
Attractiveness of Bicycle Tourism in Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the study is to present the phenomenon of demand for cycling tourism by means of a qualitative method, based on reports of the Polish Tourist Organisation (PTO). The attempt was made with the help of an in-depth perspective of people practising cycling tourism, including among others: their previous experience of cycling, assessment of the infrastructure available in Poland and their expectations towards cycling trips.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The following qualitative research methods were used in this paper: online focus group interviews (FGI - Focus Group Interview, Telephone in-depth interview (TDI), inventory and scoping review.

Findings: Increased tourist activity with the use of the bicycle as a means of transport has been observed. The period of pandemics and limited possibilities to stay in larger human concentrations has accentuated the mentioned phenomenon. The bicycle is not only a form of transport to the workplace, but also a means of leisure, tourism and recreation. Urban development strategies assume the development of cycling infrastructure, also in the area of strict city centres, however, a direct assessment allows to verify its condition, quality and accessibility for users. The obtained opinion is an extremely valuable source of information, allows to create further plans and to implement them in the future by, among others, local authorities of towns and cities.

Practical Implications: The results of the research may be used for promotional purposes, e.g. by institutions supporting the development of tourism in the region, by tourism organisers, promoting cycling tourism products, such as cycling routes or active ways of spending leisure time, by non-governmental and governmental organisations, for educational purposes by educational establishments.

Originality/Value: Application of qualitative methods to quantify the growing phenomenon of cycling tourism. Carrying out a survey among respondents from the entire country. Comparison of opinions of users of cycling routes and organisers of cycling tours (entrepreneurs). Possibility of comparing the results with other quantitative statements of the phenomenon of active - cycling tourism in the world.

Keywords: Active tourism, cycle tourism, cycle routes, cycle tours.

JEL Classification: L83, O35, Z32.

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1. Introduction

In recent years cycling tourism in Poland has experienced a renaissance. What is happening in the related infrastructure makes us optimistic. The process implemented by local authorities of cities is to move wheeled traffic away from city centres, to increase the number and range of cycle routes, to network cycle routes with, among others, public transport stops, to create opportunities to commute by bicycle to workplaces (Biernat, 2018). New routes are being created. Provinces, districts or municipalities are creating trail concepts in their areas. International, national or regional routes are emerging.

There is a growing interest in this form of active recreation. Cycling tourism is practiced by an increasing number of people (not only during trips, but also in their permanent place of residence), which is in accordance with the realisation of increasing tendency of developed societies to remain in harmony with the principles of healthy lifestyle. This is evidenced by data from the activity reports of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK).

This activity is universal because it can be performed by people of all ages, with different skill levels, in a group or individually. As the number of tourists increases, their preferences and expectations change, largely in line with dominant consumer trends, emerging both on the demand side (including changes related to free time and lifestyle, and the growing influence of fashion media) and on the tourism supply (e.g., creation of tourism products not only by enterprises, but also by tourist regions).

Knowing tourists' expectations and assessing demand, supply and quality is extremely important for entities creating a tourist product. Without this knowledge, entrepreneurs and local authorities are unable to decide what to offer, how much and how (Weiermair, 1997; Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020).

Tourist services, including those related to cycling tourists, require a holistic approach that takes into account the heterogeneous and complementary nature of tourism. The concept of experience quality is better suited to this purpose, i.e., a number of related services (accommodation, food, transport, etc.) and interactions independent of service providers, but determining the assessment of quality (landscape, local population, other service recipients, etc.). (Ritchie, 1997).

Cycling tourism is part of qualified, active tourism. According to the definition, "qualified tourism is temporary, voluntary, requiring physical preparation and the ability to use tourist equipment, frequent changes of place in space, combined with changes in everyday lifestyle, meeting the needs of exercise and physical exercise, information and cognitive needs and personal contact with another environment." social, natural, cultural" (Stasiak, 2015).

The aim of the study is to present the phenomenon of supply and demand for bicycle tourism using a qualitative method, based on reports of the Polish Tourist Organization POT.

2. Literature Review

Research has shown the positive impact of practicing various forms of physical activity, including cycling, on mental and physical health and a healthy lifestyle (Łubkowska, 2015; Bentkowska, 2019; Temjanovski, 2020). The observations also apply to the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that it increased interest in bicycle trips (FB, 2021).

It was found that cycling tourism is the best form of tourism in times of pandemic and epidemic threat because it is practiced individually or in small groups, cycling forces us to maintain a safe distance, tourists take care of their health through movement and physical activity, we stay in fresh air and sun, which strengthens our body. The pandemic also accelerated construction activities and road investments in cities.

