
THE BEHAVIOUR OF TOURISM MARKET PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM

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Abstract: This article considers the influence of ecotourism, a fast-developing form of tourism, on an important area in the functioning of the tourism market, which is the behaviour of its participants. The aim of the article is to present the way in which the developing concept and principles of ecotourism can affect the behaviour of consumers (tourists) and the activity of tour operators (providers of tourism services). The authors propose a unique research approach which consist in addressing both the expectations on the part of tourists as well as those related to business targets of the tourism industry. This article presents conceptual framework and outlines methodical approach which can be useful for the future research. Twelve types of behaviour regarding both tourists and tour operators were distinguished, followed by a description of the character of the possible influence of ecotourism on each of them. In this way the article also presents an outline of a new approach to managing business (including market relations), taking into consideration the growing popularity and importance of ecotourism.

Keywords: tourism, ecotourism, tourism industry, tourism market, consumer behaviour.

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is a phenomenon of increasing importance in the market of tourism-related services. The concept first appeared in the literature in the 1960s (a time indicated by, among others [Higham 2007; Buckley 2009; Fennell 2014]). A growing interest in this form of tourism has been observed, both on the part of consumers and businesses. The idea of ecotourism, based on the concept of sustainable development, aims at the harmonious coexistence of people and business organizations with the natural environment, which makes it an important and timely issue. The research conducted into ecotourism is of an interdisciplinary

character, and combines several aspects related to nature, society, culture, education and also business. The development of ecotourism is not irrelevant for the processes of managing business organizations in tourism, and its growing popularity and importance brings about certain types of consumer behaviour and activity on the part of the providers of tourism services.

Ecotourism, just like any developing area of life and economy, needs a clear definition of the various internal and external relations. This is relevant both for the re-search and for the shaping of the further development of ecotourism and functioning of the tourism industry. Therefore we shall address the

problem which can be set out as follows: in what way does ecotourism, a particular and growing form of tourism, impact on the market participants. i.e. the consumers and providers of tourism services, prompting specific market behavior on their part?

The authors perceive the need for resolving this scientific issue, which for researchers would mean the necessity of systematizing the research area and determining the potential dependences between the growing popularity of ecotourism and the specific behaviour of its participants. They would also like to provide useful suggestions to tourism managers, who often limit their perspective to the narrow confines of their own business organization and/or region, as to what may be the models of consumer behaviour, i.e. ecotourists.

The aim of the article is to present in what way the developing idea and principles of ecotourism can influence the behaviour of consumers (tourists) and the activity of tour operators (providers of tourism services). The authors' intention is to propose their own research approach to the field of ecotourism which involves the inclusion of both the customers' (tourists) expectations as well as the business objectives of the tourism industry. The article is proposed in the form of methodological survey.

2. Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the article is the survey of literature – mostly methodological survey. Publications available in the libraries, as well as in the Internet, were analyzed with the use of critical analysis of the source literature dedicated to ecotourism, and in particular showing the links with such disciplines as management and economics, especially in relation to the functioning of the tourism market (e.g. [Fennell 2014; Backman et al. 2001; Lindberg 2001; Parker 2001; Page, Dowling 2002; Fennell, Dowling (eds.) 2003; Wood 2007; Buckley 2009]). The considerations were further enriched by a discussion and the authors own reflections formulated during the cycle of thematic academic seminars.

Literature review covered the publications dedicated to ecotourism by, among others, D.B. Weaver, H.M. Donohoe, R.D. Needham, D.A. Fennell, R.K. Dowling, R. Buckley, R.K. Blamely, and J. Hingham, as well as articles examining the issue of ecological awareness (e.g. [Kollmuss, Agyeman 2002; Courtenay-Hall, Rogers 2002; Bohdanowicz 2003; Carmi et al. 2015]). The conclusions presented in this paper aim at ordering and complementing the existing knowledge and methodological approach to the multifaceted research into ecotourism. The au-

thors appreciate the results of the research conducted so far and hope to develop them further in a creative way. The article provides a theoretical contribution to the studies on the management of market relations in tourism, and in particular shows the influence of the new and dynamic phenomenon of ecotourism on the behaviour and relations of the market participants. In the previous studies ecotourism and behaviour of tourism market participants were analyzed separately, often by the researchers from different scientific fields. This is a research gap which the authors would like to fill by attempting to shape methodical assumptions for the integrated research on the borderline of management sciences and tourism.

