowing of the trade market to local or regional undertakings (R5, R6) may constitute a proof in this regard. National event organizers may become the beneficiaries of such situation. Due to trade market narrowing, local or regional events may be better perceived or treated as accessible within the environment of their potential participants (R5). It was also noted that events organized on the grounds of external exhibition facilities (R6) may become very popular in the near future. There was a voice within the framework of the discussion indicating the willingness to return to business meetings held in the traditional formula, proving the validity of their organization (R7). The reported comment directly refers to the very core of the trade service, which provides for the possibility of establishing contacts and running negotiations during direct meetings (Szromnik, 2016). Undoubtedly, this type of meetings is eagerly awaited by representatives of economic practice.

Table 1. Phenomena illustrating changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondent	Respondent 's statement
R ₁	<p><i>"... we entered a new policy, sort of savings policy."</i> <i>"... awakening first in sort of local sphere, that is (...) Polish, that is actually a bit of continuation of what has been done in this year, I mean internal tourism, these local trips ..."</i></p>

	<i>"... the world is about to take off again, or at least our closest neighbors ..."</i>
R ₂	<i>"... more clients from Poland." "... there will be fewer business clients, because companies are quite efficient with it, with this remote work, with organizing all meetings remotely ..."</i>
R ₃	<i>"... we go back to the roots, the usual hare and hounds game that we organize in the forest is so (...) popular ..." "... people who are looking for a place even without the Internet, do not necessarily need that Internet, they do not necessarily need these technological innovations ..."</i>
R ₄	<i>"... forms of promotion, i.e. those based on live contact with the client, accounted for about 60%, and 40% were constituted by internet activities. I think that in 2022 we will reverse these proportions ... "</i>
R ₅	<i>"... elements of this digitization (...) will remain, especially when it comes to congresses ..." "... we will return to the trade formula, but it will also be changed a great deal..." "... the world will narrow down a bit to local markets. This is the forecast in the meetings industry ... " "... we can gain, because our events can be perceived in a better way, more accessible, more readily available by customers from our region than these gigantic world events ..."</i>
R ₆	<i>"... transfer some of the events that would take place in the closed space of the hall, to the outdoor areas ..." "... the emphasis will be put on regional or local events and this part of the market will be developed ... " "... all these premises related to the use of technology will continue to be used, developed ..."</i>
R ₇	<i>"... a huge number of Poles have spent their free time in shopping malls, they have been going there, actually for entertainment, for fun, it hasn't been about shopping entirely, just to go for a walk. If we take away these shopping malls, shopping centers, they will have to spend their free time somewhere ... " "... these business relations, I cannot imagine, for example, discussing the details...you do not know who is looking at the webcam at that particular moment, who is the advisor? Well, we know that some things are done and set behind the scenes ... "</i>
R ₈	<i>"... we must put emphasis on smaller groups, on pro-health groups, families ..." "... Someone who has always traveled, will keep going skiing to Austria or during weekends, whether in the country or abroad, and someone for whom galleries constitute major attraction...well they will stick to these galleries ..."</i>
R ₁₄	<i>"... overcoming the crisis also means opening up to all those in desperate need, that is, that there would be trips, that people would come to different places, not only to stick to the nature, but to learn ..."</i>
R ₁₇	<i>"... we assume that we will master the effects of this pandemic sufficiently and that certain safety procedures will be implemented to such an extent that the pandemic will cease to have such a large impact on our lives and previous behavior ..." "... people stopped being afraid just because what seemed to be completely untamed thing at the very beginning of the pandemic, in a psychological sense I would say, now somehow this fear has been tamed ..." "... agrotourism, ecotourism ..." "... the awareness of this need for contact with the nature has increased to a much greater extent as well as the fact that safety will also play a major role ... " "... last year, much more money was transferred to a campaign promoting Poland and the implementation of such a campaign, TV programs, contests, which are to introduce tourist attractions, that are perhaps little known, to the Poles ..." "... this year 2021, we first communicate and promote ourselves in the nearest, neighboring markets, those with easy access, so that people who want to visit Poland and can get here by their own car ..." "... we are the second country when it comes to declaring a return to tourism, traveling ..." "... companies will recover from the crisis in at least 2-3 years (...), first of all, it is not possible to provide more services during the tourist season, (...) we have a supply limit and it is impossible to produce more here "</i>

Source: Own study based on the research.

In general, the authors propose the classification of main changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic relate to 5 main aspects, shown in Figure 1.

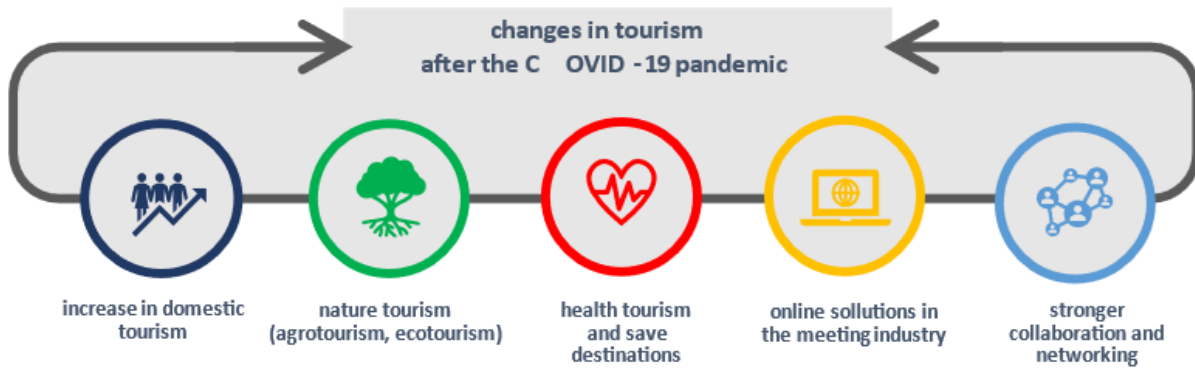


Fig.1. The classification of main changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Source: Own study based on the research.

