

## A VALUABLE NATURAL AREA AS A SYSTEM MARKETING PRODUCT VERSUS EXPECTATIONS OF TOURISTS AS ACTIVE PURCHASERS

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### ABSTRACT

The article is theoretical and empirical in nature. The theoretical part provides a cognitive and critical analysis of the world literature. According to the approach presented in this part, valuable natural areas are ‘system marketing products’ which should be co-created by purchasers. The research aim of the article is to identify the significance assigned by tourists to various characteristics of valuable natural areas and group the tourists based on this. Three research questions were formed. In order to answer them, primary research was conducted by means of a questionnaire. The results were statistically analysed using the method of averaging and factor analysis. The results indicate that the relatively highest significance from the 25 elements of valuable natural areas evaluated was assigned to cleanliness and food. Untypical elements (e.g. ‘photographic safari’) were the least significant. Respondents were assigned to six groups linked to various types of activities. This points to the necessity to adapt elements of the product, i.e. a valuable natural area, to the various expectations of the purchasers.

**Key words:** valuable natural area, product, marketing, expectations, purchasers, tourists

**JEL codes:** M31

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary final purchaser is becoming a more and more demanding participant in the consumer market. The expectations of the contemporary final purchaser are growing rapidly, and fulfilling these expectations is one of the greatest challenges for offerers. The increasing expectations of purchasers concern not only the products offered (both material and non-material), but also the range of the market activity of purchasers. They would like to purchase products which fulfil their expectations and simultaneously they would like to participate in the preparation of the products and influence their characteristics and marketing attributes. Thus, the role of purchasers is being re-defined: they are becoming active participants of the market, i.e.

prosumers [Kotilainen and Saari 2018, pp. 1–22]. The activity of an active participant of the market decidedly goes beyond the purchase behaviour of traditional, i.e. passive, purchasers, as it also includes communication and creation. This significant increase in the level of purchasers’ activity in way forces offerers to change their approach towards purchasers, and this entails the necessity to change the model of functioning on the market. It is no longer sufficient to be a creator and supplier of products and other elements of an offer. These roles need to be replaced with a model of co-creating an offer with the final purchaser.

The necessity for the re-orientation has become a base for various contemporary management concepts, such as marketing management, which includes affiliate marketing [Fruchter and Sigue 2005, pp. 18–36], pro-

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sumption [Baruk 2017], experiential marketing [García, Galindo and Suárez 2018, pp. 22–41], and holistic marketing [Soliman 2016, pp. 42–56]. Each concept highlights particular aspects of connections between the offerer and purchaser. The tangible and intangible advantages, valuable for both parties, are generated through the proper creation of the connections, and it is the intangible advantages that are acquiring greater significance as they allow for example building a strategic advantage [Bettencourt, Lusch and Vargo 2014, pp. 44–66]. Improving the image or perpetuating a positive image of the offerer on the one hand, and on the other hand the sense of exerting influence by buyers on past activities reserved exclusively for offerers is often a sufficient stimulus for mutual cooperation and its strengthening.

The implementation of such an approach despite appearances is not easy. It requires mental changes [Fyrberg 2013, pp. 1163–1181] both from offerers and purchasers. It is no longer sufficient for offerers to identify the needs of recipients and use the knowledge of the needs in the process of product creation, which formed the basis for classic marketing orientation. A modern (participative) marketing orientation requires active cooperation between an offerer and a purchaser at each stage of marketing creation process, and acquiring knowledge of purchasers must be replaced with acquiring purchaser knowledge and building new knowledge on the basis of purchaser knowledge and own knowledge.

It is relatively more difficult to follow the assumptions of that approach in the case of non-material products, including the specific tourist products, i.e. valuable natural areas. The literature defines valuable natural areas as areas of great biodiversity or areas hardly transformed by a human being, with the level of contamination not disrupting the functioning of primeval ecosystems [Łuszczuk 2011, pp. 260–276]. The great biodiversity mentioned, i.e. biological and landscape diversity, constitutes or may constitute a dominant determinant of economic activity, or it subsequently limits the conventional forms of management [Jalinik 2002, pp. 87–88]. The values which are distinctive features of these areas can satisfy a number of recipients' needs, and the needs concern not only leisure (psychological, social, security needs) but also aesthetics and knowledge (cultural needs, etc). A wide range of needs which can be met by tourists makes the role of such an area

as a marketing product highly significant. A valuable natural area may even be ranked as a product of system (which was analysed among others by Mazurek-Łopacińska [2016, pp. 18–31]), as it constitutes a set of benefits which fulfil an extensive bundle of needs.

