

Preferences and Behaviors of the Elder People Resting in Valuable Natural Areas

Jan Zawadka

Abstract The purpose of this paper is to introduce results of the research about preferences and behaviors of the elder people, resting in natural valuable areas. Thus, in the article the profile of an average senior, sightseeing valuable natural areas, was presented and such aspects like motives for choosing this form of tourism (as well as the particular offer), tourists' use of sources of information concerning accommodation, preferred ways of spending leisure time and expectations about diversification and improvement of the offer were discussed. Finally, the analysis of factors implicating surveyed tourists' behaviors and expectations (like level of education and financial status) was made.

The research with use of the polling technique was made in summer of 2013 and included 45 participants (tourists) in age of 55 or higher, resting in rural accommodation objects near Kampinos National Park.

Identification of preferences and behaviors of people resting in valuable natural areas is crucial to the improvement and adaptation of tourist accommodation offer to the level expected by particular market segments. Such research is also important for authorities of the local communities, as well as people planning touristic and recreational development in valuable natural areas. Previous research was rarely focused on particular age groups, what seems to be vital in such case, because youths, families with babies or seniors have completely different expectations regarding their holidays.

Keywords Rural tourism • Agritourism • The elderly • Seniors • Preferences and behaviors of tourists

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1 Introduction

Natural values, as well as valuable natural areas, have always been very popular among tourists. Whereas young people are rather interested in sightseeing, what allows them to learn more about the world, the elder people appreciate more peace, silence and nature's positive influence on rest's quality and efficiency, because—thanks to holidays in valuable natural areas—it's possible to achieve optimal mental and physical regeneration.

Therefore it's justified to claim that among different natural areas the best for peaceful rest would be surroundings of those legally protected ones.¹ Thus the laggings of the national parks, as well as peripheries of other parks and preserves very often fulfill receptive functions. It's worth to note that Poland has appreciable possibilities to develop such kind of tourism. The area of nature's conservation in this country is more than 10.1 million ha, what constitutes 32.5 % of Poland's territory. The most important form of nature's protection here is a national park—there are 23² of those, from which 9 was signed on the UNESCO's World Heritage List. Summary area of the national parks in Poland at the end of 2012 was 314.6 thousand ha (1 % of Poland's territory). Moreover, among the preserved objects and areas of special natural values are³:

- 1,481 nature reserves with summary area of 166 thousand ha,
- 122 natural landscape parks with summary area of 2,529 thousand ha,
- 385 landscape protection areas with summary area of 6,992 thousand ha,
- 7,521 other forms of nature's conservation (ecological arable lands, documentation sites and landscape-nature protected complexes) with summary area of 149 thousand ha.

Having considered the presented information it's possible to conclude, that in Poland tourism based on natural values has appreciable perspectives of further development. Moreover, this development would be certainly affected by process of ageing of the society in Poland and the entire European Union. The predictions point that number of people in post-working age and their share in whole society systematically raises—in Poland in 2007 it was 16 %, while in 2035 it will be 26.7 % (Ciura & Szymańczak, 2012). Therefore it's justified to say that those people will create crucial segment of the touristic market.

Preparation of the touristic product suitable for seniors requires detailed research among them, especially about their expectations towards touristic offer.

¹ Unrestricted entrance to many areas of nature's conservation in Poland is limited and sometimes even forbidden. However, sightseers and tourists may use many legal routes, paths and other ways of getting access to the valuable natural areas.

² Poland has accepted the definition of the national park created by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

³ Environmental protection 2013. GUS, Warsaw 2013. Condition at the end of 2012.

2 Purposes and Methods

The purpose of this paper is to introduce results of the research about preferences and behaviors of the elder people, resting in natural valuable areas. Thus, in the article the profile of an average senior, sightseeing valuable natural areas, was presented and such aspects like motives for choosing this form of tourism (as well as the particular offer), tourists' use of sources of information concerning accommodation, preferred ways of spending leisure time and expectations about diversification and improvement of the offer were discussed. Finally, the analysis of factors implicating surveyed tourists' behaviors and expectations (like level of education and financial status) was made.

