

TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TOURISM

The Polish experience

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1. Introduction

Starting from the Eighties new forms of tourism have developed, characterised by shorter holidays, but with a more specific goal. Today tourists are driven by different interests and motivations, and they have at their disposal several ways to put into practice their idea of tourism. They look for new destinations and modes of travelling in line with the requirements of a post-modern society that is unrelentingly moving through a global space (Lemmi 2009, p. 12).

For this reason international experts agree that tourism cannot be seen as a mass phenomenon, rather it should be addressed as post-tourism, where the offer has to be adapted to the demand. In this frame the sociologist John Urry (2002, p. 91) defines the figure of the post-tourist:

The post-tourist knows that he or she is a tourist and that tourism is a series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience. The post-tourist thus knows that they will have to queue time and time again, that there will be hassles over foreign exchange, that the glossy brochure is a piece of pop culture, that the apparently authentic local entertainment is as socially contrived as the ethnic bar, and that the supposedly quaint and traditional fishing village could not survive without the income from tourism.

There are two traits which characterise these new ways of travelling: on the one hand, the borders between tourism and leisure time are fading away; on the other, the distinction between educational experience and entertainment is less and less definite. With regard to entertainment, it is interesting to notice that sometimes it is realised in the so-called 'non-places':¹ places which are specific and peculiar to the contemporary society and which reflect the concept of tourism itself for the modern man.

The experiences of the post-modern travellers are mostly accomplished in such non-places and this very fact invalidates the authenticity of the experiences themselves. Indeed, as Feifer (1985, p. 271) states, the post-tourist is "not a time-traveller when he goes somewhere historic; not an instant noble savage when he

¹ The construction of places devoted to leisure and fun is a recent widespread phenomenon; this refers to man-made attractions, which highlight the ephemeral aspects of the tourist spaces (Augé 1992). These places may be defined as "non-places" or "hyper-real spaces" in opposition to tourist areas with a strong anthropological or geographical value. Urry suggests that a visitor of these non-places lives a virtual experience, where there is no direct contact with reality: "Of course not all members of the world community are equal participants within global tourism. Side by side with global tourists and travellers within many of those 'empty meeting places' or 'non-places' of modernity such as the airport lounge, the coach station, the railway terminus, the motorway service stations, docks and so on are countless global exiles" (Urry 2002, p. 142). A territory becomes a mere support to the development of tourist activities, according to a well-established mechanism of falsification or misrepresentation of reality (such as Disneyland).

stays on a tropical beach; not an invisible observer when he visits a native compound. Resolutely 'realistic', he cannot evade his condition of outsider".

The travellers are aware of the 'non-authenticity' of their touristic experience, they appreciate it, and they enjoy themselves thanks to the amusements and leisure activities specially created for them: "They know that there is no authentic tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played" (Urry 2002, p. 12).

As already mentioned above, the time we are living can be labelled as the time of global tourism. Besides, it is marked by the fact that there are not any places to discover any more, rather there are varied formulas for travelling, which in the long run are destined to further differ, according to social and cultural differences in the demand (Gaworecki 2007, p. 60). On this subject Lemmi (2009) introduces the concept of 'mille turismi' (literally 'a thousand tourisms'), where each tourist requires services that are increasingly diverse and original. The market is both segmented and demanding, therefore the offer must be adapted to it: this results in the creation of innumerable tourist niches linked to the promotion of cultural and environmental resources. In other words, we are currently witnessing the development of alternative forms of tourism, now closer to the needs expressed by the "environmental sustainability" model (Lemmi 2009, p. 11). This new form of tourism is 'shaped' on the physical and social structure of a territory and it is characterised by a careful selection of operational criteria, and by diversified formulas and fluxes. In this way, it is well integrated into the economic, social and cultural frame of a certain tourist destination. For this reason alternative tourism, also called 'soft tourism', is completely different from the traditional idea of tourism: over the years it has been variously defined as ecotourism, "responsible tourism", "compatible tourism", but it is most commonly named "sustainable tourism" (*ibidem*, p. 74; Niemiec 2006, pp. 53-56; see also Fossati, Panella 2002; Cici, Chitotti, Villa 1999). It monitors some key parameters, such as (Gaworecki 2007, pp. 86-87):

- the carrying capacity of tourist areas (number of tourists per hectare);
- water consumption;
- the impact of tourism on soil, uplands and vegetation;
- the pollution and degradation of the ecosystem as well as of monuments and artworks;
- the socio-economic impact of tourism (in terms of jobs and income) and the socio-cultural one (in relation to culture and civilisation).

