
Factors Influencing the Choice of Travel Destination of Angling-Related Tourists Visiting Szczecinek County, Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article presents a case study of an area located in north-west Poland, where angling tourism is becoming an increasingly important part of its local economy and may constitute an opportunity / threat to the condition of the natural environment.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The factors influencing the choice of travel destination were analysed in a survey that applied the CAWI technique.

Findings: The main purpose of tourist trips was fishing and rest by the water and the fishing is practiced regularly throughout the year, and summer is the most preferred season. The factors determining the choice of a tourist destination included the quantity of fish and the quality of the stock, the availability of fisheries, as well as tourist and landscape values.

Practical Implications: The article stresses the significance of developing angling-related tourism as a factor of socio-economic development of regions. This form of tourist activity may bring more and more income to the county's inhabitants who provide services in this field in the nearest future.

Originality/Value: The review of the world's contemporary literature on angling-related tourism and original CAWI research results has been presented.

Keywords: Recreational fishery, angling-related tourism, tourism-based recreational fishery.

JEL codes: O13, O44, R11.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The importance of world commercial capture fishing has been declining significantly for many years while, with the socio-economic development, the role of recreational fishing has been in the growth phase (Hickley, 1998). A similar phenomenon has also been observed in Poland (Czarkowski and Kapusta, 2016).

FAO (2012) defines recreational fishing as fishing for marine animals (mainly fish), the main purpose of which is not to meet individual nutritional needs, and moreover, the results of fishing are not generally intended for sale, nor are they exported or traded on the domestic market. Amateur fishing, however, should not be equated with angling.

According to Czarkowski and Kapusta (2016), the term angling defines fishing with the use of a specific tool (rod), but does not define its purpose (recreation, obtaining fish as food or selling for profit). In other words, using a fishing rod does not mean practicing recreational fishing, but the purpose for which this form of activity is undertaken.

Recreational fishery is currently the dominant form of freshwater and coastal use in many highly developed countries in the world. World estimates indicate that from 220 million (World Bank 2012) to even 700 million people worldwide (Cooke and Cowx, 2004) are engaged in this form of social activity. By comparison, the commercial fishing sector employs only 120 million people and the global revenues of this sector amounted to USD 274 billion in 2007, while the expenditures of fishing practitioners reached USD 190 billion (World Bank, 2012).

The USA may constitute the most spectacular example of the socio-economic importance of recreational fishing in the country scale, where more people fish than play tennis and golf combined and total fishing expenses are \$ 125 billion annually (Depowski, 2005; Hickley, 1998). In Europe, in turn, 25 million people practice fishing and spend EUR 25 billion on the hobby. Widespread though this phenomenon may be, the 7th World Recreational Fishing Conference indicated a large data gap regarding recreational fishery in many developed and most developing countries (Arlinghaus *et al.*, 2016).

As results from the presented data, this issue requires increased attention from both the international, national and regional perspective. The more so because the socio-cultural, economic and environmental significance increases with the increasing number of people doing this type of hobby. What has been of particular concern recently, is the growing negative impacts of recreational fishery on freshwater and marine ecosystems (Cooke and Cowx, 2004).

On the other hand, however, it should be noted that sustainable recreational fishery can bring benefits of both ecological and social nature and contribute to solving

conflicts between fishing and nature conservation needs (Brownscombe *et al.*, 2019). Successful development of recreational fishery requires the introduction of administrative / legal restrictions preventing the fish stock from overexploitation and maintaining its suitable stock structure (Cowx, 2015).

2. Literature Review

As emphasised by researchers, recreational fishery has been subject to dynamic changes in recent years (Brownscombe *et al.*, 2019). This particularly applies to countries undergoing rapid socio-economic changes. Unfortunately, the authorities and public opinion of these countries do not appreciate the social, economic and ecological importance of recreational fishery, which results in insufficient adjustment of legal regulations and ineffective management methods (Arlinghaus *et al.*, 2016; Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020).

This issue, therefore, requires more attention in both scientific and practical aspect. Poland, which entered the path of a market economy after 1989 and has been a member of the European Union since 2004, belongs to the group of emerging economy countries. It has been observed that, with the socio-economic development, the importance of fishing as a part of the food sector in this country decreases in favour of its recreational importance (Kupren, 2009).

