

Tourists ecological awareness – key to understanding human behaviour in coastal environment

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Abstract

As developing tourism endangers the environment today we should recognise people's rest preferences, knowledge and lifestyle to protect and properly use coastal natural values. This paper shows some conclusions from data collected on the basis of the questionnaire (22 questions and 200 respondents) carried out with tourists in the years 2002 and 2003 on Polish beaches. The main research question was on what tourists' ecological awareness depends? In many questions education, pollution and litters were the main problems pointed by asked tourists. But also it is clearly visible, that people do not want a lot of buildings and infrastructure close to the beach. For them bigger value is the natural landscape and environment in which they can really rest.

Keywords: Ecological awareness; Human behaviour; Coastal socio-economic problems.

Introduction

Settlement, tourism and economy development has a negative impact on coastal areas. Major impacts of tourism industry in coastal areas are (i) infrastructure with hotels, transport system and garbage, (ii) recreation with human activity, and (iii) coast protection against abrasion. If the coastal environment is damaged or destroyed, tourism will decrease. Too less attention for the environment is equal to a smaller number of tourists and a smaller income from tourism industry. People do not think about threats for coastal environment. Tourists and citizens of the coastal villages do not have knowledge about coastal processes and dangers caused by storm and human impact. It is seen in their behaviour: left litter on the beach, trampled dunes, more and more construction for tourism close to the beach. If we want to protect and keep natural environment we should strongly influence on tourism participants to change their knowledge and behaviour. Today when developing tourism endangers the environment we should recognise people's rest preferences, knowledge and lifestyle to protect and properly use coastal natural values. The critical issue for decision-makers in such matters would be the empirical question about the degree to which any proposed uses depreciate the resource. Since the basis of our principle is a respect for the values of others, the strategy that minimises user impact overall most respect those who argue for

preservation and least respect those advocating various consumptive uses (Harman *et al.*, 2004). A first step in promoting the improvement of the environmental situation is to make information and knowledge about it available (Ryden, 2003). The ecological awareness should be understood as defined level of knowledge about threats of life and health resulting from unsuitable relation of man to nature. Awareness consists of knowledge, opinions and imagination, also values and norms of the behaviour (Fig. 1).

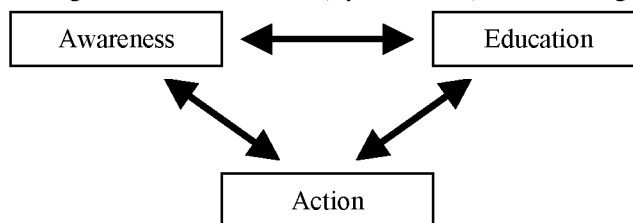


Fig. 1. Relation of awareness, knowledge and behaviour-action (Ryden, 2003).

Methods and the aim of the study

This paper shows data collected on the basis of the questionnaire (22 questions and 200 respondents) carried out with tourists. Used questions were about (i) knowledge about coastal environment and its dynamics, dangers, (ii) opinions on its theme, (iii) its value for tourists, (iv) behaviour presented by tourists in environment. The main research question was on what tourists' ecological awareness depend? These researches were done on beaches of Polish coastal villages in the summer 2002-03 (data in this paper is only from 2002 research with 100 respondents). The study is the sociological part of an own research project ANDDY (see in web: polishdunes.szc.pl).

Tourists awareness in the light of their opinion on the coast

To the question about what adds attraction to the seaside landscape and environment, most of all people answered that it is the contact with the sea, rest on beach and microclimate. Only few people answered (below 20%) that these are also: promenades, historic places and museums, recreational infrastructure, park with reservations and luxurious hotels (Fig. 2). Tourists, observing polluted beaches, dunes, sea and villages probably understand the threat for nature from human impact. To the question about kinds of preservation of seaside nature over 60% of the tourists pointed on: taxes and punishments for nature poisoning, paths to walk, not roads for cars, sewage treatments, selection of litter and education (Fig. 3). Among the proposed threats for seaside nature (Fig. 4) most persons pointed quantity of litters and waste material (79%), absence of sewage treatments (67%) and the increasing number of tourists (54%). For most respondents the presence of large numbers of tourists in little seaside villages is the threat for nature (81%). Infrastructure development close to the beach is a major problem of tourism development and for coastal protection. In a separate question about these investments only 10% of the tourists answered: 'yes - it should be built close to the beach' (restaurants, hotels), but 65% answered: 'no!'. To the question with a picture of a natural coast and a coast covered by infrastructure (town), 84% of people prefer a natural

landscape; only 22% prefer a coast with town buildings. Also 79% of the interviewed tourists prefer to rest in small villages, because of the calmness, silence and absence of tourists.