Moreover, a valuable natural area as a product of system fits in the current consumer trends, or even cultural megatrends [Mazurek-Łopacińska 2016, pp. 16–31], especially a trend referred to as 'return to the past' [Dąbrowska 2018, pp. 106–117], which is connected with the rediscovery of traditional values including the consumption of traditional foods and spending leisure time according to canons of Polish tradition. They correspond to the assumptions of 'slow life' and 'slow food' – a move initiated in 1986 in Italy [Simonetti 2012, pp. 168–189]. It can therefore be stated that although a part of authors consider consumer trends exclusively or primarily in the context of innovative behaviour and refer them to virtual activity [Zalega 2016, pp. 202–225], the trends also include behaviours referring to the past, enabling the preservation of traditional values such as cultural values, national values, etc.

Therefore, in the case of specific products such as valuable natural areas, it is essential to apply the participative approach presented, attempting to involve tourists in their creation. Tourists should be treated not only as the addressees of a marketing offer but also as co-creators. The implementation of that approach should be evolutionary, and the starting point should be the recognition of recipients' expectations concerning the products mentioned. Contrary to a traditional marketing approach, it is essential not to make do with the recognition, as tourists should be encouraged to actively shape the features of the product according to their needs. Following the assumptions presented, the article aimed to identify the significance attributed by tourists to various characteristics of valuable natural areas and group tourists on account of that variable. The results of cognitive-and-critical analysis of literature indicate cognitive and research gaps existing in this area. Until now, valuable natural areas have not been analysed in the context of their role as products of a marketing system and expectations towards them.

In the process of the realization of the goal formed, an attempt was made to answer the following research questions:

- Q1 – what significance did the respondents representing tourists of valuable natural areas attribute to particular characteristics of these marketing products?
- Q2 – what hierarchical structure did particular characteristics of valuable natural areas as marketing products have?
- Q3 – which groups of respondents formed a segment of tourists visiting valuable natural areas, taking into consideration the significance the tourists assigned to particular characteristics of these marketing products?

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In order to answer the formulated research questions, in the second and third quarters of 2017 questionnaire survey was carried out, including 216 respondents representing adult tourists visiting valuable natural areas especially from Lubelskie Voivodeship and Świętokrzyskie one. The respondents were chosen by means of non-random sampling (purposive one). The survey was of a direct nature, which requires a personal contact between the pollster and the respondents. All questionnaire papers were qualified for quantitative analysis, which was possible due to a face-to-face contact applied. The primary data gathered were submitted for quantitative analysis, which involved averaging analysis and explorative factor analysis.

The research had a much wider subject range than it is presented in this article. Only a fragment is presented concerning the significance assigned by tourists to 25 elements of tourist reception areas under protection. These elements were identified based on the results of the cognitive-and-critical analysis of literature and the results of non-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted at the stage of preparing for the questionnaire as a research tool. For each element the respondents were supposed to define its significance on a 5-grade Likert scale. The application of the Likert scale determines the applicability of both research methods mentioned above.

Factor analysis was used in order to reduce the number of variables affecting the tested category, i.e. the significance assigned to elements of valuable natural areas, and to reveal internal hidden interdependen-

cies in relations between those variables. The number of common factors was determined using the criterion technique, whereas factor rotation was performed using the standardized varimax method. As part of the factors, the variables with the highest factor loadings against particular factors were distinguished ( $> 0.7$ ) [Abdi and Williams 2010, pp. 433–459].

The statistical analysis of the collected primary data was made using the IBM SPSS Statistics Ver. 22.

### THE RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The results of the research conducted indicate that among the 25 elements analysed, a high significance was attributed by at least half of the respondents to 8 elements regarded as those which facilitate the use of values of valuable natural areas (Table 1). This set of elements includes first of all infrastructure, emotional elements ('positive attitude of the local community to tourists') and environmental elements ('cleanliness of the area'). It is worth adding that the last element mentioned was the only one to obtain over 70% definitely positive indications and the only one to have not been indicated as unimportant. As can be seen from Table 2, taking into consideration average rating values, this element took the first position as a feature of the valuable natural area with the relatively greatest significance for the respondents.