The research with use of the polling technique was made in summer of 2013 and included 45 participants (tourists) in age of 55 or higher, resting in rural accommodation objects near Kampinos National Park.

3 Results of the Research

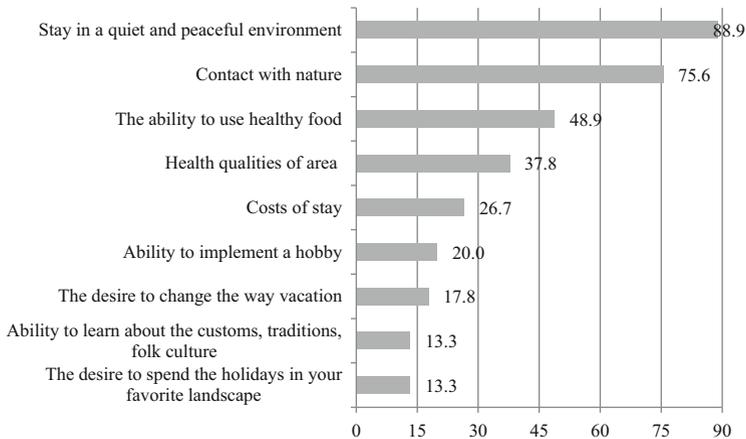
Tourists resting near Kampinoski National Park were in different age—while 71.1 % of the people were between 56 and 65, the rest of the surveyed (28.9 %) were 66 or more. Among the respondents were more women (62.2 %).

The main group of tourists resting in rural areas were people from cities, mostly big ones—75.6 % were from towns with more than 50 thousand inhabitants (including 44.1 % from cities with more than 200 thousand inhabitants), while only 15.6 % respondents were from the country.⁴

Most of the respondents (62.2 %) had higher education, while 33.3 % only finished secondary education. The rest of the surveyed tourists (4.5 %) had vocational education. 44.4 % of the respondents were collecting social provisions like pensions or Disability Living Allowances, while 24.4 % were collar workers and only 4.4 % manual workers. 20 % of the surveyed were freelancers or entrepreneurs and 15.5 % managers. Only one person declared himself as a farmer.

The next part of the respondents' characteristic is dedicated to their material status, evaluated by themselves. The surveyed mainly claimed that it is satisfactory (such answer was given by 53.3 % of them) or even good (28.9 %). However, 13.3 % judged it only as sufficient and 4.5 % as bad. No one answered that their material status is very good. The respondents also were asked to declare maximal amount of money they would be able to spend on a single leisure day in the country. 68.9 % of the surveyed claimed that they wouldn't spend more than 99 PLN (including 9.9 % below 50 PLN), while 31.1 % of them declared sum between 100 and 149 PLN.

⁴ Among respondents were mainly inhabitants of mazowieckie (62.2 %), małopolskie (13.3 %), kujawsko-pomorskie and podkarpackie (4.3 % each) provinces.



Scheme 1 Themes choice environs the Kampinos as a place of rest [%]. * Respondents could choose more than one answer. *Source:* own research

Mode of transport used to get to the holiday site was mainly a car (93.3 % of the respondents), only a few had used a bus (6.7 %).

