Tourism in Challenging Times. Travellers' Behaviour and Attitude Towards the Responsible Tourism

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Introduction

For quite a long time, the development of tourism was based on economic goals – income generation, export of services, job creation. However, with the emergence of tourism monoculture and the negative consequences of tourism development in highly visited regions, increasing attention has been paid to integrating sustainable and responsible tourism concepts into tourism development programs, disseminating information to the public and putting them into practice. The COVID-19 pandemic has been also an incentive for tourism transformation. As tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, to build back better, a new thinking and new framing of tourism is needed. This crisis is an opportunity to transform the relationship of tourism with nature, climate and the economy (United Nations, 2020). However, tourism transformation had been under the discussions even before the challenging pandemic times came. The transition to responsible tourism and the practical application of its principles are driven by both global forces, including the elements and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018), and the search for the optimal balance of tourism at national and local level – cities, protected areas, businesses, or communities, as well as the growing awareness of travellers. These insights confirms that tourism is in challenging times, and it is the moment that it may be restarted in a new, more sustainable and responsible form. Therefore, it is important to evaluate travellers' behaviour and attitude towards the responsible tourism, which may be the key element of the future of tourism.

The problem of the research. As the tourism industry has been rapidly growing for years bringing not only positive effects, but also causing negative consequences, the COVID-19 pandemic, that has brought tourism industry to a standstill, highlighted the need of complete tourism restart, reaching for more sustainable, responsible tourism. These challenging times for tourism reveal that tourism future and its sustainability depends not only by governance decisions, but on travellers as well. One of the essential conditions for the effective implementation of the principles of responsible tourism is the supportive behaviour of travellers, which includes not only the most active supporters of the concept of responsible tourism, but also expands to wider sections of society and becomes the dominant model of travel behaviour. At both the scientific and empirical levels, it is important to find out how visitors from different parts of the world support the principles of responsible tourism in their expression of behaviour and attitude. The scientific problem of this research can be formulated by the question: which principles of responsible tourism are implemented in the attitude and behaviour of the travellers of the Baltic Sea Region in the context of challenging times of tourism?

The aim of the research: to analyse the expression of travellers' behaviour orientation towards key elements of responsible tourism in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region in the challenging times for tourism.

Research object: the behaviour of travellers in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region in the challenging times for tourism.

Research methods: analysis of literature sources, systematisation, synthesis, generalisation, and comparison in the theoretical part, and quantitative research – a questionnaire survey – and data analysis and processing methods in the empirical research.

Methodology

To analyse the expression of travellers' behaviour orientation towards the key elements of responsible tourism in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region in the challenging times for tourism, the quantitative survey of the Baltic Sea Region countries representatives has been carried out. The survey consisted multiple choice, Likert scale and ranking questions. The respondents of the survey have been selected by snowball sampling method (Naderifar et al., 2017). The survey has been carried out in 2021 May. Microsoft Excel software has been used for processing and systematizing of the research data. The research involves eight Baltic Sea Region countries, that are the members of the European Union: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden (European Commission, 2009). The sample size of the research has been calculated using Paniotto's formula (Kardelis, 2002): $n = 1/((\Delta^2 + 1/N))$. According to the calculations using this formula, the sample size of 400 respondents has been chosen. The survey questionary has been filled by 415 respondents.
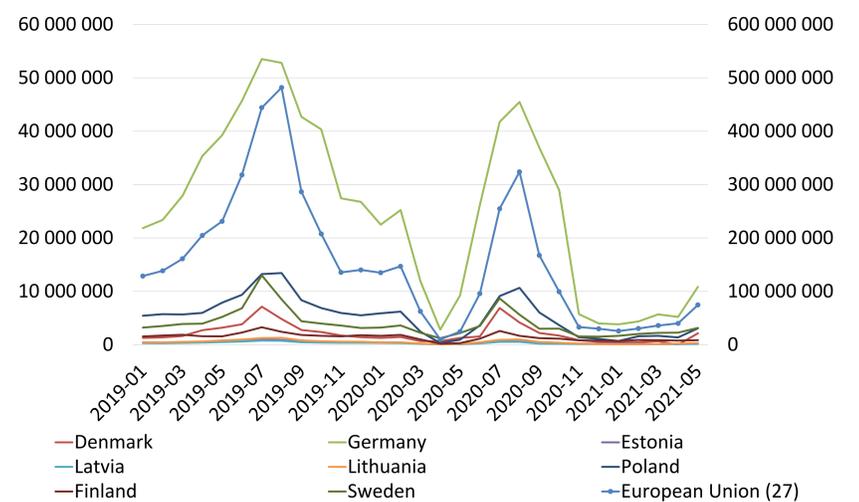
Results

Figure 1. Tourism of the Baltic Sea Region countries in the challenging times, 2019-2021, monthly data, by nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments.
Source: Compiled by the authors, based on the data of Eurostat.

Table 1. Travellers' of the Baltic Sea Region countries behaviour and attitude towards the key elements of the responsible tourism.
Source: Compiled by the authors.

