

DISABLED PERSONS AND TOURISM POLICY IN POLAND

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Abstract: The study presents a set of conditionings of tourism policy in the context of disabled persons and the barriers and restrictions they are facing. Goals, links, organizations and institutions included in tourism policy are presented with a special consideration for disabled persons. Specific indications concerning the possibility of undertaking tourism activity by disabled persons are shown.

Key words: tourism policy, disabled persons, disabled persons tourism activity

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Tourism is a phenomenon of rich and diverse content. Taking into account its social and economic aspects we have to recognize the important role it plays as a form of rest, relaxation, cognition or physical and psychological recovery. Tourism is also important from the economic point of view. It is one of the fastest growing sectors of many national economies. It is an important factor of cities and regions economic development. The very important role of tourism comes inter alia from the fact that it stimulates not only the tourism branch but also many other economic sectors.

One of the transactors in tourism market is the state. Although in free-market economies the role of the state in creating economic phenomena and relations is limited, the multidimensional character of tourism which influences the economic and social areas of life, needs a proper coordination. The state plays a multiple and important role in the functioning of the economic system and by this meaning also in the functioning of the tourism market.

Tourism policy is certainly one of the factors affecting contemporary tourism development. Tourism became an important element of the contemporary state general policy just after World War II – when it gained its mass character. This concerns different domains of the social, economic, and political life; as well in the scale of a country as in the world scale.¹

The total activities of the state in the field of tourism are called tourism policy. The main purposes of this policy are:²

¹ W.W. Gaworecki, Turystyka, Polskie Wyd. Ekonomiczne S.A., W-wa 2007, s. 107.

² http://pl.wikibooks.org/wiki/Podstawy_turystyki/Czynniki_rozwoju_turystyki, z dnia 14.07.2009

In general:

1. to maximize profits coming from tourism development and to minimize the cost of it.

In particular:

2. to optimize the fulfillment of society growing tourism needs,
3. to rationally use the work and capital resources present in the national economy sector,
4. to respect the quality status of the natural and social environment.

The position of the state towards border formalities is important for international tourism development. The state can independently decide about the conditions of border crossing for its own and for foreign citizens. This can only be limited by signed agreements with other countries. By adopting certain rules, the state has the possibility to impose limitation, hamper, or stimulate outgoing or incoming tourism, towards all or towards chosen countries. International tourism policy influences directly – in a positive or negative way – its development. This policy is reflected mainly in the relation of the state towards border formalities or conditions that have to be met to cross the state border.

Border formalities are:³ passport control, visa control, customs duty, currency control and sanitary control. The liberalization of border formalities, the improvement of service – especially the tendency to eliminate visas or custom and passport control limitation – have an important influence on international tourism development.

At this point, tourism policy efficiency is worth to be underlined. A complex influence on all of the links of the *tourism cycle* is one of its conditions. This cycle is formed by several links:⁴

- tourism market surveys,
- tourism development plans,
- tourism infrastructure development,
- preparation and training of tourism personnel,
- acts leading to the creation of an optimal model of tourism organization,⁵
- tourism economy development,
- tourism „propaganda”,
- inspection of effects of the ongoing tourism policy,
- conclusions formed on the basis of them.

In the case when government does not give importance to above mentioned links, tourism policy becomes passive - which means ineffective. Unfortunately life gives many examples of such approach - it is the problem of control of ongoing tourism policy.

As it was mentioned before, the tasks of tourism policy may be undertaken by different actors, organizations and institutions. The roles of those actors are defined by range and by territorial and tangible scope of the established tourism policy goals.

Tourism policy is executed by several institutions and organizations:

- International actors (World Tourism Organization – UN WTO, European Union Committee for Tourism, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD),
- State administration – legislative and executive,
- Tourism Self-governance organizations, institutions and other subjects supporting tourism development,
- Local and regional actors of tourism policy.

In polish conditions, this list of actors is formed by: governors, voivodeship self-governance parliaments as subjects of regional, provincial and inter-provincial tourism

³ G. Golebski, Kompendium wiedzy o turystyce, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa – Poznań 2002, s.39

⁴ http://pl.wikibooks.org/wiki/Podstawy_turystyki/Czynniki_rozwoju_turystyki

⁵ Za takie działania odpowiedzialna jest Polska Organizacja Turystyczna

policy. Governors of voivodships – as public administration organs have an important role to play. Their cooperation with self-governance parliaments gives important possibilities of creative activities, i.e. by initiating tourism municipalities.

