

# POLICY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN TOURISM

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** City tourism is one of the most frequently chosen forms of tourism consisting of many motives for doing it. On the modern tourist market, there are many negative phenomena that significantly affect the functioning of urban tourist destinations but primarily have an impact on the decisions of potential tourists about choosing cities as a tourist destination. These phenomena pose a threat to the development of both cities and tourism. They are conditioned by endogenous factors, which result from the functioning of the city, and exogenous ones, i.e. those related to socio-economic relations of the city with the environment, including tourist traffic. Cities, as a destination or transit tourist destination, are characterized by high concentration of tourist traffic; hence, the negative phenomena often affect urban tourist space with great intensity. The aim of the study is to present the author's concept of sustainable urban tourism policy assumptions. After presenting the concept of sustainable urban tourism development policy, the following issues will be discussed: basics of tourism policy, urban tourism, sustainable tourism, classification of threats related to the sustainable development of urban tourism. **Material and methods.** The study is of theoretical and conceptual nature. The following research methods will be used: critical analysis of the literature and methods of logical operations. **Results.** The effect of the considerations is to propose the assumptions of the concept of sustainable urban tourism development policy. **Conclusions.** The most important problems related to the functioning of sustainable tourism were indicated, taking into account the impact of tourism on the natural environment and on overtourism.

**Key words:** sustainable development, tourism economy, tourism policy, urban tourism, sustainable tourism

## Introduction

Cities are one of the most common tourist destinations. They are both a destination and, to a large extent, they determine tourist transit traffic. The study presents issues related to threats to the functioning of urban tourist destinations in the context of shaping sustainable tourism. Crisis phenomena were classified, distinguishing exogenous, endogenous and mixed phenomena. The aim of the work is to present the author's concept of sustainable urban tourism policy assumptions. For many years, the issues raised have been popular in scientific studies on the functioning of tourism economy, both in terms of tourism threats, sustainable tourism and tourism policy. Although the examined issues are of interest to the scientific circles, in the tourism market practice these issues remain an important and constantly unsolved problem. The presented assumptions of the sustainable urban tourism development policy constitute the basis for the creation of a competitive tourist offer. Despite the activity of international organizations, governments, territorial self-governments and cooperating institutions that support their activities, the issues of sustainable tourism, generally and particularly in cities, as well as the threats related to tourism in urban destinations, are still a problem that is much more often undertaken in scientific and educational studies than solved in socio-economic practice.

### **Basics of tourism policy**

The tourism market is an important area of interest for the state and its organs. It is reflected in the following areas of activity: economic, connected to the functioning of entities on the supply side of the market, and social, including the impact on social needs in the field of practicing tourism through the

creation of demand, as well as in terms of landscape planning. Tourism policy is a part of general socio-economic policy of the state, combining social and economic objectives and premises for interference of state authorities in economic matters [1, 2, 3]. Tourism policy should be treated as one of the specialized sectoral policies [4], making the direct impact of the state on the tourism market possible and shaping relations with other specialized policies, especially international and regional, industrial, employment, environmental protection, cultural, trade and communication policies.

Regulations at the level of the tourism market result from a pursued tourism policy. Tourism policy should be understood as the activity of the state and its organs based on defining economic and social goals related to tourism as well as selection of appropriate instruments necessary for their implementation, thus leading to shaping the tourism market structure, both on the side of tourism supply and tourism demand, and in supply-demand relations [5]. The main task of tourism policy is to shape the optimal size and structure of tourist traffic and to coordinate the development of tourism with other areas of the national economy [6]. The structure of tourism policy is formed by [7]:

- policy entities – specialized public bodies and institutions supporting them that have competencies determined by the law and use tools of direct influence on other entities of the tourism market,
- policy addressees – tourism entrepreneurs and tourism destinations together with their offers and tourism customers (clients of tourism enterprises and tourists),
- policy methods, also called policy models, i.e. the manner and scope of involvement of state authorities in the processes of the tourism market,

- policy instruments – state authorities' actions subordinated to an applied policy model which are the means of implementing goals and tasks.

The essence of the tourism policy pursued is the activity of national central entities of tourism policy that have a direct and indirect impact on the functioning of the domestic tourism market. In the countries of the European Union, two main authorities are responsible for overall tourism policy at the national level (National Tourism Administration and National Tourism Organization) [7]. Important functions in the system of tourism policy entities are performed by local self-government units: municipality, district and regional ones. Their primary task is to influence socio-economic development (including tourism development) and an improvement in the competitiveness of tourism products. Implementation of tourism policy by competent state authorities requires an identification of instruments that enforce the behavior of individual market participants, especially enterprises and entities at tourism destinations, but also customers (tourists).