3. Ecotourism and its characteristics – theoretical background

Ecotourism has become a social trend, and the popularity of its various forms has been growing fast [Hawkins, Lamoureux 2001; TIES 2015] in the 1990s (the International Ecotourism Society TIES was founded in 1990), while 2002 was declared by the UN as the International Day of Ecotourism and Quebec hosted the World Ecotourism Summit. Ecotourism being a social trend reflects the attitudes and conduct of persons, communities and business organizations. These attitudes and behaviour are specific enough to create a separate area of research and business activity in the tourism market (cf. [Kachniewska et al. 2012, pp. 223-246; Panasiuk 2014]).

It is worth noting the growing trend of activity in ecotourism both on the part of tourists and tourist operators. According to some estimates [Sharpley 2006, pp. 7-22], by 2024 ecotourism will amount to as much as 5% of holidays on the global tourism market, while M.E. Wood [2017] calculates this as 5% out of the 1.18 billion international tourists, or around 60 million people, which suggests three times as many ecotourists as there were 25 years ago.

The literature review of this article indicates substantial academic achievements of foreign scientists, in contrast with significantly smaller research done by Polish academics. Until now, no definition of ecotourism has been officially accepted as universal. Ecotourism has been defined in several ways and Table 1 shows some of them. The multitude and variety of the definitions can be justified by the use of the completely different criteria, such as in the context of management – sustainable tourism, and in the context of product – tourism based on natural resources, etc. [Buckley 2013, p. 11].

Table 1. Selected definitions of ecotourism

Source	Definition
[Ziffer 1989] see [Björk 2000]	‘A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumption use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefitting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents.’
[Wight 1993]	‘Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to the conservation of the ecosystem, while respecting the integrity of the host communities.’
[The British Ecotourism Market 2002]	‘Ecotourism refers to forms of tourism which have the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas. • It contains educational and interpretational features. • It is generally, but not exclusively organised by specialised tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small, locally owned businesses. • It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment. • It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes; – providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities; – increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.’
[The International Ecotourism Society 2015]	‘Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education. Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.’

Source: own elaboration.

The authors of this article have presented a few examples from the plethora of ecotourism definitions, which were evolving with time (see e.g.: [Donohoe, Needham 2006]). Instead of focusing on one universal definition, they claim that determining the essence of ecotourism should be based on the set of the unique characteristics (attributes) of ecotourism, which would facilitate the adaptation of ecotourism activities to a specific area (ecotourism destination). The literature provides several studies describing the key features of ecotourism, among which we should draw particular attention to those published by H.M. Donohoe et al. [2006, pp. 1213-1220], D.A. Fennell [2014, pp. 1; 37-162], and by H.M. Donohoe and R.D. Needham [2006, pp. 192-210]. As it transpires from, among others, the above-mentioned sources, ecotourism can be characterized by certain attributes such as:

- concern for the natural environment,
- respect for the cultural conditions,
- responsibility towards the local community, i.e. ensuring benefits for the local inhabitants in a given tourist destination,
- education based on the thorough and interesting interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage.