From the point of view of this discussion it is also important to mention: commerce chambers, tourism chambers, parliaments, professional associations (i.e. restorers, hoteliers, guides, pilots, carriers associations), federations of people sharing common interests (i.e. tourism offices and companies).

Tourism plays an important role in disabled persons lives. It is not only a source of entertainment and relax but also a very important form of rehabilitation. Still, to allow disabled persons to fully benefit from tourism offers it is necessary to create adequate conditions.

Disability is a multi-aspect notion. It is formed by physical, psychological and mental affections. It is one of the biggest tragedies that may happen to someone. It is a problem and a challenge not only for the diseased but also for his closest entourage. Disability imposes limits or makes it impossible to be independent and to gain self-realization. It hampers the execution of simple actions, which for fit persons are just everyday monotony. It condemns you to the care of another person.

The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly defines the term of disability as follows:⁶ „The term "disabled person" means any person unable to ensure by himself or herself, wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and/or social life, as a result of deficiency, either congenital or not, in his or her physical or mental capabilities.”. The rights written in the Declaration are applied to disabled persons and to their families.

Development impairments are formed by a wide range of deviations. There are several classifications of units and sorts of deviations. Fundamental importance is given to the World Health Organization classification which distinguishes persons:⁷

- with locomotion impairments,
- with sight impairments,
- with communication impairments (talking, writing),
- with organ impairments,
- with intellectual impairments,
- with emotional impairments,
- with hidden impairments (invisible to the eye),
- with ageing related impairments.

Disabled persons participation in tourism is inconsiderable and importantly differs from the level characterizing the whole country population. According to Tourism Institute surveys in 1999 only 21,3% of disabled persons participated in tourism travels. 37% of the questioned Polish citizens did not travel within or outside the country, disabled persons where twice that number (78,7). 58,7% of Polish citizens did participate in inbound travels as well did only 20,3% of disabled persons. For outbound tourism the results were adequately 13,6% and 1%.⁸

The main purposes of travel of disabled persons differs considerably from those typical for the rest of the population. Unlike other Polish citizens, who traveled mainly for tourism and rest purposes, disabled persons traveled to visit friends and relatives as well during long as during short travels in 1999. Health and rehabilitation were also important purposes for disabled persons travels (27,8% against 5,4% among all Polish citizens) and were recognized as typically tourism related.⁹

⁶ B.A. Szpurek, Niepełnosprawni w Unii Europejskiej, Wyd. WSH Leszno 2006, s. 11

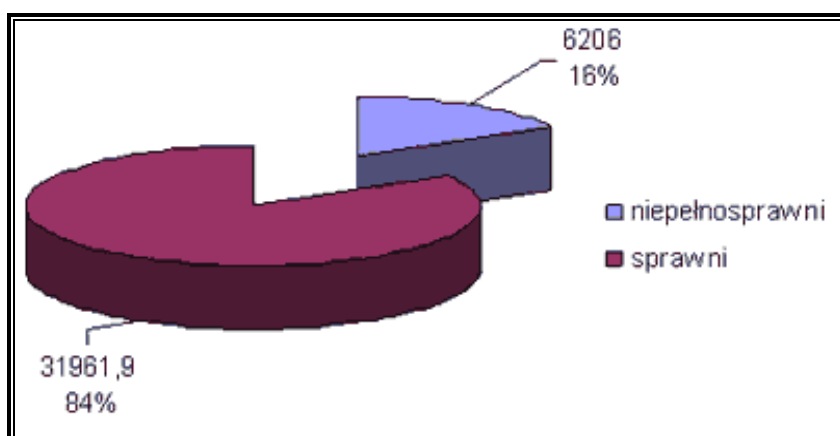
⁷ M. Gawinek, Niepełnosprawny turysta- poradnik dla pilotów i przewodników turystycznych, Wyd. Forum Turyst. Pomorza Zach., Szczecin 2003, s. 15

⁸ Tamże, s. 103

⁹ Tamże, s. 103

A further research surveyed more than 14,5 thousand households, with 42991 persons living in urban and rural areas, including 35248 adults aged 15 years and more and 7743 children aged 14 years and less.

