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The impact of COVID-19 on foreign travel plans of Polish tourists in 2020

Abstract. The aim of this article is to analyse foreign travel plans of Polish tourists in 2020 and how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is based on information collected through an online survey involving 355 respondents. The survey was anonymous and consisted of 6 questions. It was found that the outbreak of the pandemic significantly changed foreign travel plans of Poles in the analysed period. Only a third of the respondents said they were planning a tourist or recreational trip abroad. There was much less interest in countries like Turkey, Egypt or Tunisia, in favour of European countries, mainly those located in the Mediterranean area, such as Spain and Italy. The study has also shown that domestic tourism can be expected to increase, as indicated by data collected by the Polish Chamber of Tourism.

Keywords: COVID-19, Poland, tourism, survey, travel plans

JEL Codes: O52; Z13; Z32

1. Introduction

The tourism literature addressing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic keeps growing, especially regarding reports trying to explain the importance of the whole situation for the global tourism industry. One can find first economic analyses, forecasts and proposals of corrective actions, which are intended, at least to a small extent, to compensate for financial huge losses caused by the pandemic (Baldwin, Mauro, 2020; Czech et al., 2020). Authors already discuss the

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negative effects on tourism brought on by the introduction of quarantine, travel restrictions or even border closures (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020; Linka et al., 2020). However, it is argued that all those restrictions were necessary to slow down the spread of the coronavirus around the world, as reported by Chinazzi et al. (2020).

Tourism in Europe, which is a highly tourism-intensive region, has been particularly affected in its western, southern and central parts. From the moment of the first case of COVID-9 infection or the first outbreaks (Goniewicz et al., 2020), those parts of Europe recorded a considerable decrease in the number of visitors. On the one hand, this situation was related to border closures in Asian countries; on the other hand, a growing fear of traveling could be observed among inhabitants of other countries, which was associated with the introduction of various types of restrictions (Bonaccorsi, et al., 2020). Based on Skyscanner data, it can be estimated that interest in foreign travel among Europeans decreased by about 30% compared to the same period in the previous year (Gallego & Font, 2020).

The situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the Polish tourism sector, which was manifested, among other things, by the decline in occupancy rates (Napierała, et al., 2020). In March 2020, the occupancy rate of all forms of accommodation fell by approximately 40% compared to the same period last year (Korinth & Ranasinghe, 2020). After Poland's borders were reopened, the situation of the hotel industry improved, but the higher occupancy rate was mainly related to the increase in tourist traffic in the country. A similar situation could be observed when analysing passenger statistics for Polish airports, which were hit by the closure of the country's borders from March 15, 2020 (Orzechowska & Bednarek, 2020).

The purpose of this article is to present the results of an online survey conducted from June 1 to June 15, 2020. The study was intended to illustrate how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected Poles' interest in foreign travel in 2020. The findings provide an insight into the impact of the pandemic on foreign travel plans of Polish tourists and are one of the first publications on the subject based on survey data.

2. Poles traveling abroad in 2017-2019 – the situation before the COVID-19 pandemic

In recent years, the main reasons why Poles have travelled abroad have been tourism and leisure. Each year in the period 2017-2019 saw an increase in the number of foreign trips (Table 1).

Table 1. Foreign tourist trips of Polish residents aged 15 or more in 2017-2019 (in thousand)

Trip length	Year		
	2017	2018	2019
Short-term (2-4 days)	2,398.1	2,527.6	2,679.4
Percentage change	–	+ 5.4%	+ 6.0%
Long-term (5 days or longer)	9,560.0	10,219.3	10,865.2
Percentage change	–	+ 6.8%	+ 6.3%

Source: based on data published by Statistics Poland (GUS 2017, 2018, 2019).

The above data show an annual increase in the number of long-term trips, which account for the vast majority of all foreign trips. A similar increase, in percentage terms, was recorded for short-term trips, despite considerably lower absolute figures. This increase could be attributed to the dynamic growth of low-cost airlines in Poland (Bojczuk, 2008) and the rising popularity of so-called city breaks (Balińska, 2020).