From the viewpoint of management, and in particular a proper understanding and shaping of consumer (tourist) behaviour, we should draw attention to a few important characteristics of ecotourism which influence that behaviour. The

first factor is environmental sensitivity, understood as empathy towards the natural environment and its integral parts [Chawla 1998] (see: [Kollmuss, Agyeman 2002, p. 251]). Environmental sensitivity, combined with its ethical aspect, has a significant influence on the decisions made by participants in tourism market. The second factor is ecological awareness which involves the knowledge and understanding of the natural environment as well as the ability to “perceive phenomena, their mutual relations, causes and effects, also the readiness to take action to protect the natural environment” [Zuzek 2017, p. 162]. Depending on that awareness, the activities undertaken by participants of the tourism market become better or less adapted to the assumptions of ecotourism. Another factor is the knowledge of the natural environment, and the awareness of the mechanisms and impact of tourism on nature. This was also pointed out by A. Kollmuss and J. Agyeman [2002, pp. 239-260] analysing several factors conditioning the mechanisms of pro-ecological behaviour. It is also important to see that ecotourism can be a source of emotions and experiences which strengthen the ties with the visited place, the people met there and their culture. All this creates a sense of responsibility and desire to protect the visited location.

4. Key participants in the ecotourism market – main assumptions

This article describes ecotourism as a defined, specific area of tourism in which the interests of two participants coincide: consumers (tourists) and providers of tourism services. Each of these two groups represents different motives and ways of operating in the market, and this also relates to their attitudes and behavior which are dictated by ecotourism trends.

Which models of behaviour in each of those groups are relevant for the tourism market? The behavior of members of the first group, i.e. consumers, have been described in behaviourism theories. Naturally in the research approach we should distinguish between individual consumers (private individuals), households and families, and social groups, e.g. scholastic, religious, regional, etc. One should also consider

the whole complex methodology which is always applied for the purposes of customer segmentation in sophisticated marketing. When talking about consumers in ecotourism we should differentiate between the two aspects: on the one hand, the state of ecological awareness of tourists which conditions a certain type of their market and consumer attitudes regarding tourist services, and on the other, their consumer behaviour i.e. specific decisions and choices, and their mode of conduct during touristic activity. Ecological awareness whose vital element includes the knowledge, acceptance and practical implementation of the principles of ecotourism, is formed as a result of many processes such as upbringing, education, models approved by society, experience and observation. Thus one can assume that the principles of ecotourism reach the awareness of people involved in ecotourism in a variety of forms. It is highly probable that they influence their conscience