Furthermore, alternative tourism rejects the package tours provided with the classic 'all-inclusive formula', in favour of more personalised types of travelling and solutions that are more respectful of the people and the places visited (Lemmi 2009, p. 11).

In Poland there is a general tendency, even among the working classes, to take more than one holiday a year. This explains why people are looking for new ways to experience tourism: here the boundaries between one kind of tourism and the other (e.g. education/leisure, business/health and so on) are gradually blurring.

2. Alternative tourism in Poland

It stands to reason that tourism is generally determined as a “space phenomenon” of outstanding importance in several fields, such as the economic, the social and the cultural ones (Żegleń, Cisek 2007, p. 5). Tourism has become one of the strong points of the entire world economy and its turnover is now comparable to that of traditional sectors, such as industry and trade (Alejziak 2000, p. 137).

However, in Poland tourism was long considered secondary to the productive sphere. A significant change inevitably occurred when the Polish economy had to be adapted to European standards (Buczyńska 1995, pp. 163-165). This process began in Poland in the late Eighties with the end of the Communist regime and the People’s Republic of Poland giving way to the Republic of Poland.

Moreover, in the 1990s, when Poland entered the capitalistic world and adopted a new economic system, the Government was obliged to take a series of measures aimed at supporting tourism in the country; among the most consequential measures, we can mention (Żegleń, Cisek 2007, p. 9):

- in 1994, the Government favoured the development of tourism economy and its implementation was entrusted to the Ministry of Sports and Tourism;
- on April 26th 2000 the Council of Ministers approved a national programme for tourism development, which coincided with the issue of various reforms aimed at favouring Poland’s admission to the European Union (on 1st May 2004).

In the 2000 national programme, one of the main objectives was to create a tourism industry that matched European standards and which was to be managed by private companies owing to a lack of state funding.

Today, Poland has finally recognised the leading role of tourism in the production of the domestic product: tourism is considered an effective means towards development and a curb on unemployment (*ibidem*, p. 7). But for this to happen, everyone should do their best to make the place known, appreciated and visited by tourists. In this way, territorial marketing, with its tools and policies, becomes of the utmost importance to promote and advertise the country.

Unfortunately, an inadequate amount of publicity is another weak point of tourism in Poland. It is estimated that the demand for tourist services is increasing by an average of 5% per year (*ibidem*, p. 22). This is due to numerous factors, among which the most important ones are the following:

- lower travel costs, e.g. thanks to low-cost airlines;
- the high quality of tourist facilities and the consequent rise in the number of sites of interest;
- European funding, which has helped to optimize the tourist offer.

The Polish Ministry of Economy has planned a tourism development project to be implemented in the years 2007-2013, which envisages the creation of new jobs, especially through local initiatives (“*Projekt strategia rozwoju turystyki na lata 2007-2013*”, 2005, p. 3).

Even though several regions are endowed with remarkable natural, cultural and historical resources, they are often lacking in infrastructure and have only a small number of luxury hotels and restaurants.

Within the overall strategy for Polish tourist development, as outlined in national and regional plans, there are some points that could help increase alternative forms of tourism. Indeed, one of the central directives of this national plan is the diversification of tourist facilities by taking into account the rich cultural and natural heritage of Poland and consequently by enhancing its territorial diversity.

As for this aspect, many efforts are being put into achieving cooperation between tour operators, local associations, and organisations. All this is matched to adequate professional training, as a way, on the one hand, to sensitize people towards respecting the territory and, on the other, to arrange new intervention strategies to optimize tourism in Poland (Niemięc 2006, p. 5).

Hand in hand with tourism development, the awareness of an inseparable relationship between tourism and environmental quality is gradually gaining ground also in Poland: it is well known that a deteriorated environment nullifies the attractiveness of a country to its tourists, and excessive tourist fluxes have an adverse impact on the environment and on tourism itself.

In the countries where tourism is in a mature phase – which is not the case of Poland – this has led to a few relevant complications, such as progressive impoverishment of territorial resources; unauthorized building; excessive waste, and pollution in general; from an anthropological perspective, loss of local history and culture, especially in small communities (Lemmi 2009, p. 74).