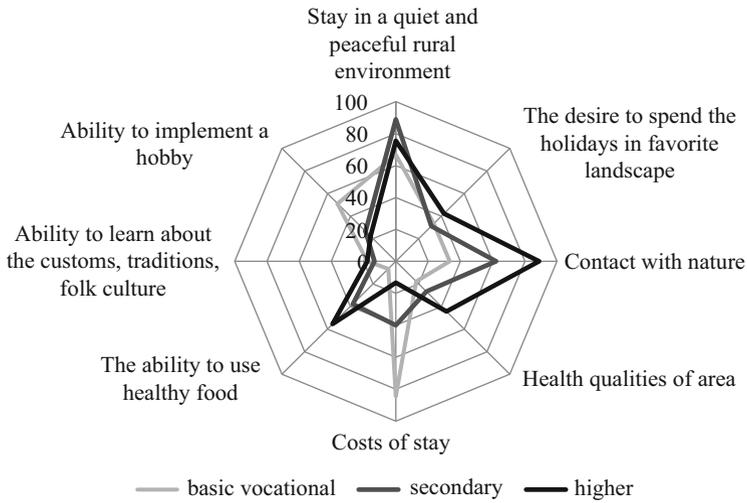
Rest in attractive natural area is highly desired by elder people. 70 % of the people in age over 55, who took place in research made by Research Corporation Pretenden, has declared will of spending their holidays near forest (Preferencje, 2011). To understand this phenomenon better the surveyed were asked about reasons of choosing Kampinos as a place for spending their leisure time. Information about collected opinions is presented on Scheme 1.

Possibility of resting in natural environment, contact with nature and wish to eat healthy food were the most popular reasons of choosing this type of tourism. Interesting dependencies may be noticed through the analysis of the motives of choosing rural areas as a place for holidays according to education level of the respondents (Scheme 2). As a reason of arrival to such areas people with higher education more often than the others were giving possibility of contact with nature (88.9 % of answers), eating healthy food (55.6 %) and health values of visited terrains (44.4 %).

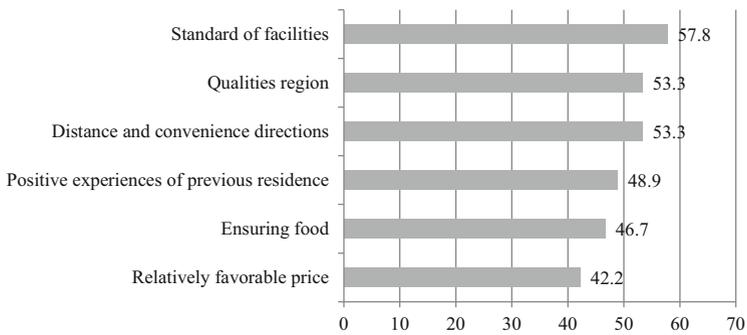
Worse educated people as one of the reasons of choosing such holidays definitely more often claimed costs of the visit (84.4 % of the answers). This is closely connected with fact, that accommodation places they used were localized in the country—and that makes them economically attractive.

The respondents were also asked about motives of choosing particular accommodation places for their holidays. Among the answers dominated those referring to quality of facilities, region or settlement values, convenience of drive and positive experience from earlier visits (Scheme 3).

Better educated people among the respondents were giving more often answers referring to comfort of the visit—quality of facilities (almost 80 % of the answers) and possibility of alimentation (approx. 57 %). On the other hand worse educated



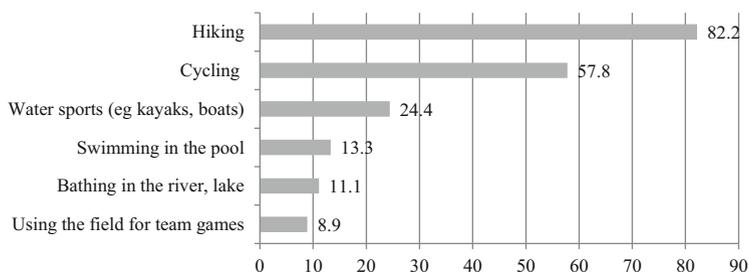
Scheme 2 Themes choice the place of rest, depending on the level of education of respondents [%]. *Source:* own research



Scheme 3 Themes to choose a specific accommodation facility as a place of rest [%]. * Respondents could choose more than one answer. *Source:* own research

were pointing out favorable price (64.7 % of the answers) instead of quality of facilities (only 23.5 %).