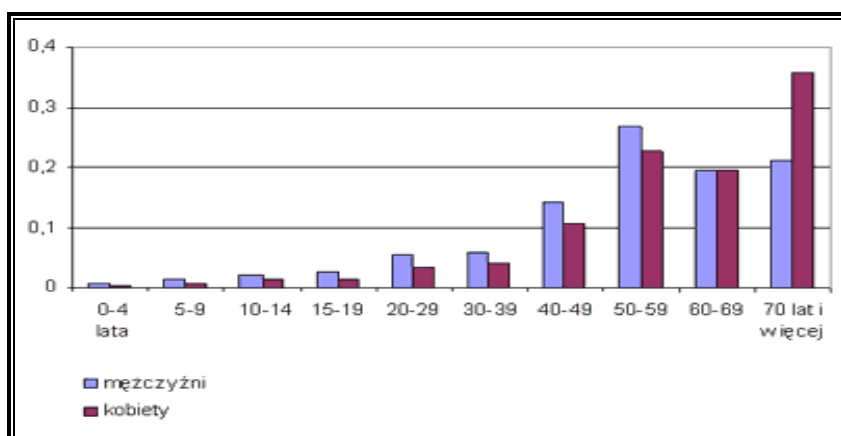
Subsequently the results were generalized according to the population constantly living in Poland (status on the day of 31st December 2004). In this group almost 32 millions are dexterous persons which corresponds to approximately 84% of Poland inhabitants. In the same group was approximately 6 million disabled persons which corresponds to 16% of the population.



Graph 1. Percentage of disabled and dexterous persons in the total respondents group

Source: www.niepelnosprawni.pl, date 14.07.2009

In the group of disabled persons almost 60% live in cities, almost 40% are rural inhabitants. Nearly 40% of disabled persons are male and 54% are woman. It is worth noticing that in the age group from 0 to 59 years the number of disabled males is grater. In the age group from 60 to 69 years the number of disabled males and females is the same while in the age group above 70 years disabled females are predominant (Graph 2). This situation arises from a shorter length of life for man than for woman. In the age group above 70 years there are more woman than man - this means that the total amount of disabled woman is grater than disabled man, as it was mentioned before.



Graph 2. Disabled persons according to sex and age structure

Source: www.niepelnosprawni.pl, date: 14.07.2009

Disabled persons are often pushed to the margin of society life and their elementary social needs are not fulfilled. Much is said about the necessity to create support that will help disabled persons gain education and work, but many forgot to guarantee them a rational use of their free time, also in the form of tourism activities.

Tourism plays or may play an important role in rehabilitation and health improvement of disabled persons. It refers to all forms of disability, as well related to mobility as to mentality. Participation in tourism releases activity, shapes motivation for physical effort and for active recreation. Newly gained abilities may be used with success in other areas of everyday life. Tourism, not only plays an important role in rehabilitation but it has also an educational and breeding function. Participation in tourism has beneficial influence on the well-being and the psychological state of disabled persons - is an important element of social integration.

To achieve the best effects and to provide expected benefits it is crucial to adjust and to match the right form of tourism activity to the degree and type of disability.

When analyzing the factors influencing disabled persons tourism activity it is important to notice that there is a need to adapt the tourism infrastructure, especially in hospitality and gastronomy. Architectural barriers are a problem – they restrain the possibility to host persons with physical dysfunctions. The adaptation of existing tourism facilities requires enormous financial expenditures, investors are unable to match them and furthermore they do not expect that future incomes, resulting from modification, will in short time refund the incurred costs.

The situation on the tourism market does not facilitate disabled persons tourism, there is also an insufficient number of offers dedicated to this segment of tourists. There are two reasons for this situation. It is not only the lack of correctly adapted tourism facilities but also the small confidence in the possibility and efficiency of creating demand for this kind of services. Such reasoning leads to a bad direction as tourism managers should notice the heterogeneity of financial resources and health situation of disabled persons. A part of disabled persons is poor but there is also a group of auspicious and independent ones with free-time resources. This phenomenon is underestimated as well by travel agencies as by direct service suppliers.

Another important factor is the inadequate quality of personnel training. This includes all sorts of specialists providing tourism services: hoteliers, client service staff in tourism agencies, carriers, restaurateurs, guides, pilots, tourism animators leading activities with disabled persons. A common problem concerning disabled persons group leading is a lack of knowledge concerning tourism customer service.

The way the service is given to a client with special needs in our facility is very important, but it is also good to have information about the whole system of services available on a given territory, i.e.: special transport services, availability of tourism attractions, historical monuments and shops.

On the disabled persons tourism market a lack of information concerning tourism services can be noticed. A disabled person is looking for precise, up-to-date, fair, reliable information, transmitted in an appropriate way.