The tourist market significantly affects customs and lifestyle on the whole, so that a lot of cultural events and traditional rituals are frequently performed only in order to amuse and entertain the eager visitors (*ibidem*, p. 78).

To overcome these problems, Poland is developing a new conception of tourism resource management and greater respect for the natural ecosystems, constantly threatened by the effects, sometimes all but positive, of tourism development.

Given the need for a change in the model of socio-economic development in the new millennium and an increasingly close relationship between economic, environmental and cultural issues, alternative tourist trends have emerged, which could turn economically backward areas into competitive ones.

Among the main forms of alternative tourism that can be found in Poland there are (to delve deeper into the issue of various forms of alternative tourism in Poland, see Gaworecki 2007, pp. 161-210): urban tourism; rural and ecotourism; health-spa tourism and medical tourism; lake and beach tourism; and winter tourism.

1.1. Urban tourism

It is generally accepted that large urban areas are the most popular tourist destinations worldwide. Indeed, cities offer tourists a rich heritage of history, art and culture and are characterised by steady tourist fluxes: this is one of the reasons why cities undergo a constant process of change related to the

implementation of new architectural structures with high visual and imaginative impact² (see Ceresoli 2005, p. 109).

This process is focused on a strong interdependence between architecture, culture, fashion, tourism, specific lifestyles, which – often influenced by trends towards mass standardisation – have contributed to the renewal of the urban landscape, beyond the evolution of tourism itself: factors such as culture, innovation and creativity, in fact, are the driving forces behind the revitalisation of the cities, where depressed areas are sometimes given new functions, by promoting an architecture as an ‘icon’ of post-modern times (Lemmi 2009, p. 114).

The expressive architecture often entails drawbacks both from an environmental point of view, traditional character replaced by design, and from a social one, displacement through gentrification,³ which changes the social and ethnic character of the neighbourhood (*ibidem*, pp. 114-155).

The great risk of such a phenomenon is the loss of the local community’s identity: the sense of identification between a nation and its monuments might be fatally compromised, as long as the latter is not turned into cultural property (see Ceresoli 2005, p.113).

Besides, the organisation of cultural and entertainment events can restore the city to its previous prestigious position, back to the centre of a competitive tourism market.

The tourism which takes place in metropolitan areas (urban tourism) can have different purposes (at a local, national or international level): art and culture, business, congresses, trade fairs, exhibitions, religion, education, the so-called ‘hit and run’ tourism and more.

In Poland there are many cities that are prominent leaders in art and international centres and that attract large numbers of tourists every year. The most popular cities are: Warsaw, Cracow, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia,⁴ Poznań, Toruń, Lublin, Częstochowa, and the historic site of Oświęcim, namely the former Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz.⁵

² Two representative examples of unusual buildings are: Krzywy Domek (‘Crooked House’) in Sopot and Złote Tarasy (‘Golden Terraces’) in Warsaw. The first one was built in the centre of Sopot in 2004. It is approximately 4,000 square meters in size and is part of the shopping centre. It was inspired by the fairytale illustrations and drawings of Jan Marcin Szancer and Per Dahlberg. Inside we can find a concentration of shops, restaurants, and drinking establishments (<http://krzywydomek.info/strona-glowna.html>, 10.2013). The second, Złote Tarasy, is a commercial, office, and entertainment complex in the centre of Warsaw, located next to the Central Railway Station. It was opened in 2007. The total area of the building amounts to 205,000 square meters. It includes 200 shops and restaurants, a hotel, a multiplex cinema, with eight screens, 2560 seats, and an underground parking garage for 1,400 cars (<http://www.zlotetarasy.pl/>, 10.2013).

³ “When the ‘urban renewal’ of lower class neighbourhoods with condos attracts yuppie tenants, driving up rents and driving out long time, lower income residents. It often begins with influxes of local artists looking for a cheap place to live, giving the neighbourhood a bohemian air. This hip reputation attracts yuppies who want to live in such an atmosphere, driving out the lower income artists and lower income residents, often ethnic/racial minorities, changing the social character of the neighbourhood. It also involves the ‘yuppification’ of local businesses; shops catering to yuppie tastes like sushi restaurants, Starbucks, etc. come to replace local businesses displaced by higher rents” (definition from *Urban Dictionary*, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gentrification>, 10.2013).

⁴ Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia, in Pomeranian Voivodeship, are three towns together making up the metropolitan agglomeration called in Polish: *Trójmiasto* (Tri-City).