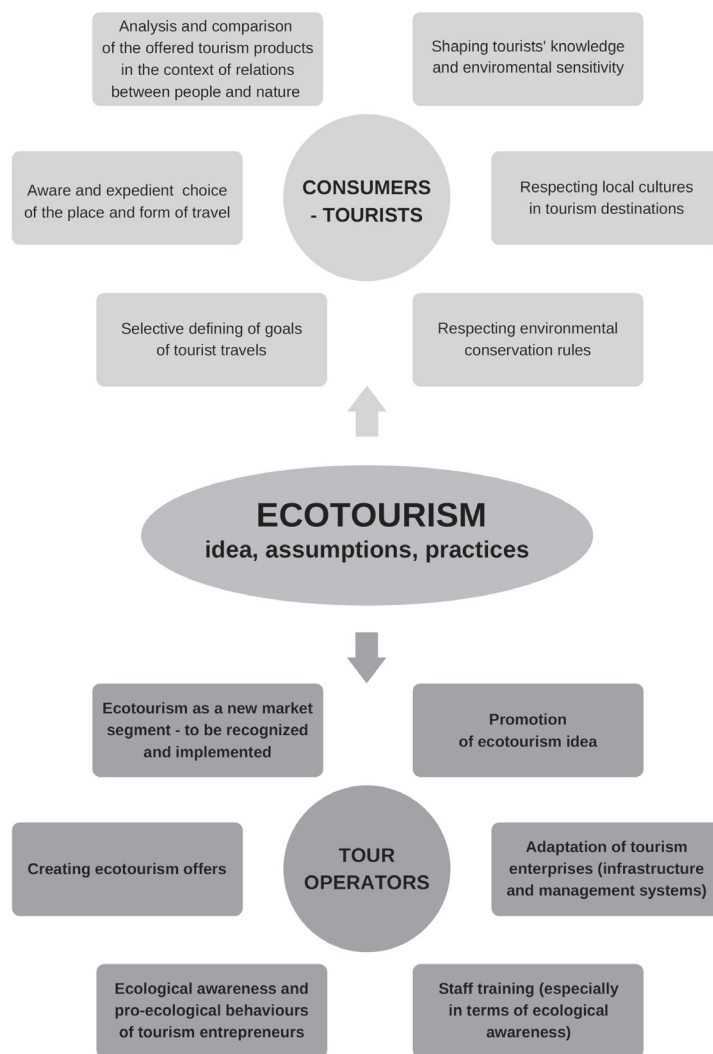


Fig. 1. Key tourist behaviour and activity of tour operators in the context of the impact of ecotourism

Source: own elaboration.

and then their behaviour – both as consumers of tourism and travel-related services, and as persons with a certain sensitivity regarding nature. Therefore the question arises: which particular types of tourists' behaviour can be altered under the influence of the idea of ecotourism and its market opportunities?

The second group of market participants examined here in the context of ecotourism are organizers and providers of tourism services. These are entities which create and then sell specific tourism products and those related to services for tourists: entrepreneurs, travel agencies, hotels, boarding houses and other types of accommodation, organizers of special events, leisure companies, etc. What kinds of their behaviour could become the object of research? Most definitely the point of departure should be checking the authenticity of their pro-environmental stance (understood as the orientation towards caring for the natural environment), and in particular revealing to what degree the pro-environmental stance of tourism organizers is their actual business objective and in what part this is merely a tool to create their market image, without any real respect for the environment? Another question relates to the fact whether, and to what degree, ecotourism creates for business new opportunities to achieve market success. It would also be important to seek a new approach to business management (in its different areas), which would include the ecotourism trend.

The key types of activity on the part of tourists and tourism operators undertaken in the context of the influence of the idea and principles of ecotourism are presented in Figure 1. In general it indicates twelve kinds of activity, six regarding consumers and six tourism services providers, respectively. The authors assume that these kinds of activity are typical for the behaviour of each of the groups of tourism market participants. This scheme is fundamental for further considerations in which the authors try to establish in what way ecotourism (its idea, assumptions and practices) affects the behavior of the examined entities. The answers to this query are proposed in the next part of the article, in Tables 2 and 3.

5. Tourist behaviour and activities of tour operators in the context of the idea and principles of ecotourism – discussion

Table 2 presents hypothetical areas of influence by ecotourism on consumer (tourist) behaviour. In each of these areas one can see certain types of tourist behaviour which are influenced by the development of

ecotourism. These kinds of behaviour are the result of acceptance by consumers of the concept and principles of ecotourism. At the same time, a wider scope of such behaviour means the development of ecotourism both in respect of consumer needs but also the expectations of specific products offered to tourists. It should be stressed that this table presents potential (theoretical, not empirically proved) influence of ecotourism on consumer behaviour.

The influence of ecotourism on the behaviour of tourism organizers is of a different character. As was already mentioned, they are in general entrepreneurs who create and sell certain tourism and travel-related services. It is possible to indicate a few hypothetical areas of influence on the part of ecotourism on their behavior, which are presented in Table 3.

It is noticeable that the above types of behaviour on the part of consumers and organizers of ecotourism can be shaped, changed and developed under the influence of the idea and trends of ecotourism. In this way ecotourism, just through its own assumptions, can change the orientation of consumers and companies providing services in tourism market, and can affect their choices and behaviour at every stage of preparing and realizing tourist travel, or creating and selling the products offered to tourists.

6. Conclusions

1. Nowadays one can see the unceasing interest in tourism based on contacts with nature [Balmford et al. 2009; The World Bank Group 2018], accompanied by growing levels of ecological awareness among tourists [Center for Responsible Travel 2017, p. 7], while forecasts predict the rising share of ecotourism in the global tourism market. Therefore it can be assumed that a new, particular yet extensive and dynamic segment of this market is being created. This opens up both the prospects for interesting business opportunities and a wide area of academic research in ecotourism.