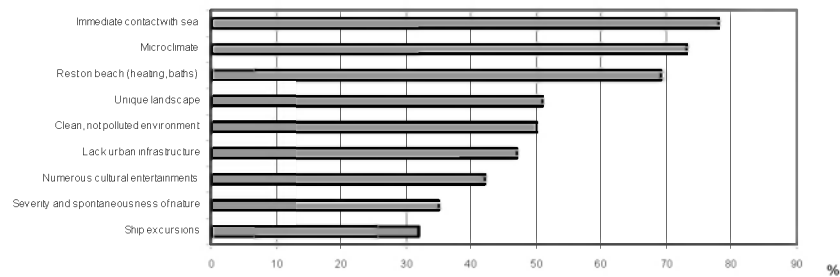


Fig. 2. Respondents opinion on the theme of what adds attraction to the seaside environment (over 30% of answers) (Labuz 2003ab).

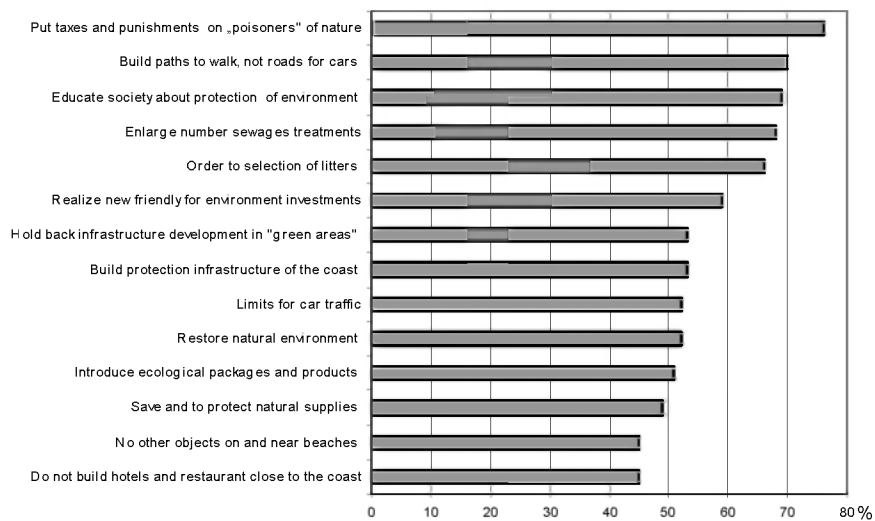


Fig. 3. Respondents opinion on what kind of action really protects the seaside environment (over 45% of answers) (Labuz, 2003ab).

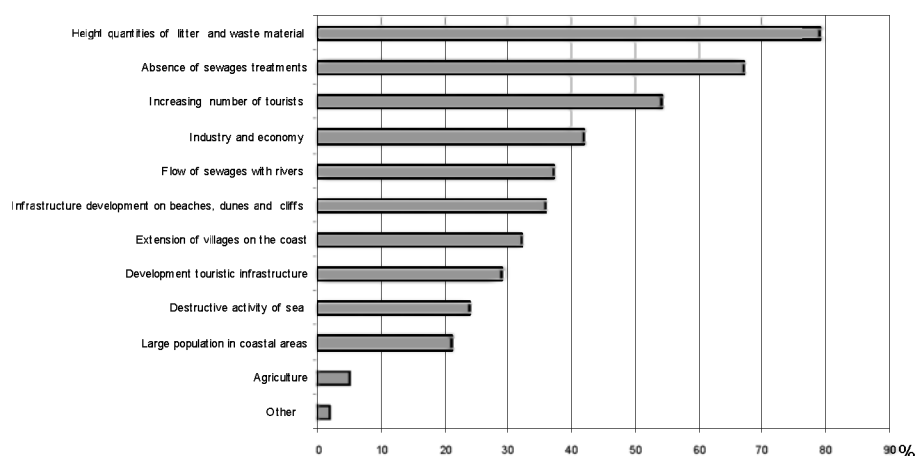


Fig. 4. Respondents opinion on the theme of threats for seaside nature (Labuz, 2003ab).

Conclusions

In many questions education, pollution and litters were the main problems pointed by asked tourists. But also it is clearly visible, that people do not want a lot of buildings and infrastructure close to the beach. For them the natural landscape and environment in which they can really rest is more important. Probably a better knowledge of the coastal environment may increase their friendly activity for the environment. Local communities and schools should take care of the education on the seaside environment. Various opinions not true knowledge and not accepted behaviours of tourists should be regulated. Their awareness and attitudes should be changed. In other cases the natural environment will be soon destroyed. And social costs of protection will rapidly increase.

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