

TOURIST ECONOMY ON THE POLISH SEA-COAST IN VIEW OF THE ECOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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Abstract

The paper presents the most important mechanisms of not conforming to the rules of eco-development in the Polish coastal recreational zone as well as some methods of remedying the negative processes taking place in this area. The decisive faults that have led to degradation of this area are: a) selecting the areas of the highest natural values for investing; b) exceeding the tourist capacity and absorptive power ratios; c) lack of a consistent system of protected areas in the coastal zone; etc.

It has been assumed that the following factors related with both the physical planning and the market, can enable the development of eco-tourism: a) tax zoning; b) establishing the so-called commune strategic land resources; and c) introducing order to the tourist traffic in communes.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is developed mainly in the environment of the highest quality of natural resources and, at the same time, the least transformed by various activities of man. Therefore, due to its strong links with the environment, tourism should play the most important pro-ecological role as compared with any other branch of economy in the sea-coast recreation zone. The author

submits a thesis that this form of activity in the post-war period has departed from the rules of ecological development of the sea-coast region.

This paper on one hand shows the examples of evident breaking of the rules of ecological development of the Polish sea-coast and, on the other hand, the ways of remedying those negative phenomena that have already taken place. In the first place however, relationships between tourism and ecological development, i. e. the so-called eco-tourism, shall be defined.

ECO-TOURISM: A TERM SUSCEPTIBLE OF VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

The term „sustainable tourism”, or its synonym — „eco-tourism”, was introduced to literature not a long time ago. Generally, it defines such a way of accomplishing tourism that does not lead to degradation of the natural values of land and also maximally limits a negative impact of this kind of activity on the natural environment and the local communities. The point is, that this term can be interpreted in numerous ways.

Z. Haber and I. Chmielewska (1995, page 11) write: „... the aforementioned terms define such a form of tourism that, without diminishing its cultural value, allows to limit the degradation of the natural environment normally caused by traditional tourism...”. Those authors assume explicitly that it must be some brand new form of tourism.

Other authors present similar views. Institute for Sustainable Development — ISD (Instytut na Rzecz Ekorozwoju) for example, even though not defining explicitly the term „eco-tourism” (using alternatively other definitions such as „pro-ecological tourism” or „nature exploring tourism”), says that the term defines other forms of qualified tourism the organization of which does not involve a precise definition of requirements towards the environment (Raport, 1994, p. 33.).

According to the author, it is incorrect to put an equation sign between the so called alternative tourism (or its synonyms, such as applied, supporting, harmonious, gentle, green, responsible or non-destructive tourism) and eco-tourism. It should be noted here that it is the alternative tourism that comprises those forms of tourism which assure a proper contact with the nature and the local communities and oppose the mass and commercial kinds of tourism, and whose negative impact on the natural environment is reduced to minimum (Szwichtenberg, 1993).

Being aware of the multitude of possibilities in approaching eco-tourism, the author elaborated in 1993 its definition and had it judged by a few dozens of practitioners and theoreticians of geography of tourism. The definition has been totally accepted by the competent judges. Therefore, the term eco-

tourism defines any traditional form of tourism that is adequate to the proper tourist values, especially values of the natural environment; that acts in accordance to the rules of planning and the current state of technology, that is accomplished under conditions of full ethic both when adapting the given area to the fulfillment of the tourist function and also during its exploitation (Szwichtenberg, 1993).

Generally, the author submits a thesis that during the development of the coastal area the first three rules of ecological development provided by the aforesaid definition were observed relatively correctly. The most controversial element is the fourth one, defined as ethical activity. It concerns activity of authorities, some planners and tourists themselves.

EXAMPLES OF BREAKING THE RULES OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT BY TOURISM AND OTHER ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

Many mistakes have been made in the post war period, causing substantial degradation of one of the most valuable areas in Poland. These include:

- a) selecting the most valuable areas for tourist investment projects,
- b) not taking into account the geodynamic processes taking place in the coastal zone,
- c) exceeding the tourist capacity and absorptive power of a given region,
- d) giving up the idea of establishing a consistent system of protected areas in the sea-coast as well as throughout the whole country,
- e) lack of links between physical planning and environment protection etc.