⁵ The Polish cities offer many tourist attractions: picturesque old towns with palaces, churches, and architectural complexes; museums range from art, applied arts, musical instruments to war

Each city has its own website,⁶ which contains any kind of information: general news about Poland, its history, local food, sights and monuments, traditions and customs, cultural events, accommodation and much more. This service is usually offered not only in Polish and English, but also in a variety of languages, such as German, French, Russian, Czech, Spanish, Italian and others.⁷ In addition to the official website, some cities – like Poznań – even give the opportunity to access an English on-line city guide.

These cities provide the tourist with different forms of accommodation (hotels, hostels, bed & breakfasts, flats etc.), since lodging is diversified according to taste and price.⁸

As far as Polish hotels are concerned, although in a socialist mould for many years, today they are no way inferior to the rest of Europe, above all as for the middle-high segment, being the best known international hotel chains present in the country (Polce 2009, p. 135). Hotel industry is in fact mostly represented by hotels built in the new millennium.

On the other hand, among the cheapest traditional hotels in Poland, there are Dom Wycieczkowy and Dom Turysty, which have preserved their socialistic structure and style. Located in central areas of the cities, these hotels, in spite of presenting small rooms, standard plain design, limited number of services, are highly desirable for the major hotel chains: they are trying to buy the old Soviet hotels in such cities as Cracow, Łódź, Gdańsk and Warsaw, where tourism is greatly developed. This approach is having a positive effect on the overall level of services in Polish hotels, which have to compete and improve their quality. For example, hotel rooms in the oldest Polish network Orbis⁹ provide higher and better standards than the traditional ones. Room prices in Polish hotels depend not only on the level of the hotel, but also on the area where it is located and on the season. The highest season in Poland which affects the urban tourism is May-September. Indeed, hotels in Cracow, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Sopot, Gdynia, Warsaw and other major Polish cities, during the summer, as a rule, raise their prices.¹⁰

The solutions for youth accommodation are growing: modern and coloured hostels are mushrooming in the young people's favourite cities.

The tourist promotion of Polish cities and regions relies on the help of such institutions as *Centrum Promocji Miast*¹¹ and *Agencja Promocji Miast i Regionów*.¹² In Warsaw a Festival dealing with the promotion of cities and regions was started in 2007, which takes place every year in September, organises

memorabilia and ethnography; impressive monuments, included by UNESCO in its heritage list; and zoological gardens, botanical gardens, arboretum, numerous parks (<http://www.international-travel-tours.com/poland/cities.html>, 10.2013).

⁶ The official websites of these cities are: Cracow, <http://www.krakow.pl/>; Warsaw, <http://www.krakow.pl/>; Lublin, <http://www.um.lublin.pl/>; Gdańsk, <http://www.gdansk.pl/>; Sopot, <http://www.sopot.pl/eGmina/pl/>; Gdynia, <http://www.gdynia.com/>; Łódź, <http://uml.lodz.pl/>; Poznań, <http://www.poznan.pl/>; Wrocław, <http://www.wroclaw.pl/>; Toruń, <http://www.torun.pl/>; Oświęcim (Auschwitz), <http://pl.auschwitz.org.pl/m/> (10.2013).

⁷ Obviously, if the websites are intended for the domestic tourism, then they are available only in Polish and English.

⁸ Two popular websites to book Polish hotels are: www.staypoland.com/; www.enterhotel.pl (10.2013).

⁹ The Orbis Hotel Group was founded in the 1920 and today is the largest hotel network in Poland, managing nearly sixty hotels under the Etap, Ibis, Mercure, Novotel, Sofitel and Orbis Hotels brands <http://www.orbis.pl/> (10.2013).

¹⁰ <http://www.city-of-hotels.com/183/poland/1.html> (10.2013).

¹¹ <http://www.miasta.org.pl/?p> (10.2013).

¹² <http://www.apmir.org/> (10.2013).

conferences and workshops, and publishes material on promoting strategies. Besides, the same Festival launched a competition called “*Złote Formaty*” (‘Golden Formats’), with the purpose of awarding a prize to the cities which succeeded in the best tourist promotion.¹³

There are a lot of Tourism and Recreation Fairs, arranged in Warsaw annually.

In order to attract both domestic and foreign tourism, the city promotion is more and more frequently entrusted to agencies and specialised institutions, which make use of new and more effective forms of publicity: TV advertising, internet, press and others.

