
Nautical Tourism of Polish Sailors in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Purpose: This article aims to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nautical tourism of Polish sailors. The main focus was on decisions regarding tourist cruises to be carried out in 2020.

Design/Methodology/Approach: For this article, a survey was conducted among Polish sailors using the CAWI technique. The survey forms were distributed by Facebook and posted on sailing forums and sailing association profiles - 85 completed questionnaires were collected. Mathematical and statistical methods were used to elaborate the results. The article also makes use of participant observation and analysis of legal acts.

Findings: The conducted research allowed to establish that the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the decisions of Polish sailors regarding nautical tourism in 2020. The risk of contracting COVID-19 and the restrictions introduced for that reason affected both the duration and routes of cruises. There was no significant influence on the selection of the crew. Great independence from the accommodation and catering facilities, resulting from the structure and equipment of the units, as well as other features of nautical tourism that allow for the modification of tourist trips, in most cases allowed for the implementation of planned cruises.

Practical Implications: The results of the presented research may be of interest to entities managing the development of tourism, as they show that thanks to its specific features, nautical tourism can be practised even in the situation of applicable restrictions and it happens without endangering the life and health of its participants.

Originality/value: The results of the analysis fill the research gap in the discussed issue, as nautical tourism is rarely the subject of scientific research. To the author's knowledge, there are no articles on COVID-19 pandemic related to this form of tourism so far

Keywords: nautical tourism, tourism management, COVID-19.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the areas of the economy that have been hardest hit by the pandemic. Until 2019, records were set every year on the tourist market related to the number of participants in tourist traffic and generated revenues (www.statista.com). Tourism flourished and was a driving force behind economic development, not only of individual towns but also of countries (Sharpley and Telfer, 2015; Du, Lew, and Ng, 2016; Mishra, Rout, and Mohapatra, 2011; Hącia, 2019). The situation completely changed in the second quarter of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, although not the first in the 21st century, spread throughout the world like no other in the history of mankind (Strielkowski, 2020; Gallego and Font, 2020; Grima *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2020). It almost completely paralyzed tourism. Closed borders, cancelled flights, obligatory quarantine for people coming from abroad, as well as closed hotels and restaurants for months prevented or at least hampered tourist trips, both domestic and foreign (Sigala, 2020). Some people, even being able to go on a foreign trip, resigned for fear of becoming infected (Roman, Niedziółka, and Krasnodębski, 2020). International arrivals dropping by 74% and destinations worldwide welcomed 1 billion fewer international arrivals than in the previous year. The collapse in international travel represents an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues (unwto.org).

Nautical tourism is one of the forms of water-based tourism (Jennings, 2011; Butowski, 2018), the popularity of which has been growing in recent years (not only in Poland) (Kasum, Žani, and Boži, 2011; Rindone, 2019). According to the estimates of the European Commission from 2016, in Europe alone, sailing was practised by over 36 million people, and in total in all European yacht ports (of which there were over 4,500), even 70,000 people could be employed people (European Commission, 2016).

According to Luković “*nautical tourism means the navigation and stay of tourists – sailors on vessels (yachts, recreational small crafts and boats for both personal use and commercial activities, and the like), as well as their stay in the ports of nautical tourism for rest and recreation*” (Luković, 2013). For this article, however, the concept is narrowed down to tourism on board yachts, while the research area is narrowed down to Poland.

Regions with appropriate conditions can reap very tangible benefits from the development of this form of tourism. It can contribute to the development of local economies through income from tourism, employment growth and the development of entrepreneurship, especially in the area of services, investment stimulation and inflow of capital, development of technical, communication and social infrastructure (Hącia and Strulak-Wójcikiewicz, 2018; Nowaczyk, 2018). For this to happen, however, it is necessary to ensure an appropriate level of tourist traffic. It is conditioned by many factors, among which, of course, the tourist attractions of the area itself (in the case of nautical and inland tourism) are one of the most important

(Islam, Hossain, and Noor, 2017; Cracolici and Nijkamp, 2009). However, to use the attractions existing in a given place, they must be available (Biswas, Omar, and Rashid-Radha, 2020). It is precisely this availability that is often problematic in the conditions of a pandemic and the related restrictions. They can be a factor in making tourist decisions.