In the period between 2017 and 2019, Greece was the most popular foreign destination, although the number of Polish travelers to this country declined by an average of 4 percentage points per year (Table 2). A reverse but much more dynamic trend can be observed for Turkey, which nearly managed to match the

Table 2. Most popular foreign destinations chosen by Polish tourists in 2017-2019 (% of all foreign trips)

Country	Year		
	2017	2018	2019
Greece	30.84	26.26	22.11
Turkey	9.79	15.99	20.44
Egypt	9.78	11.46	12.52
Spain	15.57	12.83	11.14
Bulgaria	10.81	10.77	10.98
Tunisia	1.11	2.49	3.67
Cyprus	1.49	1.97	2.95
Italy	3.98	3.32	2.29
Albania	2.18	2.63	1.85
Portugal	1.93	1.28	1.36

Source: Frydrykiewicz (2020).

share of Greece in 2019. Decreases in the number of Polish tourists were also recorded for Spain (from 15.57% in 2017 to 11.14% in 2019) and Italy (from 3.98% in 2017 to 2.29% in 2019).

3. Material and research methods

In order to analyse holiday plans of Poles in 2020, the author used an online survey, which was carried out in the period 1-15 June 2020. The survey was posted on the Google Forms platform, which was a particularly convenient form of data collection given the pandemic. Responses were obtained from a sample of tourists and one-day visitors selected from among people registered on Facebook.

The survey was anonymous and consisted of 6 questions, both open-ended and closed. Some of the questions could be answered using options on a Likert scale (6- or 4-point). Similar surveys aimed at studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society have been conducted by, among others, Rzymiski and Nowicki (2020) and Ahorsu et al. (2020). The online survey was completed by a total of 355 respondents (275 women and 80 men), with 52% of them aged 18-35.

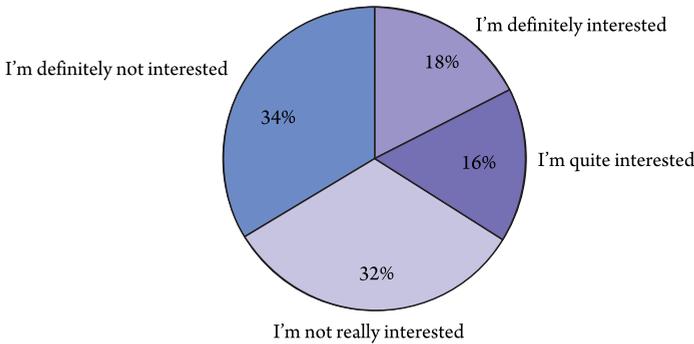
Answers to question 3 (see Fig. 3) were compared with corresponding data for the previous year, obtained from the Polish Chamber of Tourism (PIT). The results collected in the author's survey were also compared with data for 2018-2019 collected by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), in two surveys, each involving a random sample of about 900 respondents.

4. Results

Poles participate in international tourism every year (Anisiewicz, Palmowski, 2014; Fogel, 2017). Statistics on international tourism also show that the number of Poles travelling abroad have been slowly increasing in the last decade (Będzik & Gołąb, 2020; Podemski, 2011). This situation is likely to change considerably in 2020, which is confirmed by the answers provided in the online survey, which are summarised in Figure 1.

It was found that two thirds of the respondents decided not to travel abroad in 2020. If attitudes of the respondents are treated as indicative of the mood of the entire society, one can expect that the situation in 2020 will differ from what could be observed in 2019. Differences can be expected especially in July and August, which is the period when a considerable percentage (28% in 2011) of the annual tourist traffic in Poland takes place (Wendt & Ilies, 2012). The growing interest in domestic tourism will probably produce an influx of tourists in the coastal regions and in the Sudetes and Carpathians, which have traditionally been major domestic

Fig. 1. Respondents' interest in foreign travel in 2020



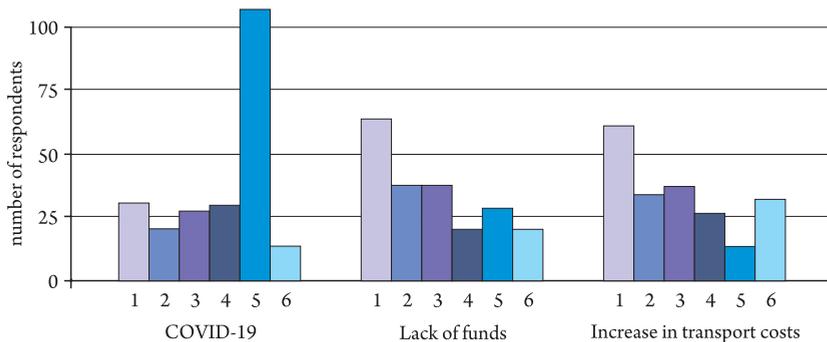
Source: own elaboration based on questionnaire research.