Many modernizations and expansions of bicycle infrastructure have been made to increase the attractiveness of this form of commuting in cities, eliminating or limiting car traffic, including in 32 large European cities and 102 US cities (Kraus, 2021). American cities offered costless or cheaper bikesharing, sometimes including free membership, as well as lower fees per hour of use. Some large cities in Europe also offered cheaper bikesharing and even subsidized the purchase and repair of bicycles (ECF, 2021).

The motivations that guide bicycle tourists when practicing this form of activity are examined on the example of Canada and the USA (Abernethy, 2022). Mountain bikers of both nationalities have similar motivations for practicing tourism, i.e. the appropriate climate of the place, conditions on the trail, natural surroundings, features of the trail, provided tourist infrastructure and entertainment options.

Cycling tourism can be a form and way of discovering the attractiveness of city centers. The authors consider the digital identification of cyclists' parking spaces on bicycle routes in Krakow (Banet, 2022) and Beijing (Li, 2023). The analysis shows that cyclists make stops of various lengths in the immediate vicinity of tourist attractions, both natural and anthropogenic.

The use of electric bicycles for mobility purposes has increased particularly in urban contexts, where bicycles have become one of the key elements in the transition to more sustainable cities. Research is being undertaken to identify factors that influence intentions and preferences regarding the consumption of electric bicycles (Mina, 2024).

The subject literature contains research on the choice of everyday means of transport, including a bicycle, through the prism of perceiving the natural environment in which we move, based on the example of Colombia. The decision depended on factors such as travel time, cost, level of service, comfort and safety of cyclists in road traffic.

Research has shown that the main factor limiting everyday cycling is lack of safety, and the possibility of suffering an accident or being attacked weighs much more than the possible economic savings and improvement in health associated with using a bicycle. The results indicated that the quality of supporting infrastructure, investments and initiatives, e.g. on-campus showers, free bicycle parking, planting plants along bicycle routes to ensure safety, are as important as the bicycle paths available along the route (Gutiérrez, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

The aim of the article is to present the phenomenon of demand for bicycle tourism using a qualitative method. Quality measurement was carried out on the basis of an interpretive paradigm using an unstructured questionnaire.

Qualitative methods reject the traditional functionalist approach to analyzing reality based on a pre-adopted model. When assessing quality, both the assessment criteria (attributes) and the assessment itself result from the analysis of respondents' free statements. Qualitative methods mainly use data collection techniques such as: focus group interviews, observations, mystery shopping, non-standardized interviews, and the critical incident method.

For the purposes of this study, 4 online focus group interviews (FGI - Focus Group Interview) were conducted, which were discussions led by a moderator in a group of deliberately selected 8 people - tourists - lasting 120 minutes each, and 3 in-depth telephone interviews (Telephone in-depth interview - TDI).) with bicycle tourism organizers, lasting 60 minutes each. The research was carried out in September 2020.

The respondents were residents of Warsaw, Lublin, Kraków, Białystok, Wrocław and Poznań. These were adults aged 18-65 who declared regular cycling activity and who had or had not participated in an organized group cycling trip in their lives. The aim of the study is to estimate the demand for bicycle tourism in Poland. This attempt was made using an in-depth perspective of people practicing bicycle

tourism, including, among others: their previous experiences related to bicycle travel, assessment of the infrastructure available in Poland and expectations towards offers of trips using bicycles. An inventory and review of the scope of the literature served to expand the research context.

4. Research Results and Discussion

The general results of the conducted research are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Expectations of individual customers (cycling tourists) and travel agencies*

Expectations of individual customers	Expectations of travel agencies
1. A diverse offer in terms of length, intensity, various types of accommodation and scale of luxury 2. A small cycling group with an equal level of advancement 3. Accommodation for 1-2 nights, in single- or double-person rooms, with private bathroom, hot water, restaurant or buffet offering hot breakfasts 4. Covered place for bicycles 5. Integration meetings with a bonfire/barbecue area 6. For those traveling shorter distances, the opportunity to visit monuments 7. Preferred bicycle routes in the most attractive regions of Poland (mountains, sea, Podlasie, Masuria) 8. The need of bicycle transport to the starting point and back 9. The need to luggage transport during the trip 10. Medical care along the route and bicycle service	1. Lack of good marking of bicycle routes 2. Lack of information about bicycle routes in Poland collected in one place (website) 3. No 1-night accommodation for bicycle tours 4. Low availability of transport services for travel agencies - lack of willingness to cooperate, lack of appropriate trailers and transport racks, inadequacy of rail and coach transport to transport bicycles 5. Too few professional bicycle rental companies offering high-quality bicycles to customers

Source: Prepared on the basis of the report of the Polish Tourist Organization POT.