The aim of the article is to determine the impact of the pandemic on nautical tourism practised by Poles in terms of their decisions. The following research questions were posed:

1. Has the pandemic affected cruise lines as planned by sailors? (Q1)
2. Has the pandemic affected the length of cruises organized by sailors? (Q2)
3. Has the pandemic affected the composition of the cruise crew? (Q3)

Nautical tourism is relatively rarely the subject of scientific research. In Poland, there are also no centrally kept statistics and reports that could facilitate this. Due to the topicality of the topic, it is difficult to find other sources analyzing the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on sailing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the article is pioneering and fills the existing research gap. The presented analyzes and conclusions may also be a valuable source of knowledge for entities managing the development of tourism.

2. Methodology

The research conducted for the article included an analysis of the Polish regulations on restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of their potential impact on nautical tourism by Polish sailors. Based on participant observation and a review of the literature, the features of nautical tourism were also identified, which may be significant concerning the risk of coronavirus infection or connection with the introduction of related restrictions. To achieve the main goal of the article, which was to determine the impact of a pandemic on nautical tourism in terms of decisions made by tourists, a CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) survey was carried out. The survey form was made available on Polish sailing forums and Facebook profiles of sailing associations. The study lasted from 1 February to 28 February. 2021, 85 completed forms were collected during this time. Mathematical and statistical methods were used to analyze the data. The obtained information allowed to obtain answers to the research questions formulated for the article.

3. Restrictions on Sailing in Poland in 2020 and the Specificity of Nautical Tourism in the Aspect of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, nautical tourism in Poland was influenced by the applicable regulations and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it should be emphasized that frequent changes took place in this area, which could cause a lot of confusion about what is currently and what is not allowed. The legal basis for the

regulations in force was the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of May 2, 2020 on the establishment of certain restrictions, orders and bans in connection with the occurrence of an epidemic (Regulation, 2020). The most important regulations that had an impact on sailing are, first of all, time limits for entrepreneurs to conduct: service activities related to the improvement of physical condition and activities related to sports, entertainment and recreation. In practice, they meant a ban on training activities related to sailing, organization of regattas, and most importantly, the activities of yacht ports.

Fortunately, these regulations were in force for a relatively short time and before the high sailing season, these facilities were opened, making it possible to practice sailing. Until further notice, it was also forbidden to organize assemblies and events, meetings and gatherings of any kind, except for the meetings of a given person with their relatives. This meant that in the first months of the restrictions (from March to mid-May), the yacht's crew could only consist of members of the immediate family. Throughout the sailing season, however, there were recommendations to keep the so-called social distancing and covering the mouth and nose with a mask or other item of clothing. The obligation to maintain a two-meter distance between people forced to keep such a distance from other people, e.g., in yacht harbours.

Bearing in mind that some of the most popular sailing waters in Poland are of a cross-border nature, it should be noted that sailing in Poland was largely influenced by the regulations in force in neighbouring countries. Border crossing restrictions largely eliminated the possibility of international shipping. This resulted not only in the impossibility of Polish sailors to sail on foreign waters, but also made it impossible for foreign sailors to come to Poland. Although it should be noted that here too, the regulations were subject to frequent changes. They often covered specific regions and there was no reciprocity. For example, from March to August 2020, one-day Polish tourists were forbidden to enter (and enter) the areas belonging to the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, while residents of the state could easily come and sail to Poland (gov.pl).

Nautical tourism is very specific. It is classified as active tourism, and its practice is associated with frequent travel between yacht ports, communing with newly met people (who may be part of the yacht's crew) and intensive contact with the natural environment (Łapko, 2015). It aims to meet the various needs of participants - from practising sports to relaxation and entertainment (Ćorluka and Musinov, 2018). It is also characterized by great independence from enterprises that are organizers of tourism. Trips related to nautical tourism are usually organized by participants themselves or through small, specialized travel agencies. Participants usually decide on their own about the choice of the cruise route and the frequency of calls to ports. In this context, nautical tourism can be classified as one of the forms of alternative tourism (Sumathi *et al.*, 2018).