Territorial self-government units that fulfill both regulatory and real functions on the tourism market play an important role in the structure of tourism policy entities. The activities of self-government units are decisive in the creation of local and regional tourism products, combining provisions from individual bidders of the direct tourism economy and paratourism services at a tourist destination. By defining the place of tourism in the structure of the local and regional economy, especially by creating tourism development strategies, cooperation and integration of entities from the tourism industry, there are opportunities to stimulate the economy at the local or regional level and create new jobs [8]. The main areas of activity of self-government units in tourism management include the creation, exploitation and management of tourist attractions, including events, investments in tourist and paratourist infrastructure, creation of network cooperation and product consortia, and promotion of a territorial tourism product.

### **Urban tourism**

One of the functions of cities is the tourist function. The significance of this function is increasing, which results from the fact that cities are more and more often chosen as destinations for tourist trips for various motives. They also constitute tourist transit traffic [9]. Urban (city) tourism is one of the most dynamically developing forms of tourism [10, 11] which is becoming one of the most important elements of shaping economic effects in many destinations [12]. It is the basis of creation of socio-economic development, as it influences tourist entrepreneurship in cities [13, 14], the labor market [15] and the standard of living [16]. It is difficult to interpret urban tourism unequivocally. It is due to the wide spectrum of motives of tourist arrivals that are shaped by tourist consumption in cities [17, 18].

Urban tourism that is often interpreted as metropolitan [19] is associated with the destination to which tourist traffic is directed. It is an urban area or, more broadly, a metropolitan area, with extensive urban infrastructure including transport, stay (accommodation and catering), cultural, sport and recreation, entertainment, commercial, communal and other services serving both the needs of tourist traffic and the needs of permanent residents of cities [20, 21]. Typical goals attracting tourists to cities include sightseeing, culture, business, sports, family and social events or shopping. An important element of generating urban tourist traffic is the organization of events which, in large metropolises, are often spectacular in nature and temporarily affect highly-intensified tourism. These events are of sport, cul-

tural, entertainment, commercial and congress nature. However, in the case of some cities, they are of recreational, health (including spa and wellness) and religious one.

### **Sustainable city tourism**

The essence of sustainable development comes down to shaping such development that should enable meeting today's needs without limiting the opportunity for future generations [22]. Therefore, the basis for sustainable development is such development that meets the needs of modern times without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Issues of sustainable development refer directly to urban tourism which, through mass tourism and its constant global growth, has a significant impact on the environment [23]. Not only does high dynamics of tourist traffic in urban destinations bring benefits associated with the improvement in the quality of life and stay at the tourist destination, but also creates dysfunctions of its development related particularly to mass tourism. The issue of protection and prevention of irreversible degradation of the natural environment and, above all, natural tourist values is of particular importance for the quality of life of tourist receptionists and tourists themselves.

The concept of sustainable tourism emerged as a result of research on the links between tourism, environment and development. The basis of the concept of sustainable tourism is to achieve harmony between the needs of tourists, environment and local communities. Sustainable tourism refers to the broadly understood concept of tourist development in an environmentally friendly way in tourist destinations [24]. Responsible and ethical tourism involves organizing tourist travel in a way that ensures full responsibility for the changes caused in other people's lives, in their social, cultural and natural environment. It also means providing tourists with better experiences and tourist companies with greater development opportunities [25]. According to the definition included in Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism Economy, sustainable tourism is understood as one that meets the needs of modern tourists and tourist destinations, while ensuring that these needs can be met in the future [26].

The concept of sustainable tourism development refers primarily to determination of an acceptable increase in the volume of tourism, which would not cause negative changes in the environment, which in turn is crucial for the quality of life in the future. It should be emphasized that sustainable tourism is not a type or form of tourism. Instead, it is a way of functioning, organizing and managing urban tourism economy [27, 28]. It means that from the point of view of urban tourist destination, such competences are possessed by the city's self-government with all institutions and business entities cooperating with the city, serving mainly inbound traffic and dealing with the creation and sharing of the tourist offer. Behaviors and activity of entities operating in urban tourist destinations should create harmonious relations between the broadly understood environment, including both the natural and anthropogenic system, and tourism development. Therefore, it can be concluded that sustainable tourism refers to a situation where negative consequences of tourism activities are not irreversible for the environment, while bringing positive effects to tourists, communities of reception areas, as well as entities providing tourist services.