The detailed test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Detailed opinion of individual customers (cycling tourists) on various aspects of cycling tourism in Poland*

Previous cycling experience
- depending on age - different experiences of bicycle tourists - including the length of trips. - middle-aged and mature cyclists made more than 1 bicycle trip in the country and abroad, organized by a tourist agency. - cyclists who did not use the professional service of the agency, most often joined a trip organized on their own by friends
Bicycle trip plans

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cycling is a passion for the respondents, they plan to spend as much time as possible on a bike. - everyone, without exception, would like to take advantage of a bicycle trip organized by the agency, in the country (any type of Green Velo trail) and abroad (Bornholm, Italy, Portugal).
The perfect bike trip
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - up to 40 km per day for beginners and up to 200 km per day for experienced riders. - a safe route, preferably away from car traffic. - combined with other activities, e.g. kayaking. - with access to the swimming pool, sauna and massages near the accommodation.
Assessment of the development of bicycle routes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - routes leading nowhere, having no connection with other routes. - dangerous routes shared with car traffic. - no roofs, shelters with the possibility of bicycle repair. - no sanitary facilities on the route. - lack of catering facilities where you can eat a hot meal.
Assessment of accommodation facilities for cyclists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of availability of accommodation for a larger bicycle group, for 1 night, especially in the summer. - no information about available accommodation facilities along the routes or bicycle trails. - no laundry facilities, also in accommodation facilities. - no roofed bicycle storage.
Assessment of bicycle rental companies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traveling mainly on your own bike due to too few professional bicycle rental companies offering high-quality, technically efficient equipment.
Assessment of transport services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if the travel agency does not offer transport to and from the bicycle trip, it is difficult to get there by public transport if you do not have your own means of transport. - trains lack wagons adapted to transport bicycles.
Evaluation of bicycle service points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficient number of service points and roofed shelters with basic tools in the event of a bicycle breakdown, especially during individually organized trips.
Evaluation of sources of information about bicycle routes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of sufficient information about bicycle routes/trails and infrastructure around the routes. - no paper maps informing about available routes and bicycle trails. - lack of an internet portal and a mobile application providing information about available bicycle routes and trails as well as the infrastructure around them.

Source: Prepared on the basis of the report of the Polish Tourist Organization POT.

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The increased interest in bicycle tourism in Poland is visible not only in the increased number of people taking part in it, but also in the demand for bicycle tourist trips. This is manifested by an increase in the number of companies operating in the country organizing this type of trips: from 8 in 2011 to 40 in 2021 (not including clubs, associations and other unformalized groups individually organizing trips).

There is an increased demand for well-prepared bicycle tourism products, including bicycle trails of various lengths, including: Green Velo, Enduro Trails Bielsko-Biała, Srebrna Góra in Lower Silesia, Karkonosze or Strefa Sudety MTB.

The expectations of tourists taking advantage of organized bicycle trips are evolving. They expect increasingly higher quality of services and accommodation standards, preferably with breakfast included, as well as cyclist-friendly places along the route.

In the case of tourist products such as hiking trails or cycling tourist regions, tourists expect extensive information on the Internet that will help them plan their trip. The practical information that a tourist looks for before leaving includes: a map and guide to the trail/region with available GPS tracks, accommodation, catering, information about the possibility of getting there by public transport, the possibility of renting a good quality bicycle, access to bicycle services, such as service, bicycle shop, transport of bicycles and luggage along the route.

Electric bicycles are a rapidly developing branch of the bicycle industry. More and more people use this type of equipment. This awareness should influence the planning or revitalization of bicycle routes in terms of the possibility of charging electric bicycles. Such solutions are used in Germany, Austria and Italy.

In many regions, work is underway to develop a network of bicycle routes and infrastructure for bicycle tourists. The changes are made by extending existing bicycle routes, thickening the network of bicycle routes and building cyclist-friendly local facilities. An example is the flagship project of implementing the Concept of the West Pomeranian bicycle route network, implemented by the West Pomeranian Voivodeship Government, which has been ongoing since 2016.

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