Until mid-seventies it was a common practice that the most attractive areas (in terms of the tourist and natural values) were considered the most appropriate ones for being utilized for recreation. Influential investors from the southern and central parts of Poland, after having done an appraisal research, selected the most attractive terrains for the development of building grounds there, regardless of the fact that they should by no means be developed in any way whatsoever. This refers especially to afforested and dune terrains. The level of natural transformations occurring in the sea-coast zone is proportionally the highest in Poland. The geodynamic processes (abrasion, accumulation and others) make the sea shore change continuously, with varying intensity. Taking this into account it is difficult to understand the planners who located the housing development within the distance of 100 to 150 m from the sea-shore. This resulted in the situation where a dozen of the coastal localities found themselves in danger, namely the eastern part of Ustka, a part of Łeba, localities on the Hel peninsula, Ustronie Morskie, Jarosławiec, Sliwin, Międzyzdroje etc.

The tourist capacity and absorptive power ratios generally indicate such

a load per area unit that on one hand assures the optimum conditions for recreation and, on the other hand, marks the upper limit of the environment load where devastation processes start to appear. The absorptive power ratios in the whole coastal area and especially in the pine forests are very low (3 to 4 person-hours per hectare per day). These values are low indeed taking into account the fact that the tourist pressure in this environment is evaluated to be several dozens or even several hundreds of persons per hectare. These terrains should actually be excluded from the tourist exploitation until marked tourist routes and other facilities are introduced there.

Physical planning therefore should remain in compliance with the tourist capacity ratios. They have been established according to many authors (Szwichtenberg, 1991). Despite the fact that at present the capacity ratios are not exceeded in the whole Polish coastal region, in some of its areas significant overloads have been noted. Even bigger overloads could have occurred if there had been realized those planned projects that assumed a continuous growth of tourist activity, resulting from the socialist model of tourism.

In theory, the highest overloads of tourist capacity have been observed in Mielno-Unieście, Ustka, Jastrzębia Góra, Gdynia and other places. On the other hand, the highest reserves for developing the recreation function have been noted in the Elbląg coastal area and at the Hel Peninsula, i.e. where the tourist activity has been in fact stopped because of ecological reasons and especially by a high level of contamination of the Baltic sea water.

According to the author, the whole sea-coast — not only in Poland — should comprise one system of protected areas (national parks, landscape parks, areas of protected landscape, reservations and others.) The starting point for defining the coastal system of protected areas should be an ecological appraisal of the resources. One should expect that the results of such undertakings will be taken into account in the obligatory studies on physical planning in particular coastal provinces.

The analysis made by the author showed that ca. one third of the coast is not submitted to any kind of protection and a significant part of it is protected in an improper way. For example, the Woliński National Park is considered to be one of the most intensively exploited tourist areas in Poland with the tourist capacity of two thousand accommodations; also in its vicinity lays Międzyzdroje — one of the bigger tourist resorts in the Baltic coast. In the Mierzeja Wiślana Landscape Park, in the middle of the tourist season twenty five thousand persons are accommodated one at a time and the capacity of this area is fourteen thousand accommodations.

As can be seen from the above, a big part of the land is not protected at all in the coastal zone and also forms of tourist development do not comply with the limitations concerning particular types of protected areas.

As mentioned in the preface to this chapter, the most obvious departure

from the policy of ecological development is inconsistency of physical planning with the rules of protection and forming of the natural environment. This concerns, among others, functional, structural or technological inconsistency.

Investing in facilities serving the purpose of passive recreation — despite the fact that the existing conditions are mainly suitable for the active forms of recreation — is a result of the aforementioned strong investors' pressure on the most precious areas of the Polish sea-coast and also faulty physical planning. It will be difficult to eliminate the holiday centres from the dune-forest strip that should in fact be freely accessible to the public (especially with cold sea water and not the best possible bioclimatic conditions!) However, by introducing new forms of recreation facilities, like swimming pools, sporting facilities etc., it will become possible to reduce the impact of this kind of functional barriers on the development of tourism.