Promotion is a crucial issue in every kind of services (including tourism). Thus—due to its expensiveness—it would seem that single accommodation providers could find difficulties in organizing it properly. However, the results of the research indicate that the most popular source of information (51.1 % of the answers) used by respondents was the Internet, which is relatively cheap instrument of promotion. Also many of the surveyed claimed, that such source are friends’ recommendations (44.4 % of the respondents), much less popular were touristic exhibitions or fairs (8.9 %), TV and printed materials (4.4 % each).



Scheme 4 Outdoor activities preferred by respondents during the vacation in Kampinos areas [%]. * Respondents could choose more than one answer. *Source:* own research

The important role of the Internet and word of mouth marketing in promotion of the rural accommodation places is also confirmed by alternative researches made by author (Zawadka, 2010a, 2010b) and others, e.g. Krzyżanowska and Wojtkowski (2012); Stepaniuk (2010); Kolczatek and Jankowski (2006); Niedziółka (2008) or Prochorowicz (2006).⁵ It is important to stress the fact that quite expensive form of promotions, like participation in touristic exhibitions or printed materials (folders, catalogues and brochures) were only occasionally used by tourists.

Holidays near forest made good occasion for active rest in open air. Thus, the respondents were asked about its preferable forms. Information about that issue is presented on Scheme 4.

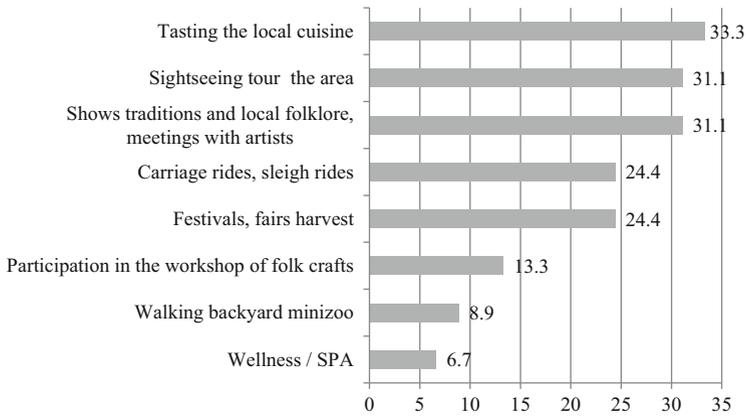
Because of their age, the surveyed preferred peaceful activity, like hiking or cycling tours. Some of them also pointed out Nordic Walking.

Respondents were also enquired about some additional attractions, expected during their holidays (Scheme 5).

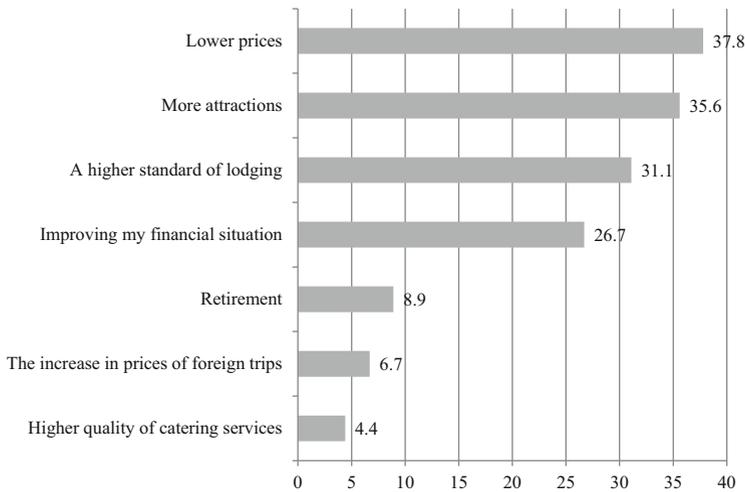
Tourist's answers are the evidence of their great interest in cultural aspect of visiting areas.