In turn, four elements were indicated as very important by less than one in five people, which indicates relatively little significance assigned to those elements from the point of view of satisfying the respondents' needs. None of the elements was included among the key distinguishing features of valuable natural areas, with one of them occupying the last place in the hierarchy of all analyzed elements (Table 2).

Taking into account the values of average ratings, the analyzed elements were divided into the following four groups:

- 1) group 'A' – elements for which the average rating values were at least 4.5;
- 2) group 'B' – elements for which the average rating values ranged from 4.0 to 4.5;
- 3) group 'C' – elements for which the average rating values ranged from 3.5 to 4.0;
- 4) group 'D' – elements for which the average rating values were less than 3.5.

**Table 1.** The significance assigned by respondents to the selected elements facilitating the use of assets of valuable natural areas

The element assessed	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average rating
		5	4	3	2	1	
Infrastructure for observing animals (e.g. pulpits)	a	19.4	44.4	28.7	4.6	2.8	3.731481
Infrastructure for admiring the landscape (e.g. viewing tower)	b	41.7	38.4	16.2	2.8	0.9	4.171296
Good marking of tourist routes	c	52.8	34.7	9.3	1.9	1.4	4.356481
Natural educational paths in the open air	d	37.0	28.7	26.9	5.6	1.9	3.935185
Infrastructure enabling safe use of bathing areas	e	49.1	29.2	14.4	6.5	0.9	4.189815
Infrastructure enabling safe sightseeing	f	53.7	31.9	9.7	3.2	1.4	4.333333
Printed guides about local natural values	g	29.2	39.8	22.7	7.9	0.5	3.893519
Free application that enables exploring the local nature	h	33.8	26.9	27.3	10.2	1.9	3.805556
Website with information on the advantages of local nature	i	28.2	40.3	21.8	6.0	3.7	3.833333
Small hostels, camping centres	j	17.1	40.3	28.7	11.6	2.3	3.583333
Stationary exhibitions showing the most valuable values of the local nature	k	19.4	32.9	35.6	10.6	1.4	3.583333
Organising photographic ‘safari’	l	14.8	26.4	35.2	18.5	5.1	3.273148
Good accommodation base	ł	46.8	41.7	10.2	0.9	0.5	4.333333
Agritourism farms allowing for better understanding of arable crops, livestock, etc.	m	27.8	40.3	22.2	7.9	1.4	4.092593
Availability and good standard of sanitary facilities	n	52.3	32.9	12.5	0.9	0.9	4.353488
Good gastronomic base	o	50.0	35.6	9.7	3.2	0.5	4.592593
The possibility of tasting local specialties	p	48.6	37.5	9.7	3.7	0.5	4.300926
Road infrastructure allowing for safe access	r	50.9	33.8	13.0	1.9	0.5	4.328704
Cleanliness of the area	s	70.4	24.5	4.2	0.9	0.0	4.643519
Easy access to natural attractions	t	53.7	36.1	9.3	0.5	0.5	4.421296
Facilities for the elderly and disabled	u	37.5	31.0	14.4	10.2	6.9	3.819444
Facilities for children	w	30.1	32.9	13.9	7.9	15.3	3.546296
Facilities for tourists with pets	x	29.6	24.5	26.9	11.6	6.5	3.598131
Internet access, good coverage	y	37.0	36.6	18.1	4.6	3.7	3.986111
Positive attitude of the local community to tourists	z	51.4	35.2	9.3	2.8	1.4	4.324074

5 – very high, 4 – high, 3 – medium, 2 – little, 1 – none.

Source: Own study.

The first group identified includes two elements which, through an analogy to product levels, can be defined as the core of a system product, i.e. valuable natural area. The second and third groups consist of eleven elements each, creating the level of the basic and expected products, respectively. The fourth group,

which consists of only one element, can be considered as the level of the extended product.