1.2. Rural tourism and ecotourism

The first investigation of organic farms in Poland was carried out in 1990 on the basis of the Organic Agriculture Criteria of EKOLAND Association and worked out according to the guidelines of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). Since then, we have observed a continuous development in organic agriculture, with different growth rates in different periods, depending on expertise levels, market conditions and subsidies (Łuczka-Bakula, Smoluk, Czubak 2004, p. 110).

One of the precursors of ecotourism is ECEAT-Poland. In Poland, rural tourism and ecotourism¹⁴ developed in the Nineties following the initiative of the association *ECEAT –Europejska Centrum Rolnictwa Ekologicznego i Turystyki w Polsce* (‘European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism’) – active in several European countries, which began to spread the *EAT (Eko-Agro-Turystyka)* project.¹⁵

ECEAT is the leading European organisation in the field of small-scale sustainable tourism with a special attention to rural areas and organic farming. Organic farming is a form of agriculture that excludes the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Organic farmers try, as far as possible, to rely on natural strategies in order to maintain soil productivity and control pests. Organic agriculture can be considered a subset of sustainable agriculture, the difference being that organic implies certification in accordance with legal standards (Niemiec 2006, pp. 54-55). Organic methods are studied in the field of agroecology. *ECEAT*-Poland is non-profit, charitable and educational association. They help preserve precious cultural and natural landscapes and the traditional way of life of rural people, while supporting the growth of organic farming and nature protection.¹⁶

Farms are located in rural and hilly regions, where tourism helps produce income and enhance the landscape and the environmental resources. Tourist activity in these areas also contributes to support housing estates and productive structures (agricultural, trading, hand-crafts) that can now hardly survive on a local economic basis. The high environmental, artistic, historical and cultural

¹³ <http://www.outdoordlamiast.pl/> (10.2013).

¹⁴ The term ‘ecoagritourism’ has been existed in literature for some years. This kind of agritourism denotes the stay on farms, whose workers cultivate soil and produce food by means of organic methods. They must be farms which possess a certificate (Zaręba 2006, p. 52).

¹⁵ The Eco-Agro-Tourism project (EAT) was started in January 1993 and the coordination team, which was formed in Poland, was later transformed into the independent, non-governmental, non-profit association *ECEAT*-Poland. The *ECEAT* websites are: <http://eceptoland.pl/en/projects.html>; <http://eceptoland.pl/index.php> (10.2013).

¹⁶ <http://www.poland.eceat.org/abouteceat.htm> (10.2013).

quality of these areas determines the development of highly attractive tourist destinations.

Customers mainly come from developed, urbanised and industrialised areas and look for comfortable accommodation in rural houses, modernised and adapted, where they can experience traditional habits, rural foods and natural activities: walking, hiking, visiting national parks, recreational or outdoor sports, tasting natural products and so on (Gaworecki 2007, p. 78).

Ecotourism (Zaręba 2006) especially addresses a developing market segment, which is rapidly growing, even though it basically remains a niche phenomenon. It is characterised by a number of key aspects:

- first of all, it focuses on the observation of nature;
- second, it aims at reducing the negative effects caused by traditional tourism on the environment and society;
- third, it essentially has an educational character;
- fourth, it contributes to environmental protection;
- finally, it raises the tourists' and the local community's awareness of such issues as the respect for the environment and the preservation of culture.

Poland is a country characterised by a rich environmental heritage, mostly unspoilt: it is a true temple of ecotourism. The main activities for ecotourists in Poland are hiking, bird watching and cross-country skiing. In addition to this, some 'agrihouses' even have their own ethnographic museums: here tourists can get acquainted with the local traditions and objects which belong to the history of these places.

Thanks to Poland's unspoilt countryside, it is possible to experience ecotourism across all the country. Polish farmhouse holidays offer excellent opportunities for the recreation with children, who can enjoy the fresh air or play in specially-equipped yards.

Over the last few years the places which have been considered the main tourist attractions are: Pobrzeże Bałtyku, Pojezierze Mazurskie, Tatras and Podhale, Bieszczady, the national park near the river Narew (Narwiański Park Narodowy), Puszcza Knyszyńska (Park Krajobrazowy Puszczy Knyszyńskiej),¹⁷ Pomorze Zachodnie, Ziemia Lubuska,¹⁸ and the Carpathians.