The last key issue submitted to analysis, concerned inter-organizational cooperation in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic. It was assumed, for the purposes of the conducted research, that the network paradigm is gaining particular importance in tourism.

In the vast majority of cases, tourist services are treated as an area of specialization of cooperating producers. There are also arguments in favor of supporting and initiating inter-organizational cooperation among tourism enterprises, such as team effectiveness, collectively gained experience, sharing risk or the permeation of resources (Manczak, 2014). In the opinion of some respondents (R5, R6), cooperation between enterprises will stand as a key activity that can help to overcome the crisis or rebuild the former position in times of recovery from pandemic (Table 2). During interviews, it was also noted that among the entities, operating in tourism, there is a belief that overcoming the crisis will be a collaborative process (R5, R6), as well as spread over time (R17). In addition, this process will require the initiation of joint projects of various manufacturers of tourist services (hotel, transport, leadership) (R5, R6), which will prove the attitudes promoting solidarity.

Table 2. Directions of development of inter-organizational cooperation in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic

Respondent	Respondent 's statement
R5	"... we will be getting up from our knees after this pandemic; all these industries related to the meetings industry, I am talking about hotels, travel agencies, organizers, guides - if we do not show solidarity and we do not cooperate together, then (...) everyone will collapse" "... as an organizer of trades or congresses, I must be involved in strong cooperation with a hotel that will not, saying colloquially, "kill me", making me pay the entire 100% of the rental cost six months in advance ..."
R6	"... real, decent cooperation of many industries. Not only are we talking here about the hotel sector but also about agencies, about suppliers, taxi drivers - we should build cooperation together, because difficult times are coming ..."
R7	"... when it comes to this inter-organizational cooperation, I think we should put a lot of emphasis on not letting these customers, our guests, leave Poland. Let Poles visit Poland, visit our Polish tourist attractions ..."
R17	"... webinars, trainings for tour guides or commissioning regional tasks, such as, for example, an audit in facilities that have certificates of a safe facility (...) hygienically. For example, I have not cooperated in this area before, this is a new area of cooperation for me..." "... when it comes to this inter-organizational cooperation again, I would like to mention the Polish Chamber of Tourism, the Inbound Tourism Forum, hotel associations ..."

Source: Own study based on the research.

According to one of the experts (R7), undertaking projects aimed at supporting domestic tourism, as well as promoting tourist attractions among Poles should stand as the determinant of inter-organizational cooperation. It is worth mentioning that this particular stance corresponds with the activities recently undertaken by the Polish Tourist Organization or the Polish Tourist Voucher program. Therefore, it can be assumed that there are existing, marketing campaigns aimed at activating domestic tourism. Such kind of projects can be carried out in the future based on joint actions of various interested entities. Currently, their proof lies in POT initiatives, which will undoubtedly be continued in the near future (R17).

Based on the PTO representative's statement analysis it can be concluded that the intensification of inter-organizational cooperation has already taken place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The cooperation covered activities carried out in cooperation with the Regional Tourist Organizations (ROT) to the large extent. Undoubtedly, the undertaken projects will be continued in the forthcoming years (R17). The group of key partners of the Polish Tourist Organization includes the Polish Chamber of Tourism, the Inbound Tourism Forum and hotel associations. The distinguished organizations constitute a group of entities with which initiatives may be undertaken as part of inter-organizational cooperation.

Conclusions

Based on the research results, attempts were made to outline changes in tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic based on the opinion of experts participating in the interviews. It can be concluded that, as a result of the epidemic situation, the processes that led to the introduction of certain changes in tourism, including those related to the translocation of activities into virtual space, intensified. This phenomenon will undoubtedly be progressing in the forthcoming years. In the opinion of interviewees, the process of overcoming the economic crisis will be a phenomenon spread over time. However, catching up with the losses caused by the Covid-19 pandemic will require tourism entities to put a lot of effort into the implemented projects. This process will be marked by a large dose of uncertainty. Some experts were able to present their views on inter-organizational cooperation in tourism. They appreciated its role in times of recovery from the economic crisis. Initiating such kind of interactions between market participants is not only justified from the point of view of a difficult situation in which tourism enterprises find themselves these days, but it can also determine a new quality of future undertakings and promote solidarity attitudes.

Encapsulating, it should be added that the presented research results illustrate the opinions and positions of a selected group of entities supplying the tourism market, i.e. those participating in completed virtual interviews. The authors are aware of the fact that the analyzed statements of experts do not reflect the moods or do not allow to outline in detail the situation in which all domestic tourist entities found themselves. Nevertheless, taking into account the adopted research assumptions, it was possible to obtain answers to the questions, developed for the needs of the meetings with experts and to identify important research categories or formulating important conclusions that may herald further future research directions.

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