Elements reflecting product features of a valuable natural area were also submitted for factor analysis. On the basis of the Kaiser criterion, six factors were distinguished with eigenvalues exceeding 1. As results

**Table 2.** Hierarchy of elements facilitating the use of assets of valuable natural areas

The element assessed	Position	Group
Cleanliness of the area	1	A
Good gastronomic base	2	
Easy access to natural attractions	3	
Good marking of tourist routes	4	
Availability and good standard of sanitary facilities	5	
Infrastructure enabling safe sightseeing	6	
Good accommodation base	6	B
Road infrastructure allowing for safe access	7	
Positive attitude of the local community to tourists	8	
The possibility of tasting local specialties	9	
Infrastructure enabling safe use of bathing areas	10	
Infrastructure for admiring the landscape (e.g. viewing tower)	11	
Agritourism farms allowing for better understanding of arable crops, livestock, etc.	12	C
Internet access, good coverage	13	
Natural educational paths in the open air	14	
Printed guides about local natural values	15	
Website with information on the advantages of local nature	16	
Facilities for the elderly and disabled	17	
Free application that enables exploring the local nature	18	D
Infrastructure for observing animals (e.g. pulpits)	19	
Facilities for tourists with pets	20	
Small hostels, camping centres	21	
Stationary exhibitions showing the most valuable values of the local nature	21	
Facilities for children	22	
Organising photographic ‘safari’	23	

Source: Own study.

from Table 3, the first factor explains almost 30% of the total variability of the phenomenon studied. It consists of three variables with factor loading value exceeding the assumed eligibility value 0.7 (Table 4). These variables refer to elements from groups ‘A’ and ‘B’. The remaining factors selected have relatively lower eigenvalues and explain much smaller part of the total variability of the phenomenon studied than the first factor. However, each factor includes variables with certain common or similar attributes.

Moreover, particular factors can be identified with segments of respondents distinguished in terms of the

significance attributed by them to particular elements of valuable natural areas. In marketing research, factor analysis is used among others in the process of inference about a structure of the analysed phenomenon, especially in the case of the research on buyer behaviour [Walesiak 1996; Walesiak and Bąk 1997, pp. 75–87]. The factors identified by conducting the factor analysis of market behaviour can therefore be interpreted as segments of respondents distinguished on the basis of behavioural and psychographic criterion.

Respondents can therefore be divided into six groups according to certain characteristics a valuable

**Table 3.** Hierarchy of values based on their eigenvalues determined by means of the Kaiser criterion

Factor	Eigenvalue	Total eigenvalues (variance) (%)	Cumulated eigenvalue	Cumulated of eigenvalues (%)
1	7.0996	28.398	7.100	28.398
2	2.4516	9.806	9.551	38.205
3	1.6722	6.689	11.223	44.894
4	1.4833	5.933	12.707	50.827
5	1.2156	4.862	13.922	55.690
6	1.1942	4.777	15.117	60.466

Source: Own study.

**Table 4.** The results of factor analysis for elements facilitating the use of natural environment values

Variables	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
a	-0.1248	0.2667	0.0525	0.0473	<b>0.7999</b>	0.0099
b	0.1053	0.5498	-0.0733	-0.0001	0.5123	0.1372
c	0.2645	<b>0.7416</b>	-0.1137	-0.0301	0.2673	0.1248
d	0.1871	0.6258	0.1607	0.2471	0.2653	0.2204
e	0.2311	0.5978	0.2588	0.3811	-0.2681	-0.0376
f	0.2575	<b>0.7607</b>	0.2404	0.1465	-0.0329	0.1653
g	0.1104	0.4027	0.1405	0.1456	0.2265	0.5825
h	0.1652	0.1656	0.3017	0.1759	0.1066	<b>0.7081</b>
i	0.1726	0.0850	0.0764	0.0191	0.0397	<b>0.8482</b>
j	0.0889	0.0140	0.5602	0.2458	0.1287	0.2559
k	0.0986	0.0267	0.4428	0.1301	0.6062	0.2168
l	0.0825	-0.0319	<b>0.7224</b>	0.1132	0.3772	0.1566
ł	0.5355	0.1773	0.2125	0.2668	0.0382	0.1028
m	0.1436	-0.0215	0.0248	0.1701	0.2952	0.0552
n	0.6893	0.2693	0.1059	0.0035	-0.0927	0.0568
o	<b>0.8222</b>	0.0869	0.2138	0.0025	-0.0914	0.0249
p	<b>0.7107</b>	0.0361	-0.0423	0.2155	0.0777	0.1420
r	<b>0.7306</b>	0.0736	0.1516	0.1958	0.0690	0.0127
s	0.6029	0.0888	-0.1323	-0.0385	0.0674	0.4132
t	0.5643	0.0943	0.0491	-0.0108	0.2210	0.2439
u	0.2275	0.1226	0.1348	<b>0.8278</b>	0.0709	0.0821
w	0.0786	0.1793	0.0433	<b>0.8507</b>	0.2194	0.1095
x	0.0331	0.2415	0.6089	-0.0438	-0.1653	0.0869
y	0.4370	0.0423	0.4536	-0.0061	0.0692	-0.2269
z	0.6302	0.2814	-0.0558	0.1017	0.0563	0.0657

The meaning of symbol from 'a' to 'z' as in Table 1.