The sea-coast has very good conditions for developing three major economic functions, i.e. tourism, agriculture and industry. Wrong hierarchy of those functions being first of all a result of faulty governmental policy has led on one hand to poor tourist policy („tourist policy“ — as for many years tourism was not subject to market demand and supply rules), and on the other hand to establishing only minimal links between industry and agriculture on one hand and tourism and tourism on the other.

The agricultural function, due to the law, rigorously protecting the high quality arable land, has limited the development of the coastal holiday resorts, whilst industry — and urbanization it involves — reduced the values of the natural environment.

The above very schematic examples prove that the primary causes for the improper development of the coast are either wrong assumptions made by economic politicians or projects of megalomaniac physical planners or total inefficiency of building and social supervision (no local self-government!) All these factors are closely related with the above — mentioned fourth principle of eco-development. Only straightforward accomplishment of the principles comprised in the definition of eco-development (eco-tourism) should contribute to maintain the values in a condition allowing for proper regeneration of physical and psychic forces of the society today and in the future.

SOME METHODS OF RENDERING THE TOURIST FUNCTION IN THE COASTAL ZONE MORE ECOLOGICAL

The author is not going to indicate any specific methods for mending the above described deficiencies. The Institute for Sustainable Development showing the principal problems of ecological tourism development emphasizes that „... apart from the already existing negligence and irregularities, particu-

larly in physical planning, new issues arise from spontaneous economic and social processes within the period of structural transformation. The most dangerous is the attitude arising from the common need for quick profit and action for seizure of natural resources increasing their degradation..." (Report..., 1994, p. 7). Therefore this part of the paper will deal with these issues.

The author considers that physical planning and market factors which would allow for the development of eco-tourism can be as follows: a) tax zoning — particularly in the coast belt; b) forming the so called communal strategic land resources; c) setting communal tourism in order; others.

Tax zoning

The regulations pertaining to protection of arable land and forests being in force until very recently unequivocally contributed to excessive concentration of investments in the coastal belt. The present regulations (Ustawa o ochronie..., 1995) as well as the ability of respective communes to differentiate real estate taxes, can have a positive influence both on the physical structure of settlements and on processes leading to their economic revival.

The restrictions pertaining to soil did not allow, among other things, to solve communication problems of all the coastal localities. We may say that they have contributed to an economic regress of a particular type.

Therefore, the following assumptions for development of the localities are proposed:

1. The communes should correct the existing plans or speed up work on the studies of conditions and trends in physical planning (in accordance with the law concerning physical planning — see Ustawa..., 1994,) enabling establishment of possibilities for development of the coastal localities towards the south, away from the sea;
2. The communes should, in cooperation with the Provincial Physical Planning Offices, establish the „tax zoning“. This will differentiate not only taxes but also building regulations being in force in respective coastal belts.

J. Blakley (Gorzela, 1992, p. 44) writes that: „... building regulations can be applied in a more flexible way in order to attract capital and provide some benefits for the local society. In case of a specific investor a suspension of some strict regulations (such as provisions of the physical plan) concerning the use of land or density of building, can be made dependent on allocation of some funds towards the local budget...“

The average width of the coastal recreation zone in Koszalin Province is approx. 1.5 km. To encourage investments the communal authorities could establish several belts parallel to the coast line where real estate taxes would differ between each other. The belt located at distance between 1.5 and 5 km could be exempted from taxation for a considerable period of time.

Such zoning would allow for: a) deglomeration of coastal localities; b) construction of by-pass roads; and c) location of second houses in the so-called „locality hinterland“. This would result in conditions for formation of the second tourist investment zone.

It would not be detrimental to the present zone — both to the invested areas as well as to the separation zones because location of the second houses need not be directly connected with the tourist values. However, it will considerably help in putting the first zone in proper order and in better economic animation of the coastal belt. Introduction of new forms of tourist investment may revive some coastal localities that at present are in stagnation or in the initial stage of collapse.