Recreational fishing is currently practiced by approx. 1.5 million Polish people and its total economic value is estimated at approx. EUR 300 million (Kupren *et al.*, 2018). There are excellent conditions for fishing in Poland, e.g. on natural water reservoirs. There are 7,081 lakes across the country with an area greater than 1 ha whose total area amounts 2,813.77 km² (Jańczak, 1996). The total area of the lakes used for fishing is about 2700 km² (Mickiewicz, Wołos 2015).

As Niedziejko (2012) states, the following phenomena have recently been observed in the fishing tourism in Poland:

- the growing number of its participants;
- an increase in demand for a comprehensive, high-quality tourist and fishing offer (travel arrangements, accommodation, use of the fishery and equipment);
- increasing expenditure on angling-related tourism;
- high expectations of fishing tourists with regard to the quantity and quality of fish caught;
- searching for opportunities to purchase a comprehensive tourist and fishing offer in a tourist's place of residence;
- an increase in demand for fishing grounds with good infrastructure, both specialised and related to accommodation and offering high-quality fish stock.

The benefits resulting from the development of angling-related tourism have been noticed in many European Union countries. Due to its significant socio-economic

benefits for local communities, numerous activities have been undertaken to stimulate this tourism sector in recent years. The socio-economic significance of inland fishery particularly applies to rural and slightly industrialised areas and is, additionally, usually associated with the high tourist value of these areas (Cox 2015; Czarkowski *et al.*, 2012).

In Poland, such areas involve lakeland areas occupying the northern and western part of the country (Czarkowski *et al.*, 2012). These are touristically attractive regions, yet are definitely less frequently visited by tourists than the coastal zone. As researchers indicate, the natural connections between tourism and recreational fishing are conducive to establishing cooperation between the interested stakeholders (Czarkowski, 2019).

Szczecinek County is one of the areas where such attempts are being made (Głąbiński, 2021). It is located in the central part of the Pomeranian Lake District, in north-western Poland (Figure 1). There are 108 lakes in this county with their total area of 7,942.6 ha, which is almost 3% of Poland's lakes that are exploited for fishing. It is an area of great tourist value, especially of a natural character. Referring to the presented facts and opinions regarding recreational fishery and its connections with tourism, an attempt has been made to analyse the issue in this area.

3. Methodology and Research Proceedings

The correct selection of respondents remains one of the basic problems in empirical research of tourists. The basic difficulty is the circumstances related to travel, which are not conducive to the reliability and completeness of the answers, especially in the case of carrying out research in the place of temporary stay of tourists.

This is even more true for fishing tourists due to the nature of their form of tourist activity (isolation, the need to maintain silence, being dispersed over a large area, various forms of accommodation, usually individual travel). In view of the above, a decision was made to apply the diagnostic survey method, taking into account the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview).

For this purpose, a cooperation was established with the editors of the most famous magazine for anglers in Poland, which is "Wiadomości Wędkarskie", which also runs the website www.wiadomosciwedkarskie.com.pl. The website placed a questionnaire containing 10 closed questions with the use of a Likert scale and a metric.

The condition for taking part in the study was to declare at least one stay in the county, the main purpose of which was fishing tourism. The study was being conducted from the beginning of August to the beginning of December 2019. A total of 209 correctly completed questionnaires were collected. The data obtained in the survey were entered into Excel and then analysed by means of tables and charts.

4. Results

Research on the behaviour and preferences of angling tourists in Poland has so far been conducted on a small scale (Czarkowski *et al.*, 2018; Prószyńska-Bordas and Frąckiewicz, 2016). In addition, the relationship between recreational fishing and tourism was more often noticed in marine rather than inland waters (Marciniak and Kałuża, 2010). The Pomeranian Lake District, the area of Szczecinek county in particular, has not been the area of research related to fishing tourism so far.

The research conducted in the neighbouring areas (Drawa catchment) concerned the problem of fishing pressure and fishing itself rather than the behaviour of fishing tourists (Czerniawski, Sługocki, and Domagała, 2015). Therefore, some issues related to the behaviour of angling tourists were selected. In the questionnaire study, they were formulated in the form of research questions concerning:

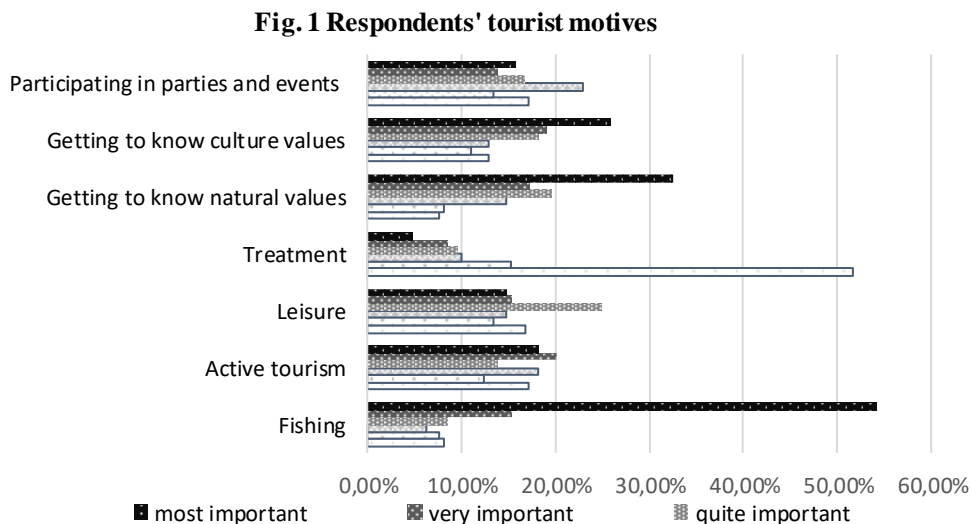
1. Respondents' travel motives.
2. Specific travel destinations related to fishing tourism.
3. Evaluation of tourist and fishing attractiveness of Szczecinek County.
 - 3.1 Respondents' tourist motives.

As expected, the respondents marked fishing to be the most important destination (54%), followed by getting to know natural values (32.5%) and cultural values (25.8%), participating in parties and events (18.2%) %). Such results indicate that it is fishing itself that is the main motive for tourist trips for people participating in the study (Figure 1). Fishing and leisure by the water were also pointed by other anglers in Poland as the most significant travel destinations (Czarnkowski *et al.*, 2018, Kupren *et al.*, 2018).

Thus, despite the lack of representativeness of the surveyed sample, it can be stated that the results of the survey presented in the further part of the analysis largely reflect the views of people for whom fishing is an important leisure activity. This increases the interpretation possibilities and the credibility of the obtained results in relation to the entire angling community in Poland.

The significance of fishing as a tourist destination was confirmed by the approach to practicing this form of activity. Over 67% of the respondents practiced fishing at least regularly, 25% at least several times a year and only 7% do not fish.

Therefore, it can be concluded that fishing is an important form of spending free time for the vast majority of respondents participating in the study. Similar conclusions were reached by Kupren *et al.* (2018), who found that 60% of anglers go fishing more than 30 times a year.

Figure 1. Respondents' tourist motives

Source: Own elaboration based on survey research.

As it was stated, the respondents' most important purpose of travel were motives related to practicing fishing. Therefore, another important issue was to study the factors affecting the choice of travel destinations. 14 elements that may influence decisions in this respect have been identified. The following were indicated as the most important (decisive or significant) by the respondents: the quantity of fish (over 80%), the quality of the fish stock (over 77.7%), tourist and landscape values (65%), fishing infrastructure (over 62%), availability of information about fisheries (over 50%), ease of access (over 45%).

Other factors were less important, among others, fishing competitions (42%), hotel infrastructure (nearly 40%), a possibility to rent a boat (over 36%). The existence of commercial fisheries was of least importance (over 12%).

Finally, the respondents were asked to assess the fishing attractiveness of the vicinity of Szczecinek. It should be noted that the question deliberately did not include the term Szczecinek County, as the affiliation of a given area to a given administrative unit is of little importance to tourists. They perceive tourist attractiveness rather through places with the highest level of it, often called tourist icons, rather than through clearly separated administrative borders.

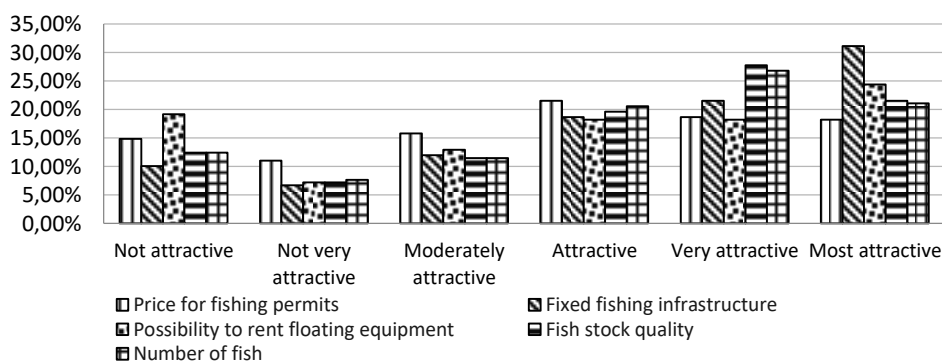
Nine categories of attractiveness from the point of view of fishing tourism were distinguished in this study (Figures 2, 3). The number of fish in the analysed area was assessed first. The vast majority of respondents rated this factor as at least attractive (more than 68% in total). The same rating was given to the quality of the fish stock (over 68%).