Other resorts are: Zielona Góra, Puszcza Białowieska, a unique place in Europe, where it is not strange to see bisons living in the wild in Łąka Prudnica, Wisła (city), Gruszczyn, in the forests of Białowieża,¹⁹ Lubañ and others. There are other farms in Bieszczady and Tatra Mountains, or in seaside and lake resorts.²⁰ Another famous site is Wojciechów near Lublin, where a village of

¹⁷ <http://www.turystyka.puszczaknyszynska.org/> (10.2013).

¹⁸ <http://www.ziemialubuska.pl/> (10.2013).

¹⁹ The town of Białowieża (means 'the White Tower'), in eastern Poland, is on the edge of forest. In the town is also located the branch of the Polish Academy Science, which specializes in flora and fauna of Białowieża Forest. Tourists can also visit the museum of the Białowieża Forest and be invited to the rest in the houses of local residents, as well as to make special trips on the paths of the forest (<http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/agrotourism-en.html>, 10.2013).

²⁰ Some websites that promote agritourism in Poland are: <http://www.wakacje.agro.pl/>; <http://www.goscinnawies.pl/>; <http://www.agrowakacje.pl/>; <http://polandnaturally.pl/>; <http://www.cottages-for-holidays.com/173/agrotourismo-en/agro-poland-en.html>. They are usually web pages with information in numerous languages: Polish, English, German, Russian,

blacksmiths was founded and which now strongly appeals to many tourists. There is a museum of local crafts, and an international handicraft exhibition is held annually, where master craftsmen from different towns display their handiworks.²¹

It is clear that eco and farmhouse holidays are in fashion today and that holidays on a farm have been regarded as a panacea for the farming activities, particularly in the poorer regions. There are several forms of rural tourism promotion: internet, brochures, magazines and fairs where both farmhouse holidays and organic food are promoted. There is the necessity to enlarge the number of farms offering tourist accommodation: this could be done through good advisory systems or through courses held by advisers.²² Besides, people willing to undertake such activities can rely on financial support from the European Union both for organic agriculture and for farms providing tourist accommodation.

1.3. Health-spa tourism and medical tourism

This form of tourism, as we know, originates from the use of natural mineral water springs with special healing powers in some medical treatments. Hotels, entertainment venues, casinos and sports amenities rise near the hot springs.

Polish Health Spas are part of the Polish culture since the 13th century. At that time they were used to treat many diseases, today they serve rather for relaxation and regeneration. The mineral water and the medicinal mud are the primary activities of health spas, which makes the treatment for some diseases exclusive to Poland. More and more tourists are allured to Poland through the accommodation facilities and care provided in spas.²³

Spa tourism in Poland is now central: it is being improved and made of high quality.

The policies followed nowadays by many thermal baths are changing, as they focus now rather on prevention rather than on treatment. Moreover, due to the introduction of new services, the thermal facilities are moving towards an integration of treatment with wellness.

More specifically, the recent approach determines a shift from specific therapeutic treatments to the achievement of a general psychological well-being. Indeed, recently the range of Polish tourist services has been extended with the addition of 'beauty farms', SPA institutes and wellness or fitness centres. There are now many such facilities in Poland all of which guarantee European standards of service.²⁴ Polish health spas offer:

- high standard of medical services;
- modern medical equipment;
- high quality health treatments;
- affordable prices;
- professional medical staff.

French, Italian, etc. It is also interesting that farmers network with each other and are grouped together in a consortium: <http://www.bugnarew.pl/start>; <http://www.agroturystyka.pl/> (10.2013).

²¹ <http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/agrotourism-en.html> (10.2013).

²² See <http://en.poland.gov.pl/Accommodation.7246.html> (10.2013).

²³ <http://www.hellotravel.com/poland/spa-tourism> (10.2013).

²⁴ <http://en.poland.gov.pl/Health,tourism,7482.html> (10.2013).