High taxes in the vicinity of the coast line will allow for securing the valuable areas which may be adjoined to the already existing general access areas. At present there are numerous holiday centres extensively using land there. The taxes should be so painful that they encourage people to give up some land voluntarily.

The above mentioned financial and planning instruments definitely should not influence the substantial quantitative development of localities. The second coastal front should launch, on one hand, the deglomeration processes within the existing building estates and, on the other hand, extensive construction of the second houses in particular.

The communal strategic land resources

The coastal communes principally are at the final stage of setting up the basic infrastructure, mostly water, sewage and waste management systems. For example, the Koszalin Province coastal localities do not suffer from water shortage, the power system has some reserves, local and imported supplies of natural gas fully satisfy communal and domestic demand (until 1997 gasification will embrace the whole coastal area). All towns have sewage systems and waste water treatment plants in operation and the coastal localities also have sewage systems working (or being accomplished very soon). The telephone network density within the coastal area is high (e.g. the Mielno commune telephone network factor is similar to that for Koszalin) etc. (Miejsc..., 1995).

The second stage of infrastructural preparation of communes to perform the tourist function should comprise setting in order the general access areas within respective localities as well as accomplishment of some new facilities like swimming pools, tennis courts, golf courses etc. or even nature reserves, parks and forest belts.

The main obstacle is lack of proper grounds. Therefore, successive formation of strategic land resources (belonging to a commune or a particular locality) is proposed. Communal funds should be used to buy respective lots

of land, combine them thus forming an area being proper for some bigger projects to be affected. This issue is strictly connected with the earlier described tax zoning and the possible formation of second tourist zone in the sea-coast.

Knowing the physical plan (study) and systematically analyzing the usage of land, location of investments etc., the commune may gain double benefit either by an earlier purchase of important grounds having their prices to increase gradually or by gaining control over localization processes. Proper grounds reserved for bigger settlement undertakings will enable the commune and the local society to obtain extremal benefits.

Not every commune has proper capital. However, it has to be emphasized that in the case of communes having no much access to the sea but having their grounds nearby (e.g. Będzino and Sianów in the Koszalin Province) they can potentially gain substantial benefits. Infrastructural investment in the strategic areas being purchased by communes shall not be excluded. Purchasing grounds by communes, which might have critical importance for respective localities, or even for the whole self-governmental unit, may also prevent ground speculation.

Setting tourism in order

In the author's opinion this is one of the most important factors allowing for organization of tourist traffic with application of rather modest outlay. The author's research work carried out in the Middle Pomerania in the period 1993–1995 showed that communes are in the least preoccupied with the principal issues concerning development of the tourist function. This means general lack of order and beauty in villages (dirty and delapidating houses, destroyed fences etc.) as well as lack of information (no signs showing how to get to public facilities, no boards providing information on the village and its vicinity, etc.).

Both the coastal and other communes have a well developed accommodation, catering and auxiliary service, necessary mainly for holiday — leisure tourism. However, it is often overlooked that many people combine stationary holiday with temporary travelling.

All the localities irrespectively of their tourist ranking position in Poland lack important facilities like maps, plans, signposts, information boards etc. Proper information makes tourists life easier and moreover relieves local people from providing information to tourists. It should be emphasized that a tourist who makes use of proper info signs does not need to trespass areas serving the local society only.

All the above action should make part of plans (studies) of commune physical planning. Also reliable environmental impact assessments made by

competent teams should constitute integral parts of such plans (studies.) Building supervisory bodies should look after accomplishment of projects and they should be much more effective than those which operated during the past dozens of years.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The main reasons of degradation of the coastal recreation area were wrong assumptions serving for establishment of strategies of the economic development of the sea-coast region and also not realizing the proposals included in physical plans.
2. Establishing zoning system in the sea-coast area, concerning taxation and physical planning, will enable the deglomeration process of the coastal localities as well as establishing second houses in the so-called „locality hinterland“.
3. In order to establish facilities necessary for functioning of the coastal localities the communes must reserve proper terrains, i.e. the so-called communal strategic land resources.

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