The use of the concept of sustainable tourism in the conditions of an urban tourist destination applies to all entities involved in the tourism development process, thanks to which it is implemented by tourists, residents, tourist enterprises and

the destination itself [29]. Exploitation of the natural environment and associated natural tourism values in the tourist service process should take tourist use standards into account [30]. The standards regarding the natural environment take the form of indicators of tourist capacity and absorption. Tourist capacity indicates the maximum level of use of tourist infrastructure, resulting e.g. from the number of places in the municipal accommodation base. From the point of view of sustainable tourism issues, the tourist absorption index, which determines the maximum ability of an urban destination to accept the burden of tourist traffic, is more important. This indicator informs us about the size of the load of a surface unit, which, on the one hand, provides guests with optimal conditions of stay, and, on the other hand, makes the upper limit of the permissible load of the environment to the limit of devastation processes. In many urban destinations, significant exceedances of the upper absorption rates are observed. It causes a gradual degradation of the elements of the natural and cultural environment. Most frequently, exceeding of these ratios results from the need to maximize economic profitability, which is the result of intensive development of the tourist economy.

### ***Threats to sustainable city tourism***

The issues of sustainable development are associated with global premises on potential threats to the environment, which are the result of social and economic activities. The most frequently mentioned global threats include the issues of such nature as [31]:

- demographic (environmental pollution is advancing faster than increasing the number of inhabitants),
- geographical (disproportion between the capabilities of the natural environment and development of production factors),
- technical (uncontrolled, from the point of view of ecological requirements, development of modern techniques and technologies),
- economic (producers do not care about the economic side of damage in nature).

The dynamic development of global tourism is conditioned by numerous phenomena that are of both positive nature (stimulating development) and negative one (threats or crises). Threats are mainly exogenous, periodic or permanent, affecting the state of tourism development, and, above all, the level of tourist offer and the level of satisfaction of tourists' needs in urban destinations. It should be borne in mind that tourist traffic, both destination and transit, is accumulated in cities, especially the largest ones. Therefore, the negative phenomena observed in global tourism concern mainly cities and may have a more intense course there than in the case of areas with developed tourist function but peripheral ones. Hence, interest in threats in modern tourism should mainly concern urban destinations, especially large tourist metropolises.

The most common threats, from the point of view of the impact on the state of functioning of urban tourist destinations, include:

1. Exogenous threats, i.e. independent of the functioning of urban tourism [32]:
  - adverse and unexpected changes in the economic situation, with a mega-, macro- and meso-economic range (e.g. tour operator market),
  - natural disasters in cities and neighboring areas,
  - climate changes, especially in cities located near sea basins,

- prolonged adverse weather conditions, mainly in cities of leisure tourist function,
  - industrial disasters in cities and surrounding areas, including transport disasters,
  - social (internal) conflicts not related to overtourism,
  - military and political conflicts (external – bilateral and multilateral),
  - terrorist activities,
  - migration crises,
  - epidemics and pandemics,
  - threats related to the use of information technologies [33].
2. Mixed (exogenous/endogenous) threats, i.e. the processes taking place in urban tourist destinations are imposed by the processes depending on the intensity of tourist traffic overlap:
    - excessive transport congestion [34], causing difficulty getting to and moving around the city's tourist destination [35],
    - the state of functioning of the municipal economy related to tourist services, including public transport, waste management, access to municipal media; an appropriate level of security becomes a potential threat mainly in the conditions of fluctuations in the volume of tourist traffic,
    - the state of the natural environment, including the state of air and water purity [36], as well as resulting from the functioning of the transport system in the city and the state of municipal waste management.
  3. Endogenous – related to the volume and structure of tourism in the city – i.e. overtourism [7].

The listed phenomena are of a diverse nature. Their causes are natural and social (including economic and political factors). The presented threats may affect the interest in the tourist offer of urban tourist destinations with varying severity. All of the above phenomena, in relation to the processes taking place on the tourist market, bring direct social and economic effects.

These threats directly affect the limitation of interest in tourist arrivals in cities and their surroundings covered by the above-mentioned phenomena. However, they can indirectly influence decisions regarding tourist trips generally to neighboring urban destinations, tourist regions, countries or even continents. In extreme cases, they cause an almost complete limitation of global tourist mobility in which large urban metropolises, especially airports, have a decisive role in reaching and transit to tourist destinations. In practice, this is happening for the first time in the history of modern tourism and concerns the COVID-19 pandemic.

Negative phenomena in tourism affect changes in the structure of demand, and thus cause changes on the supply side of the tourist market, limiting the revenues of tourism enterprises and, at the same time, determining the deterioration of the economic situation of cities and people living in them, mainly those employed in the tourism industry.

The most important premise regarding the recognition of threats affecting the state of functioning of urban tourist destinations is widely understood issues related to the security of functioning of both tourism economy entities and, above all, securing the safety of tourists and residents in urban tourist destinations. Sustainable tourism policy also plays an important role in this respect.