There is no data base, which could help to disseminate the information on travel and tourism conveniences available in Poland. This data base could include information on where it is possible to get out or get in, which facilities, buildings, tourist tracks and means of transport are adapted to their special needs and where can they be found. There are only few maps and guides available but they do not use any common standard of symbols.

The financial barrier is very often mentioned as being one of the factors that limits the tourism activity of disabled persons. The financial situation of this group of people is often very bad. For most of them social benefits and pensions are the only

source of income - in Poland they are based on a minimum level. This situation as well as the economic status of disabled persons is the cause why they are staying at home.

When creating tourism products for disabled persons, additional sources of financing may be taken into account. The creation of legislative and financial conditions could on one side facilitate the participation of disabled persons in tourism and on the other side would increase the interest given by tourism managers to this market segment.

Architectural barriers are another important factor obstructing or limiting disabled persons activity in tourism. They are present as well in accommodation facilities as in heritage attractions worth visiting. The notion „heritage site” or „historical building” being a „cultural monument” refers in practice to various examples. These are single, standalone buildings or groups of them, buildings existing in a historical urban structure distinguished by their architecture and character. These may be also unique places, listed on the World Heritage List, like stone megaliths in England or Brittany, painted, prehistoric caves in The Vézère valley in France, Egypt's pyramids, the unique underground chambers of the Wieliczka Salt Mine and many other extraordinary witnesses of our history spread all over the globe.

According to the basis of the universal design philosophy a building that is accessible is one that is „fully, equitably accessible by everyone, regardless of any disability, and with an entrance situated in direct contact with a mean of public transport”.¹⁰

The most common barriers met by an architect trying to open a historic building to all users are:¹¹

- a difficult access / approach and lack of direct contact with a mean of public / private transport,
- a complicated, often illegible functional system,
- level differences at the entrance and at the respective floors,
- horizontal and vertical communication (narrow corridors, passages, doorways, staircases, uneven surfaces, slippery, often marble floors),
- heavy, difficult to open doors,
- lack of handrails,
- lack of adequate information,
- lack of adapted sanitary installations and phones.

These barriers exist as well in buildings that have preserved their primary function (i.e. churches), in those which function has changed through the ages (i.e. museums buildings) as in historic buildings that were enlarged.

All these difficulties should not eliminate the possibility for disabled persons to access them and to use them. Especially as many buildings – due to their architecture, function or unique collections presented – are of great national and international cultural value.

There are many projects, realized in Western Europe and in Poland that confirm the possibility to reach a compromise when providing access to historical buildings. Level differences at the entrance or inside the building are eliminated with the use of simple, wooden or metal ramps. In buildings with monumental main entrances and representative stairs, elevators and lifts are being used (i.e. at the National Museum in Kraków); side or back entrances are used only in the case when the opening of the main entrance is impossible. Because of the occurring differences of levels inside historical buildings lifts, cranes or platforms placed along the staircase handrails are being used (handrail chairs are less common).

¹⁰ H. Grabowska-Palecka, Niepełnosprawni w obszarach i obiektach zabytkowych- problemy dostępności, Wyd. Politechnika Krakowska, Kraków 2004, s. 162

¹¹ Tamże

Special paths adapted to wheelchairs are being created in less accessible buildings with a complicated construction of the solid and with a difficult inside communication structure (i.e. the Windsor Castle). The rest of the building may be visited in an alternative way – by use of additional information, virtual software or special models.

Deliberations on the barriers of disabled persons participation in social life, one of the aspects of which is tourism and recreation, creates one elementary question. This relevant question concerns the creation of integration barriers that foster the marginalization of disabled persons. Disabled persons, incapable of taking care of the occurred situation by themselves are subject of negative self-appraisal while dexterous persons often understate or ignore the needs of the disabled. „This is not my problem” or „this does not concern me” are common ways of thinking. Withdraw of disabled persons may be the consequence of such negative approach towards them. Mutual understanding and opening to each other needs should occur. A change in the socio-cultural mentality and in the philosophy of life is necessary; it may be reached through promotion and bringing up of disabled persons problems in mass media and in NGO's actions. Little by little this changes occur but it happens slowly and in an insufficient degree.

Conclusions:

1. In Poland disabled persons participate in tourism less often than dexterous persons.
2. There is a long list of barriers obstructing tourism activity of disabled persons.
3. There is a real need of presenting a complex state policy concerning the possibility of undertaking tourism activities by disabled persons.
4. An increase of tourism activity among disabled persons is a chance for this group of the Polish society and may become another factor of tourism development in Poland.

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