Besides, spa tourism is increasingly linked to other forms of tourism, such as sport, recreation and culture. Health spas in Poland are numerous, more than fifty resorts with a kind atmosphere, charming surroundings, delightful boarding houses, and modern sanatoriums all year round. We can name just a few: Augustów, Busko-Zdrój, Ciechocinek, Cieplice Zdrój, Duszniki-Zdrój, Inowrocław, Iwonicz Zdrój, Kołobrzeg, Krynica Zdrój, Kudowa-Zdrój, Łądek Zdrój, Nałęczów, Szczawnica, Ustroń, Wieliczka.²⁵ The last mentioned is the famous salt mine, sculpted by miners over the centuries and now under the aegis of UNESCO.²⁶

Polish health spas suggest package treatments which are good value for money: they include accommodation in a sanatorium, boarding service, medical care, and physiotherapy. What makes Health-Spa Tourism in Poland so interesting in fact is the competitive prices combined with high standards of treatment. Highly qualified, well-trained and professional personnel work in the health resorts. The medical facilities are on the cutting edge as well, they have been modernised and now these centres present the latest and most advanced machinery and equipment (<http://www.polandforall.com/poland-health-spa-tourism.html>).

It is easy to arrange a stay supplying boarding house and treatment: the local spa services office will provide all the necessary information, and will refer patients to treatment facilities following consultation with a doctor.

The promotion of the health spas is entrusted to the Polish Spas Chamber of Commerce (Warsaw) and to the Union of Polish Spas Association (Nałęczów). Poland, which is becoming a leader in medical tourism in Central Europe, is mostly visited by Germans, British, Scandinavians, and Canadians.

Tourists are in particular being attracted by dental surgery and cosmetic and corrective surgery clinics. British people come to Poland in order to receive dental treatment, whereas among the other Europeans plastic surgery, which is four times less expensive than in other countries, is becoming more and more popular. Aesthetic medicine, laser eye surgery, rehabilitation and obesity treatment, being very cheap, are also a matter of interest.²⁷

The health spas are located in regions with varied environmental climatic conditions, usually bordering national parks and reserves. They offer the possibility of spending time outdoors and taking benefit of the advantages of eco-tourism by the sea, lakes or in the mountains. Tourists can choose between brine pools, thermal baths, natural mineral water springs or cryotherapy chambers.²⁸

Many health centres have excellent opportunities for the treatment of children.

Since Poland joined the European Union, they have been signing agreements with the national health services of all the other member countries. Health care clinics cooperate with hotels, holiday centres and a number of travel agencies, with the goal of linking health care services to leisure holidays. In the immediate future a further dynamic increase in medical tourism is as expected as desired.²⁹

²⁵ http://en.poland.gov.pl/Health_tourism,7482.html (10.2013).

²⁶ The official websites of Wieliczka Salt Mine and the museum: <http://www.wieliczka-saltmine.com/>; <http://muzeum.wieliczka.pl/?lang=en> (10.2013).

²⁷ <http://www.tourism-review.com/poland-popular-destination-for-medical-tourists-news2393> (10.2013).

²⁸ <http://www.medi-tour.co.uk/353,0,wellness-tourism-in-poland.html> (10.2013).

²⁹ http://en.poland.gov.pl/Health_tourism,7482.html (10.2013).

1.4 Lake and beach tourism

People have always been attracted to sea and lakes, so it is easy to imagine that this kind of tourism was the first (or at least one of the first) to develop and, over the years, it has diversified and specialised (Cori, Lemmi 2009, p. 22).

As for lakes, in many cases they exert considerable attraction when they are a long way from big built-up areas.

Lakes and forests are abundant in Poland. The land of Poland is dotted with approximately ten thousand lakes. Most lakes in the country are located in two areas: Mazury, in the north-eastern part of the country and Lubuskie, in the western region. The undulating landscape with a picturesque and attractive view has been shaped by nature in the long course of time. Groups of impressive lakes are also found in Eastern Poland and the western part of the Lublin region. Mountain lakes are the most astonishing among Polish lakes. Many of these lakes, like Czarna Hańcza, have crystal clear waters, perfectly reflecting the enchanting landscape girdling them. For all these reasons lake tourism in Poland has gained enormous popularity.³⁰

The northern part of the country, mostly overlooking the Baltic Sea, includes the two regions of Pomerania in the west and Warmia and Mazury in the east. Together, they constitute the so-called Baltic Lakelands (Pojezierze Bałtyckie), characterised by gentle rolling hills of morainal origin, full of thousands of small lakes and ponds and often covered with thick broad-leaved and coniferous forests (Polce 2009, p. 13).