holiday destinations for Poles in previous years (Río-Rama et al., 2019; Rogowski, 2014; Taylor & Ciechański, 2016). A larger number of tourists in these areas will increase the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP, and thus compensate for the losses caused by a smaller number of foreign tourists.

Figure 2 shows illustrates the relative importance of the main factors listed by those respondents who decided not to travel abroad, including higher costs of transport, lack of money or the COVID-19 pandemic.

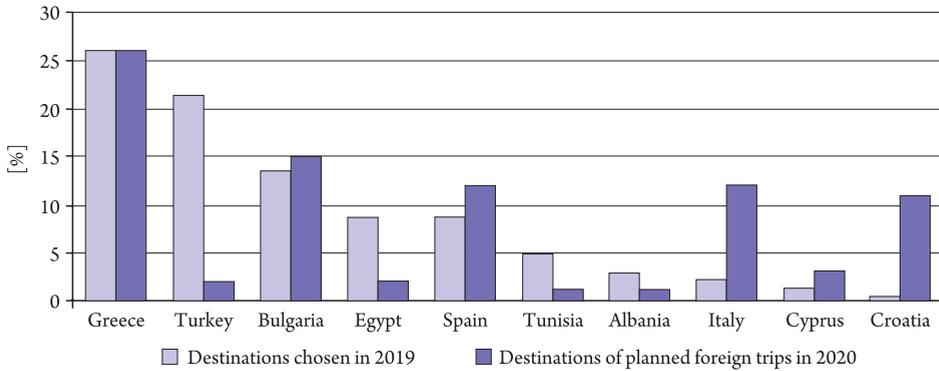
Although all the above-mentioned aspects are related to each other, it was the spread of the coronavirus that was the main motivating factor behind respondents' decision to stay in the country: a considerable influence of COVID-19 (which is represented by responses 4 and 5) was indicated by over 60% of respondents.

Fig. 2. Factors influencing respondents' foreign travel plans in 2020 (1 – no effect, 5 – high impact, 6 – none)



Source: own elaboration based on questionnaire research.

Fig. 3. The main destinations of foreign trips the respondents were planning to take in 2020



Source: own elaboration based on questionnaire research.

Other studies indicate that the decision to give up foreign travel is one of the social and economic costs of the global pandemic (Qiu et al., 2020), which has led to an impoverishment of large parts of society groups as a result of the loss of jobs and increased social (Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020).

Figure 3 illustrates how the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic have affected the respondents' choice of foreign tourist destinations in 2020.

Compared to figures for 2019, respondents' willingness to travel to European countries increased. As regards Greece, the percentage of respondents interested in visiting this country was similar to that recorded in the previous years (Łaciak, 2013). In percentage terms, there was much more interest in other Mediterranean countries (including Italy, Spain and particularly Croatia). Compared to 2019, countries outside the European continent, i.e. Turkey and Tunisia, saw a considerable drop in the number of potential visitors among the respondents, which is particularly dramatic in the case of Turkey, which had been recording annual growth in tourist traffic in previous years (Atasoy & Wendt, 2016).

5. Discussion

Foreign travel plans of Polish tourists in previous years have been the subject of other surveys conducted, among others, by CBOS¹ (CBOS 2018, 2019). Data collected in 2018-2019 clearly indicated a growing interest in foreign traveling

¹ CBOS (Centre for Public Opinion Research) is an opinion polling institute based in Warsaw.

among respondents (as evidenced by an increase from 24% in 2018 to 27% in 2019). It is worth mentioning that forecasts regarding domestic and foreign tourism were optimistic given continuous annual growth in previous years, which was halted in 2020. Compared to the results obtained by the author of the study described in this article, the share of those interested in foreign travel declined by 9 percentage points (CBOS 2018, 2019).