Source: Own study.

**Table 5.** The division of respondents based on the significance assigned by them to elements of valuable natural areas

Factor	Elements indicated by representatives of a particular group	Symbolic name
1	– good gastronomic base – the possibility of tasting local specialties – road infrastructure allowing for safe access	culinary-and-road (passive) tourists
2	– good marking of tourist routes – infrastructure enabling safe sightseeing	wanderers
3	– organising photographic ‘safari’	passive lovers of fauna
4	– facilities for the elderly and disabled – facilities for children	emphatic tourists
5	– infrastructure for observing animals (e.g. pulpits)	active lovers of fauna
6	– website with information on the advantages of local nature	modern tourists

Source: Own study.

natural area should have in order to satisfy the expectations of the respondents. As can be seen from Table 5, representatives of each of these groups prefer different aspects, beginning with culinary issues through facilities facilitating passive or active discovery of natural values of a particular area, ending with the possibilities of virtual sightseeing of the area. Taking into consideration the distinguishing features, these groups of respondents can be given symbolic names reflecting the specificity of their representatives. Thus, it can be noticed that in the process of shaping the features of a system marketing product, i.e. a valuable natural area, the offer should be differentiated depending on the specific groups of recipients. It will be much easier if they are involved in this process.

## CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the considerations presented, it can be concluded that the key significance for the respondents was assigned to aspects connected with cleanliness of the visited area and appropriate gastronomic base. In the case of valuable natural areas, both elements can be considered a core of the product. Less typical elements such as ‘photographic safari’ turned out to be relatively the least significant. As the only element analysed, ‘photographic safari’ obtained an average rating of less than 3.5. The factor analysis allowed the identification of six factors which can

be identified with groups of respondent assigning similar significance to the same elements of a system marketing product, i.e. valuable natural area. Assigning a particular significance to particular elements is tantamount to diversifying expectations between the identified groups of respondents. Therefore, the offer addressed to the representatives of each group should be prepared with a view to meet these expectations. It may be recommended that tourists as the purchasers of the tourist offer should be involved in the process of creating the offer.

It is worth adding that the research conducted has certain limitations. The limitations concern, among others, the subjective scope (relatively small population), geographic scope (representatives of Polish tourists only) and objective scope (no differentiation based on demographic and economic characteristics). Recognising these limitations guides the research planned in the future. Conducting the research will allow, among others, a comparative analysis over time.

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## **OBSZAR CENNY PRZYRODNICZO JAKO SYSTEMOWY PRODUKT MARKETINGOWY A OCZEKIWANIA TURYSTÓW JAKO AKTYWNYCH NABYWCÓW**

### **STRESZCZENIE**

Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczno-empiryczny. Do przygotowania części teoretycznej wykorzystano metodę analizy poznawczo-krytycznej światowej literatury przedmiotu. W części tej przedstawiono podejście, zgodnie z którym obszary cenne przyrodniczo są systemowymi produktami marketingowymi, które powinny być współkreowane przez odbiorców. W artykule dążono do osiągnięcia celu, jakim jest zidentyfikowanie znaczenia przypisywanego przez turystów różnym cechom obszarów przyrodniczo cennych oraz pogrupowanie turystów ze względu na tę zmienną. Sformułowano także trzy pytania badawcze. Dążąc do znalezienia na nie odpowiedzi, przeprowadzono badania pierwotne za pomocą metody badania ankietowego, których wyniki poddano analizie statystycznej (metoda analizy ocen średnich i analizy czynnikowej). Wyniki tej analizy wskazują, że relatywnie największe znaczenie wśród 25 ocenianych elementów obszarów cennych przyrodniczo respondenci przypisywali czystości i bazie gastronomicznej, a najmniej istotne były nietypowe elementy („fotograficzne safari”). Wśród ankietowanych wyodrębniono sześć grup wykazujących odmienny zakres aktywności, co wskazuje na konieczność dostosowywania elementów produktu, jakim jest obszar cenny przyrodniczo, do zróżnicowanych oczekiwań odbiorców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obszar cenny przyrodniczo, produkt, marketing, oczekiwania, nabywcy turyści