Elements	Mean (total)	Standard deviation (total)	Mean							
			Denmark	Estonia	Finland	Germany	Latvia	Lithuania	Poland	Sweden
1. Economic dimension	3,77	0,99	3,53	2,81	3,91	3,75	3,54	3,56	4,05	3,40
(E1.1) While travelling, I am concern how tourists support local economy	3,34	1,12	3,09	2,25	3,64	3,18	3,67	3,33	3,90	2,76
(E1.2) While traveling, I prefer to buy local products or services	3,96	0,85	3,59	3,25	4,14	3,85	3,67	4,11	4,38	3,65
(E1.3) While travelling, I am willing to pay more for local products or services if it contributes to local economy	3,82	0,98	3,64	2,50	3,79	3,96	3,17	3,33	3,83	3,41
(E1.4) Travel experience is better if I can support local economy	3,98	0,88	3,82	3,25	4,07	4,01	3,67	3,44	4,08	3,79
2. Socio-cultural dimension	4,28	0,77	4,11	4,38	4,43	4,21	3,67	4,25	4,47	4,29
(E2.1) I respect indigenous people while traveling	4,46	0,71	4,32	5,00	4,43	4,43	3,67	4,44	4,58	4,44
(E2.2) I respect local customs and traditions while traveling	4,47	0,65	4,23	4,25	4,64	4,41	3,67	4,67	4,69	4,44
(E2.3) While travelling, I am concerned about the well-being of the hosts	3,93	0,81	3,91	4,00	4,21	3,82	3,33	3,78	4,15	3,97
(E2.4) Travel experience is better if the destination preserves its cultural heritage	4,25	0,77	4,00	4,25	4,43	4,17	4,00	4,11	4,46	4,32
3. Environmental dimension	3,87	0,95	3,86	3,94	3,93	3,87	3,42	3,67	3,98	3,70
(E3.1) I prefer travel that specifically designed to cause as little damage to environment	3,92	0,99	3,77	4,50	3,86	3,86	3,50	3,78	4,21	3,56
(E3.2) I don't purchase products known to cause pollution	3,69	0,96	3,73	3,75	3,86	3,67	3,00	3,22	3,75	3,82
(E3.3) I am willing to pay more for a travel if it's guaranteed the money goes to preservation of local environment	3,70	0,93	3,68	3,00	3,50	3,86	3,17	3,00	3,65	3,21
(E3.4) Travel experience is better if I don't make harm for the environment	4,18	0,83	4,27	4,50	4,50	4,07	4,00	4,67	4,31	4,21
4. Self-positioning in responsible tourism in general	3,93	0,88	3,84	3,55	4,06	3,88	3,50	3,82	4,19	3,67
(E4.1) I am willing to participate in responsible tourism travel	4,24	0,72	4,14	4,00	4,43	4,16	3,83	4,44	4,40	4,24
(E4.2) I am willing to pay more for responsible tourism	3,65	0,90	3,50	2,75	3,64	3,67	3,17	3,33	3,90	3,15
(E4.3) In choosing tourism service company, it is important that the company practices responsible tourism policies	3,74	1,04	3,32	3,25	3,71	3,71	3,17	3,44	4,19	3,03
(E4.4) I describe myself as responsible traveller	3,81	0,83	3,82	3,75	4,00	3,69	3,33	3,78	4,13	3,56
(E4.5) I support responsible tourism	4,24	0,71	4,41	4,00	4,50	4,15	4,00	4,11	4,33	4,38
5. Attitude towards tourism transformation	3,77	1,12	3,24	3,40	3,66	3,86	2,97	3,44	3,90	3,42
(E5.1) The depletion of the world and SDG, Green Deal strategies changed my attitude towards tourism	3,63	1,25	3,23	3,50	3,43	3,67	3,17	3,22	3,79	3,50
(E5.2) The depletion of the world and SDG, Green Deal strategies encouraged me to prefer more responsible way of travelling	3,62	1,07	3,09	3,50	3,57	3,79	3,17	3,11	3,90	3,29
(E5.3) The COVID-19 pandemic changed my attitude towards tourism	3,61	1,25	2,86	2,75	3,57	3,74	3,00	3,56	3,77	3,03
(E5.4) The COVID-19 pandemic encouraged me to prefer more responsible way of travelling	3,63	1,24	2,77	2,75	3,57	3,79	2,67	3,33	3,81	2,91
(E5.5) Today's tourism is inseparable from saving the environment for future generation	4,27	0,83	4,23	4,50	4,14	4,32	2,83	4,00	4,23	4,35

Main conclusions

The transition to responsible tourism is primarily driven by tourism destination-related elements and power of impact related to maintaining the quality of life of local people, redistributing the benefits of tourism to travel destinations, enhancing the value and distinctiveness of the travel destination product and maintaining long-term attractiveness, within the capacity of the travel destination and efficient use of its tourism resources. Tourism standstill, which was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, has been one more incentive towards the change in tourism, leading to the search of the solutions how to make tourism more sustainable and responsible.

The analysis shows that with a wealth of travel experience, modern travellers are increasingly focusing on travel content. Changes in travel style and related behavioural components respond to travellers' expectations related to the concept of responsible tourism: modern travellers focus on the value content of their tourism product when choosing travel, opting for longer trips, abandoning consumption-for-consumption solutions, being more sensitive to the environment, the culture of the area visited, and integrating more into the area, not changing it, which has a positive impact on the regional economy, ecological protection, cultural continuity, social development.

The research revealed that evaluating the acceptance of the elements of responsible tourism, in the context of the three main responsible tourism dimensions – economic, socio-cultural and environmental – the elements of the socio-cultural dimension are evaluated with the highest travellers' agreement. The analysis of the self-positioning in responsible tourism revealed that travellers of the Baltic Sea Region are willing to participate in responsible tourism travel and they support responsible tourism. Travellers agree that today's tourism is inseparable from saving the environment for future generation. It was revealed that the behaviour and attitude of travellers of the Baltic Sea Region confirms that responsible tourism has become a way of thinking and yet is becoming the way of acting.