2. It could be thought that an alliance of tourism with the natural environment is possible. When considering the most important characteristics of the ecological and humanistic approach in sustainable tourism (in which ecotourism has its roots) it can be noted that caring for the natural environment means in reality caring about the interests of humanity and the creation of long-term possibilities of satisfying people's needs [Barwicka, 2018, pp. 10-11]. Thus ecotourism, aside from its market prospects, can be a factor contributing to the development of a sustainable economy.

Table 2. The potential character of influence of ecotourism on consumer behaviour

Type of consumer behaviour	Character of ecotourism's impact on behaviour
Defining the purpose of tourist travel	Ecotourism assumes 'greening' the purposes of tourist travel by the adoption of certain attitudes respecting the interests of the natural environment. Choosing the ecotourist form of leisure in general implies resting in a relatively undamaged and clean natural environment, away from the big city noise and burdens of everyday life. 'Greening' is closely linked to ecological education, influencing the level of tourists' ecological awareness. Practicing the ideas of ecotourism also affects the development of knowledge and interests through contact with local culture, thus possibly changing the traditional goals set for tourist travel and discovering new needs and opportunities.
Deciding about the choice of travel destination and form of tourism	Assumptions of ecotourism include suggestions related to possible destinations. These are generally areas of exceptional natural beauty, relatively undamaged nature, isolated from noise, crowds and pollution, providing opportunities for close contact with nature, active leisure and enabling access to wider knowledge about the visited place. Accepting or aware choice of ecotourism criteria may appear as a main factor influencing the choice of travel destination and form of tourism.
Analyzing and comparing details of tourism product on offer, especially from the viewpoint of the relation between people and nature	Every consumer compares offers made by various tour operators when planning travel. Such analyses could involve criteria expressing relations between people and the natural environment. Ecotourism enforces respect for such criteria.
Shaping the knowledge and sensitivity of tourists related to the coexistence of people and the natural environment	Ecotourism is usually a conscious choice of a consumer who has already sufficient knowledge and environmental sensitivity when looking for forms of ecotourism. There is also another group of consumers whose knowledge and environmental sensitivity develops during such a trip, mostly due to their experiences and sensations (such as groups of children and teenagers). In both of these cases ecotourism may influence the need for knowledge and the level of ecological awareness.
Preparing tourist travel complying with the knowledge and respect for local cultures in their travel destinations	Ecotourism protects the cultural heritage of the visited places and cares about the interests of local inhabitants. This requires appropriate attitudes of tourists towards local culture, especially in terms of knowledge of the visited places, along with respecting its elements.
Respecting the rules of environmental protection during their travel and stay in specific destinations	Ecotourists should understand and follow the elementary principles of pro-environmental behaviour. Ecotourism requires environmental sensitivity and can also effectively develop it.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. The character of potential influence from ecotourism on the activities of tourism organizers