### **Assumptions of the concept of sustainable urban tourism development policy**

A constant increase in tourist traffic in many urban tourist destinations and the dynamically progressing development of mass tourism cause an increase in demand for the natural and socio-cultural environment. Pressure on the pace of tourism development may result in the inability to defend the environment. Therefore, public authorities must intervene and issues related to the impact on sustainable tourism within the scope of objectives, activities and financing under the tourism policy must be included. Then, it will be possible to create responsible sustainable urban tourism, which should be the basis for the involvement of all participants, i.e. tourist enterprises, city governments, tourists and residents.

The presented issues regarding threats to the development of sustainable urban tourism should be the basis for actions undertaken by competent tourism policy entities. From the point of view of the policy for the development of urban sustainable tourism, the bodies of municipal self-government along with cooperating institutions are decisive (e.g. local tourist organizations). From the research on sustainable tourism policy carried out by Guo, Jiang and Li [37], the basic issues include ones related to participants in tourism policy (policy entities and recipients), planning goals and tasks as well as climate policy and its impact on sustainable tourism.

Priority measures to develop sustainable urban tourism include [25, 38, 39]:

- striving to preserve and protect nature resources and native culture,
- shaping diversity of natural and cultural assets along with activities that support their maintenance,
- involving residents in the development of tourism (already at the planning stage) and creating new sources of income,
- integrated planning in the urban economy,
- focusing the tourism industry on reducing waste and saving energy and water,
- stimulating pro-ecological behavior among tourist staff, residents and tourists,
- creating international openness and tolerance as well as a healthy lifestyle in harmony with nature,
- promotion, by city authorities, of an open market and free policy exchange of tourist services subordinated to the principles of sustainable development and respecting international environmental law,
- pro-quality initiatives taking into account appropriate ecological development, shaping the relation between tourist growth and city tourism development,
- care for human health, both tourists and residents.

Urban sustainable tourism policy should be a way of encouraging new forms of economic activity through employment policy and promoting environmental protection. The planned activities should be undertaken as part of the participatory process, in cooperation with the municipal government along with direct providers of tourist services, by defining specific goals and indicators of sustainable development in order to limit negative effects of tourism on the environment as well as promoting the preservation of local and traditional values. The adopted goals and tasks, along with the applied sustainable development indicators, should apply to both short- and long-term activities [40]. Risk associated with the policy should be taken into account in the process of task implementation. One of the most common barriers to the practical implementation of sustainable tourism policy is the relation between economic priorities and social and environmental issues. This barrier is,

among others, strongly associated with the short-term policy of local authorities, determined by their term of office. Therefore, short-term goals dominate. Policies for sustainable urban tourism require close coordination of municipal self-government with tourism economy entities and entities representing other economic sectors, i.e. transport, housing, environmental protection and resource protection as well as institutions dealing with the fiscal system, social affairs and resource management [41]. According to the document adopted by OECD countries [42], tourism economy in the context of sustainable development should be treated as an engine of inclusive growth, creating high-quality jobs, business opportunities and regional development, mitigating negative impact on local communities and better dissemination of benefits in the city economy as well as among residents and tourists.

The policy of sustainable urban tourism development should be long-term and lead to an attempt to limit the impact of threats on the functioning of urban tourism economy. These activities should be based on the introduction of policy instruments (economic, administrative and legal, promotional and informational) and indicators for the assessment of sustainable development, ultimately affecting the offer of tourism enterprises, tourists' purchasing behavior, the ratio and mutual relations between tourists and residents, in order to limit negative effects of threats that affect consolidation and development of sustainable urban tourism and to create a competitive tourist offer.

### **Summary**

On the basis of the analyses of issues related to sustainable urban tourism in the face of existing threats, the causes of these phenomena were identified, distinguishing those of an exogenous and endogenous nature and those which, depending on their detailed nature, concern both aspects. One of the most important problems of modern tourism, especially urban destinations, is overtourism. These issues have not been characterized. They result from mass tourism and are widely and thoroughly analyzed in the literature [41, 43]. A less perceived problem related to the functioning of urban tourist destinations are the issues of the condition of the natural environment, an example of which is, among others, air quality. Problems with smog are slightly considered by tourists when choosing urban destinations [44]. Similarly, important problems in securing the decent state of sustainable tourism in the city is the functioning of municipal services in handling inbound tourism, including mainly transport and cleaning. In the field of maintaining sustainable development of urban tourism, taking into account the existing threats, appropriate actions should be taken, especially long-term ones by the municipal government in cooperation with all stakeholders representing the tourist economy (tourism enterprises) along with their clients (tourists) and urban society.

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