These views reflect a broader problem regarding the state of fish stocks in inland waters, which many anglers believe is deteriorating, and therefore areas of high quantity and quality of fish are most valued (Czarkowski *et al.*, 2018) (Figures 2, 3).

The spatial differentiation of factors within Szczecinek County was not analysed, but the permanent fishing infrastructure was considered at least attractive by over 71% of the respondents. Undoubtedly, this assessment is averaged and probably applies to areas with the highest level of development in the county.

The availability of information on fisheries was also assessed by the majority of respondents as at least attractive (64.12% in total). Fishing competitions held in this area were assessed in a similar way. As many as 62.2% of respondents assessed them positively.

Figure 2. *The fishing attractiveness of Szczecinek county part 1*



Source: *Own elaboration based on survey research.*

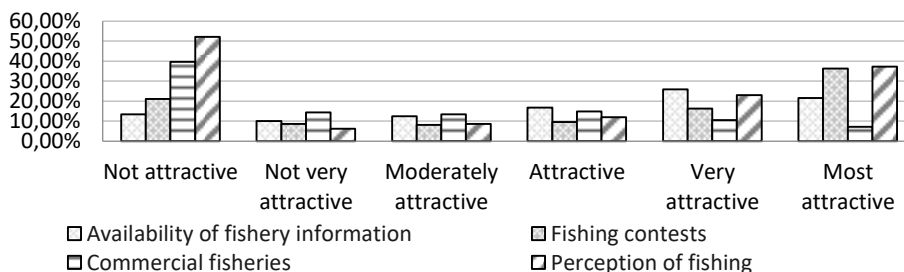
Another question concerned the possibility of renting floating equipment. In the opinion of over 60% of respondents, this aspect was rated as at least attractive. This proves that this factor is also assessed positively.

The prices of fishing permits were also not a factor that would negatively affect the perception of the fishing attractiveness of Szczecinek area. Over 58% of the respondents stated that the prices are at least attractive.

However, the respondents stated that commercial fisheries are not a specialty of the area under study, as over 54% of them in total stated that they are unattractive or not very attractive. Another factor that the respondents perceived rather unfavourably from the point of view of the development of fishing was how it was perceived by local authorities and residents (over 58% of responses in total).

To conclude, the general assessment of the fishing attractiveness was generally very positive. Undoubtedly, the results do not allow to determine whether it concerned the entire Szczecinek County or rather only its part.

Figure 3. The fishing attractiveness of Szczecinek part 2



Source: Own elaboration based on survey research.

5. Conclusion

The results of the research on the behaviour and preferences of fishing tourists visiting Szczecinek County allow to draw the following final conclusions. The surveyed respondents showed many similarities to those previously observed in Poland in the vast majority of the characteristics, preferences and behaviours typical for anglers:

1. The main purpose of tourist trips was fishing and rest by the water.
2. Fishing is practiced regularly throughout the year, and summer is the most preferred season.
3. The factors determining the choice of a tourist destination included the quantity of fish and the quality of the stock, the availability of fisheries, as well as tourist and landscape values.
4. Most anglers indicated that they were more willing to fish from a boat than from the shore, which may indicate a willingness to incur higher expenses due to the need to rent floating equipment.

When it comes to the local conditions, the analysis indicated high fishing attractiveness of the analysed area due to its quality of fish stock and quantity of fish, permanent fishing infrastructure and the availability of floating equipment. The organisation of fishing competitions and the availability of information about fisheries were also positively evaluated.

Therefore, the respondents' general assessment of Szczecinek County in terms of practicing fishing tourism was positive and bodes well for this form of tourism for the future.

The generally positive assessment of the conditions for fishing in Szczecinek County indicates that in the near future this form of tourist activity may bring more and more income to the county's inhabitants who provide services in this field.

Obviously, the basic condition is to conduct proper fishing management and raise the level of environmental awareness among fishing tourists. Properly developed fishing tourism can be a tool for implementing the principles of sustainable development.

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