During a voyage onboard a yacht, sailors usually stay in a group of several or a dozen or so people, naturally being isolated from others. Contact with people from outside the crew can only take place in the yacht ports. A very important issue is the equipment of the units, which usually allows you to sleep and cook on board the yacht, which means great independence from the onshore accommodation and catering facilities. Because most of the cruises are organized by the participants themselves, in many cases travels to/from the port are also organized on their own.

Summarizing these factors, considering sailing through the prism of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related threats and restrictions, it should be stated that sailing can be considered one of the safest forms of tourism. The most important features that determine this include:

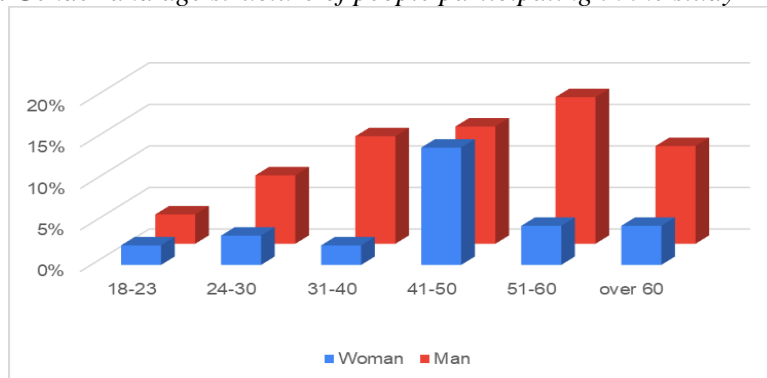
- Ease of keeping distance between other yachts, both in the port and during the voyage, and thus the ability to isolate crew members from other people. This reduces the risk of infection during a tourist trip.
- Influence on the selection of the composition of the crew. This feature applies to self-organized cruises, which constitute the vast majority of all cruises.
- High autonomy of yacht crews resulting from the usually existing kitchen and accommodation facilities on board. This eliminates the need to look for accommodation on land and use restaurants. This is very important as the possibility of providing such services in various periods of the pandemic was banned or severely limited. The existing infrastructure also allows to limit the number of ports visited on the way, which may be important if the epidemic situation in a given region worsens.
- Possibility of flexible planning of the cruise route - introducing corrections to take into account the current restrictions regarding, for example, border traffic.
- In many cases, travel to a departure port is organized on your own, using your own transport. This gives a lot of independence in the event of restrictions on the use of public transport or the suspension of certain air and rail connections. It also reduces the risk of contamination on the way to / from the port.

4. Results

The study included 85 participants. Most of the respondents were men. They constituted over 68% of respondents, the most numerous age group among men was 51-60 years old, and among women 41-50 years old. The smallest number of respondents of both sexes were between 18 and 23 years old, in total it was about 6% of the respondents (Figure 1). All respondents were active sailors - the average time of declared sailing was about 10 years. The research shows that the pandemic influenced sailing decisions. Nearly 57% of the respondents answered that they had sailed less. Only 21% said it had no impact on the frequency of their sailing in 2020.

The pandemic also affected the duration (length) of cruises carried out in 2020 (research question Q2). 38.8% of the respondents stated that the length of their cruise had been shortened (men responding in this way constituted 22.4% of all respondents, and women 16.5%). Some respondents - 18.8% declared that their flights were longer than in previous years. 42.4% of the respondents did not notice any correlation between the COVID-19 pandemic and the length of their cruises.

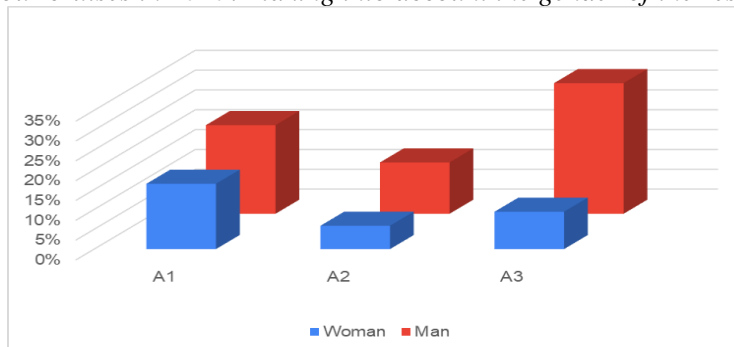
Figure 1. Gender and age structure of people participating in the study



Source: Own study.