Types of activity of tour operators	Character of ecotourism's impact on business activity
Recognition of a new market segment – consumer research, research in trends, conditions and prognosis	This regards a relatively little-known market segment, subject to numerous conditions, with a potentially volatile group of consumers showing a higher level of ecological awareness. For an entrepreneur this is an unmapped territory without any tried and tested solutions as they do not yet exist. Ecotourism
Creating ecotourism products on offer – modification of the existing products and creating new ones	Ecotourism offers a few tried-out traditional products which could be categorized and universally implemented in tourist destinations around the world. In order to satisfy the expectations of ecotourism it is necessary to create their own fairly unique products, what requires innovative approach of tourism organizers.
Pro-ecological awareness and activities of owners and managers of tourist facilities	Market success in ecotourism starts out in the minds of entrepreneurs and managers. They should be characterized by higher ecological awareness, being able to implement it in business activity, and who often even base their businesses just on that particular sensitivity and their own private ethical code (frequently based on the biocentric approach). Thus ecotourism can shape a new generation of tourism entrepreneurs.
Training and staff behaviour in tourist facilities	The on-going provision of services for tourists as part of the whole service process requires trained staff and appropriate work organization. Such requirements are equally important in a small informal establishment, as in a larger and more formal one, such as a hotel. Ecotourism may increase these expectations, exacting that employees have a suitable level of ecological awareness, environmental sensitivity and ability to transmit this to tourists.
Adapting equipment and procedures in tourism facilities	Tourist facilities must meet standard requirements. Ecotourism adds to those several detailed conditions which are mostly related to the use of resources, i.e. water, energy, air, and the proper management of resources and waste. There are also conditions of a material and technical nature required to create specific ecotourism products, such as organizing special events, training and trips. In this way ecotourism creates new requirements for the equipment and procedures in tourism facilities.
Promoting ideas of ecotourism in business operations and marketing	The entities described here promote the ideas of ecotourism even just through their specific products or only the declared views. They also run a regular promotional activity to realize their business aims, and in this way ecotourism may and should be always present in their promotional undertakings.

Source: own elaboration.

3. Ecotourism can deliver benefits to all parties involved in its realization, i.e. tourists, entrepreneurs, local inhabitants and nature itself. Although ecotourism rejects all manifestations of consumerism, however it does not exclude 'large-scale' tourism. A growing number of researchers (e.g. [Weaver, 2001; Zaręba, 2010; Ivanov, Ivanova, 2013; Harrison, 2011, Buckley 2013]) support the inclusion of larger organized group tourism into the mainstream of ecotourism. If the participants of the tourism market follow consistently and in a responsible way the idea of ecotourism, there will be a strong possibility for minimizing or even eliminating many of the disfunctions of tourism which nowadays we are faced with.

4. Ecotourism can strongly influence the behaviour of tourists. It shapes the environmental sensitivity and affects the attitudes – both ecotourists and regular tourists.

5. Ecotourism may influence the actions and choices of tour operators, leading to creation of the new group of entrepreneurs who intentionally want to develop their business in pro-environmental way.

6. When searching for particular research problems in the field of ecotourism, the authors are drawn to the following issues:

- To what degree is ecotourism a potential market with the opportunities for significant growth?
- What does the present and future increase of interest in ecotourism among consumers in Poland and other countries depend on?
- What are the specific needs and consumer behaviour of the so-called ecotourists? What changes can be expected?
- What are (should be) the characteristics and content of a genuine ecotourism product range?
- What is the actual scale of the 'artificial', purely declarative participation in ecotourism, both on the part of the consumers and organizers of tourism services?

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ZACHOWANIA UCZESTNIKÓW RYNKU TURYSTYCZNEGO W KONTEKŚCIE ROZWOJU EKOTURYSTYKI

Streszczenie: Artykuł podejmuje problem wpływu ekoturystyki, szybko rozwijającej się formy turystyki, na ważny obszar funkcjonowania rynku turystycznego, jakim są zachowania uczestników tego rynku. Celem niniejszego tekstu jest przedstawienie, w jaki sposób idea i zasady ekoturystyki mogą wpływać na zachowania konsumentów (turystów) oraz na działania organizatorów turystyki (podmiotów podaży usług turystycznych). Zaproponowano oryginalne podejście badawcze, polegające na uwzględnieniu zarówno oczekiwań turystów, jak i celów biznesowych organizacji turystycznych. Artykuł ma charakter koncepcyjny i pokazuje określone podejście metodyczne pomocne w przyszłych badaniach. Wyodrębniono dwanaście rodzajów zachowań turystów i organizatorów turystyki, a następnie opisano charakter możliwego wpływu ekoturystyki na każde z nich. Tym samym przedstawiono schemat nowego podejścia do zarządzania biznesem (w tym relacjami rynkowymi), które uwzględni trend rozwoju popularności i znaczenia ekoturystyki.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, ekoturystyka, przemysł turystyczny, rynek turystyczny, zachowania konsumentów.