Compared to studies conducted in previous years (CBOS 2018, 2019), there were also differences in the reasons given by respondents for not wanting to travel abroad. In 2020, the main factors that led to such decisions were the lack of money, although the frequency of this reason in previous years kept decreasing (from 30% in 2017 to 23% in 2018). This changed in 2020, when the pandemic affected the financial situation of many households (that is how 20% of respondents explained their decision not to travel abroad). The majority of respondents (over 60%), however, indicated the pandemic as the main factor, which is a sign of a reduced sense of security on the part of potential tourists. This aspect frequently plays a fundamental role in the economic and social development of the world's countries (Guhan, 1994). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic can therefore be regarded as one of the events responsible for disrupting the sense of security, especially in countries where the daily increase in the incidence rate was relatively high and contributed to the closing of the global tourism market.

The survey conducted by the author indicates that in 2020 respondents were willing to spend their holidays in the country despite trends recorded in previous studies showing that interest in foreign travel had been growing year by year. As regards foreign destinations selected in 2020, respondents showed a clear preference for European countries located in the Mediterranean basin (including Croatia, Italy, Greece and Spain) and for Germany. According to CBOS surveys, Egypt was the country outside Europe that the largest number of respondents selected as a potential holiday destination (3% of responses in 2018 and 4% in 2019). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 interest in this country significantly decreased and was expressed by less than 2% of the respondents in the online survey.

6. Conclusions

Based on the presented results, it can be predicted that future participation of Polish tourists in foreign trips is likely to decrease. This can be explained mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the importance of domestic tourism is likely to increase, especially in areas traditionally known for their recreational values. Respondents' answers indicate that the majority of future foreign

trips will likely be to countries in the Mediterranean basin (mainly Greece and Croatia). This prediction is already confirmed by preliminary data from the Polish Economic Institute (Czernicki, Kukołowicz, & Miniszewski, 2020), which suggest that concerns about the situation in the tourism industry during the summer of 2020 were unfounded.

It should be noted that a study similar to that carried out by the author was conducted by the Polish Tourist Organization (Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, 2020), from June 15 to June 17, 2020. Their report confirmed the findings presented by the author. 76% of respondents in the PTO study indicated they had decided not to travel abroad because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority (82%) of respondents in the PTO survey who did not give up their desire to travel, were planning a vacation Poland, mainly in holiday destinations in the north and south of the country, which have a well-developed tourism infrastructure, and are known for their recreational values and sights (Pasek & Drożdż, 2017).

At the time of writing the article, it is impossible to make predictions about foreign travel plans of Poles in 2020. The situation in the tourism market in Poland and elsewhere in the world is still very unstable. Most countries, in an effort to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, are introducing new restrictions and new travel rules almost on a daily basis, which will have a lasting effect on Polish tourists' foreign travel plans in the coming years. The effects of the pandemic are expected to be felt at least until 2022, so research on this topic has to be continued. The growing interest in domestic tourism expressed by the respondents is an indication for a new direction of research, which should focus on tourism in Poland.

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Wpływ COVID-19 na plany podróży zagranicznych Polaków w 2020 roku

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest próba określenia planów podróży zagranicznych Polaków w 2020 roku i wpływu pandemii COVID-19 na te plany. Badanie opiera się na informacjach zebranych w ankiecie internetowej z udziałem 355 respondentów. Ankieta była anonimowa i składała się z 6 pytań. Stwierdzono, że wybuch pandemii istotnie zmienił plany podróży zagranicznych Polaków w analizowanym okresie. Plany wyjazdu turystyczno-wypoczynkowego za granicę zadeklarowała jedynie 1/3 respondentów. Spadło zainteresowanie Turcją, Egiptem i Tunezją, wzrosło zaś ono w przypadku krajów europejskich, głównie położonych w basenie Morza Śródziemnego, m.in. Hiszpanii i Włoch. Na podstawie badań należy spodziewać się także wzrostu zainteresowania turystką krajową w Polsce, na co wskazują dane zebrane przez Polską Izbę Turystyki.

Słowa kluczowe: COVID-19, Polska, turystyka, ankieta, plany podróży



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