Respondents were also asked to share their opinions about possibilities of improvement of service quality, provided by the owners of visited accommodation places. The biggest part of the critics was connected with lacks in sport and recreation equipment and aesthetics of sanitation (30 % each). Moreover tourists have been noticing insufficient furnishing of bedroom or uncomfortable place to sleep (25 % of the respondents). Approx. 18 % of the surveyed pointed out necessity of enrichment and diversification of organization of the leisure time in farm, as well as limiting number of guests in a facility. There were also voices commenting insignificant knowledge of the owners about nearby values and touristic attractions.

⁵ Those researches were dedicated to promotion of the rural accommodation places—because surroundings of the Kampinoski National Park are included to the country and such accommodation objects were used by the surveyed, therefore results of those earlier researches may refer also to this poll.



Scheme 5 Attractions which would like to use the respondents [%]. * Respondents could choose more than one answer. *Source:* own research



Scheme 6 Determinants increase the frequency of vacation in valuable natural areas in the respondents' opinion [%]. * Respondents could choose more than one answer. *Source:* own research

Despite awareness of some deficiencies and limits connected with resting in rural areas 60 % of the respondents claimed similar further frequency of such organization of their leisure time and 22.2 % of them declared will of visiting country more often. To define fully that aspect, the respondents were enquired about factors, that would encourage them for more frequent resting in touristic farms (Scheme 6).

The most important among the answers were those about financial aspects (71.2 %) and increasing the number of touristic attractions (31.6 %). Better educated respondents mostly gave answers connected with improvement of quality of both accommodation places and gastronomic services.

4 Recapitulation and Conclusions

Visit and rest in valuable natural area like surroundings of the Kampinoski National Park was mainly preferred by educated inhabitants of big cities, who mostly self-evaluated their material status as pretty good. However, they were reluctant to spend significant amounts of money during holidays. Almost 69 % of the respondents didn't want to assign more than 99 PLN for single leisure day.

Tourists mainly had used a car to get to the accommodation places, what means their mobility and possibility of taking part in different attractions, not only next to the place of stay, but also in closer or farther surroundings. However, to do so tourists need to know about existence of such places—therefore it would be good to have chance of getting those information inside accommodation place.

The respondents used many sources of information while choosing location of their holidays. Except for the Internet, pointed out by more than 50 % of the surveyed, word of mouth marketing played a significant role, where relatives or friends were source of information about objects of rural tourism. It is also worth to notice, that other channels of information (and especially those connected with necessity of larger expenditures, like taking part in touristic exhibitions, folders and leaflets or commercial in press, radio and TV) were very rarely used by the tourists.

Possibility of peaceful rest in natural environment and contact with nature were two most popular motives of choosing holiday site near forest. Better educated people appreciated additionally possibility of eating healthy food and healthy values of such areas.

Among reasons of choosing particular accommodation place answers referring to quality of facilities, region or settlement values and convenience of drive were mainly given. Better educated people more often gave answers connected with comfort of stay, like quality of facilities and possibility of alimentation.

Among forms of the physical activity taken by the respondents during holidays mostly preferred were the ones, which don't cause excessive stress, e.g. hiking or cycling tours.

Holidays additional attractions expected by the surveyed were mainly connected with culture aspects of visiting areas, many answers also referred to the touring activity of the respondents.

Presented contents are only humble contribution to author's larger researches about touristic preferences and behaviors of the elder people. Awareness and indication of those aspects will allow adequate composition and specialization of the holiday offer, what should result in maximally satisfying demands for stay and leisure, realized through optimal match of the offer's range and quality of services

with defined segment of tourism. Given the rapidly growing number of the elder people and improvement of their health and material status, it's likely that in close future touristic offer will be focused on seniors. Their preferences and expectations are often quite different from those claimed by the other groups of society. Such research is also important for authorities of the local communities, as well as people planning touristic and recreational development in valuable natural areas. Therefore it seems reasonable to conduct further, larger and more detailed research in this subject.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-15858-7>

Cultural Tourism in a Digital Era

First International Conference IACuDIT, Athens, 2014

Katsoni, V. (Ed.)

2015, XII, 417 p. 45 illus., 23 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-15858-7