Among the respondents, men prevailed (32.9% of all respondents) - the results are presented in Figure 2. In the group of people whose cruises were shorter, there was a clear majority of people aged 41-50 years, and a large group of sailors aged 60+ was also represented here. The smallest age difference was observed in the group of people who did not notice any correlation between the pandemic and the length of the cruises they made in 2020 (Figure 3). The results of the conducted research showed a clear relationship between the pandemic and the cruise routes that were made by the respondents in 2020 (research question Q1). This is shown in Figure 4.

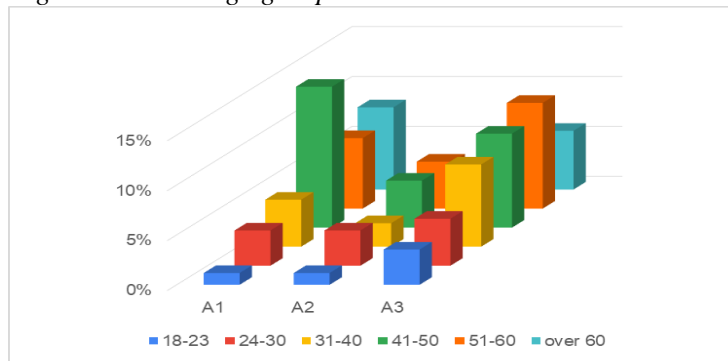
Figure 2. Distribution of responses to the question "Has the pandemic affected the length of your cruises in 2020?" taking into account the gender of the respondents



Note: A1- The duration of my cruises has become shorter; A2-The duration of my cruises has increased; A3-Had no impact.

Source: Own study.

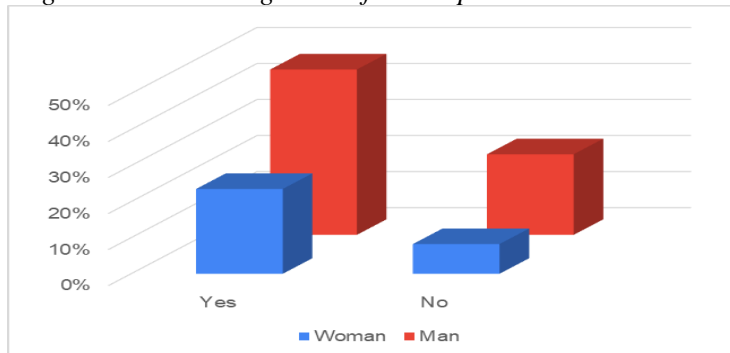
Figure 3. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the length of flights carried out in 2020, taking into account age groups



Source: Own study.

As many as 37.6% of the respondents had to modify their plans for the planned route. The majority of people noting a relationship between their cruises and the epidemic situation were men (41.2%).

Figure 4. Distribution of answers to the question "has the pandemic affected your routes?" taking into account the gender of the respondents



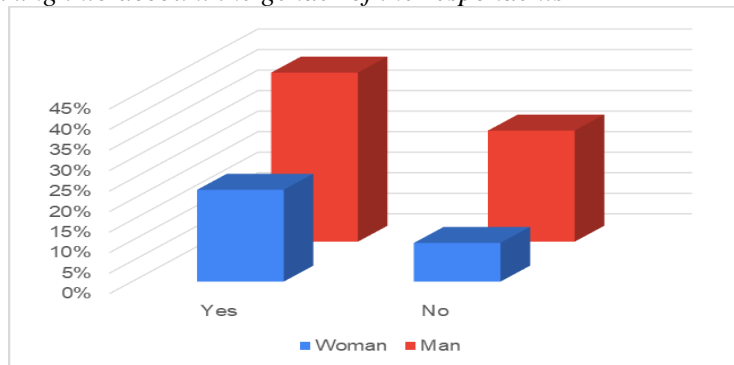
Source: Own study.

This was very often due to the applicable restrictions. Some sailors were forced to abandon voyages abroad, or they gave them up voluntarily, for fear of a sudden closure of borders or the obligation to introduce compulsory quarantine or to conduct a coronavirus test (24.7% of respondents). The Baltic Sea and the Szczecin Lagoon - transboundary waters appeared among the most frequently mentioned Polish reservoirs. Cruises on these waters are often international in nature, so the restrictions related to crossing the borders in force in other countries had to be noticed by Polish sailors and influenced their behavior.

In some cases, the modification resulted from the cancellation of a race in which the sailor was going to participate. Some people (18.8%) limited the number of ports visited for fear of becoming infected.

The results regarding the composition of the crew and its potential modification in relation to the risk of infection are very interesting (research question Q3). The vast majority of respondents stated that the pandemic had an impact on the composition of the crew (41.2% of the respondents were men, and 22.4% were women) - Figure 5.

Figure 5. Distribution of answers to the question "Has the pandemic affected your routes?" taking into account the gender of the respondents



Source: Own study.

The questionnaire also asked what exactly this impact consisted of. The answers are presented in Table 1. The respondents could choose more than one answer to this question and provide their own answer, so the obtained percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 1. The method of the impact of the pandemic on the crew composition during cruises carried out in 2020

Impact of the pandemic on the crew composition:	%
The crew composition was limited to the immediate family	22,4%
The crew composition was limited to the closest friends	23,5%
There was a problem with completing the crew for the cruise	15,3%
There have been last minute cancellations due to coronavirus infection or quarantine	16,5%
I did not notice the relationship	37,6%
I was sailing alone	1,2%
Other	3,6%

Source: Own study.

According to the presented data, some of the respondents took care to limit contacts with strangers during the cruises and sailed only in the company of their closest family and good friends - people with whom they have daily contact anyway. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 disease did not spare sailors, because quite often (in over 16% of respondents) there were sudden cancellations from the cruise due to the disease or the need to quarantine.

People who managed to go on a cruise often observed changes resulting from the existing epidemic situation, it is presented in Table 2. Also in this case, the respondents could choose more than one answer to this question and provide their own answer, the obtained percentages do not add up so up to 100%.

Table 2. Answers to the question "what observations did you make during your cruises in 2020?"

Observed changes:	%
There were definitely fewer yachts in the ports	38,8%
Seeking in ports, sailors rather kept their distance	16,5%
Personal protective equipment (masks, disinfection, gloves) were required and enforced in the ports.	42,4%
It was more difficult to provide the yacht with food	2,4%
It was harder to eat in the port area	38,8%
Other	8,6%
I didn't notice the difference	20%

Source: Own study.

According to the presented data, most respondents observed changes related to compliance with the sanitary regime in ports. For part of the sailing season, all eateries were closed to visitors, which, as you can see, was also noticed by many respondents.

5. Conclusions

After analyzing the obtained results, it should be stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on nautical tourism of Polish sailors. The sailing season 2020 was definitely special and, unfortunately, not in a positive sense. Some of the respondents were forced to change the route of their scheduled cruises (Q1). It often resulted from the binding restrictions related to, inter alia, with restrictions on crossing borders. These restrictions, as well as restrictions introduced in the country, probably contributed to the fact that most of the respondents were forced to modify the length of their trips. Some had to lengthen them and some shorten them (Q2). There was also a correlation between the pandemic and the composition of the crew. There were last-minute resignations (caused by an illness or the need to undergo quarantine), and contacts with strangers were also limited. Although, of course, some of the respondents declared that due to the pandemic no modifications were made to the crew composition (Q3).

Referring to the identified features of nautical tourism that are important in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be said that to a large extent it allowed to avoid the cancellation of the cruise. Contrary to the necessity to resign from trips organized by traditional travel agencies, here it was possible to modify the trip in such a way that it could be implemented despite the existing restrictions. This is a valuable observation, due to the fact that the coronavirus pandemic may also

continue in the 2021 season. Scientists also point out that further pandemics may occur in the future. Entities managing the development of tourism in the regions should bear this in mind and take care of the development of those types of tourism, which (like nautical tourism) give participants great flexibility and allow for the trip despite the existing restrictions.

These results only present the conduct of Polish sailors. It is planned to extend to other European Union countries in the future.

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