The Lubuskie lakeland comprises hundreds of lakes located in the central and northern parts of Lubuskie. These lakes are of primary importance for tourism in this region. The most popular lakes are Długie near Międzyrzecz, Dobiegniew, Głębokie, Lubniewice, Lubrza, Łagów, Pszczew, and Wilkowo. Tourists visit the Lubuskie lakes not just because of its picturesque views but also to enjoy and practice water sports, go angling, and to spend their holidays on sultry sandy beaches near their crystal clear waters.³¹ There are excellent conditions here for sailing, rowing, canoeing and kayaking. Water sports enthusiasts, naturalists, avian watchers and anglers can have plenty of fun in these lakes. Also fishing is ideal here and in chilly winters ice-boating and skating will surely provide tourists with an unequalled experience. In this period the lakes are covered with long stretches of smooth ice. Hundreds of lakes are interconnected by streams meaning that a person can travel hundreds of miles in water. On a holiday at the Lubuskie Lakes in Poland there is something to suit everybody's taste.³²

Alongside lakes, Polish rivers are a source of fun for anglers and lovers of water sports as well. Vistula is the biggest river in Poland. Smaller, wild streams like Drawa, Czarna Hańcza, Krutynia or Drwęca are also well-liked.³³ Kayaking is the most popular sport done in these rivers. Thousands of tourists visit Poland every year to enjoy river tourism. These rivers pass through pine and spruce forests, giving the impression of wonderland.

The last form of tourism related to water is beach tourism. It is quite developed in Poland since this is a country with a long Baltic coastline. There are

³⁰ <http://www.international-travel-tours.com/poland/lake-tourism.html> (10.2013).

³¹ <http://www.international-travel-tours.com/poland/lubuskie.html> (10.2013).

³² <http://www.lakelubbers.com/lubuskie-lakeland-1834/> (10.2013).

³³ <http://www.international-travel-tours.com/poland/lake-tourism.html> (10.2013).

dozens of sea resorts on the coast of Baltic Sea like Wolin Island, located close to the German border and the coast of Pomerania.³⁴

Beach tourism has become one of the most important economic activities. The coast, more than 500 km long, is low and sandy and, despite the cold temperatures of the Baltic Sea, attracts thousands of tourists every summer (Polce, p. 14). The Sopot beach is equipped with excellent facilities for water sports and with comfortable structures.

1.5 Winter tourism

Like other types of tourism (beach, urban, etc.), even the mountains have seen a huge increase in tourist numbers, which was accompanied by an evolution of the resorts themselves. Thanks to the diversification of the tourist facilities, these resorts cater for two main seasons (the summer and the winter).

The winter season in Poland is longer than in western or southern Europe. This particularly refers to the mountain areas in the south of the country. The snow cover remains there from November till March, creating excellent conditions for skiers, enthusiasts of winter rest and recreation, and other fans of winter sports.³⁵

The lovers of winter rest and recreation can choose from a wide offer, that includes renown winter resorts as well as quieter and fascinating little spots, better suited to family holidays. The spas located in the mountains are very attractive, full of tourist attractions and organising many sports and cultural events so as to make the stays of their customers more interesting.³⁶

On the territory of Poland there is a great number of mountain ranges. It has developed both mountain sports and hiking trips. In Poland, the most popular and highest mountains are the Tatras. They are interesting not only for skiers of any level, but also for lovers of mountaineering.

The hiking tourism is also fairly developed here. There are routes for the beginners as well as for professionals, with a few slopes and extremely beautiful landscapes. The routes have specially equipped places for rest, where tourists can overnight and have meals.³⁷

The Tatras are the highest range of the Carpathian Mountains that lies along the Polish border with Slovakia. The visitors can find here breathtaking views and unspoilt environment. The Tatra Mountains offer visitors the best skiing in winter, hiking, exploration of caves, rock climbing, cycling, para-gliding and a lot more. Tatras also take tourist to the tour of wildlife preservation which is the foremost place to visit while on a tour of Poland. There are twin national parks which cover the whole of the Tatras from both the sides of national border.

The walking paths near Tatras are pristine and fascinating to those tourists who do not hike in the mountains. The paths in the valleys are extremely enchanting which lead to wonderful Zakopane town. The whole area features various inns, hotels, motels, restaurants, board-houses, cafes, shops, art galleries, sport facilities and nightclubs.³⁸

³⁴ <http://inter.mssagroup.com/en/the-economy-of-polish-market> (10.2013).

³⁵ The most popular sports are: [snowboard and ski](#), [cross-country skiing](#), [gliding on ice](#), [ski jumping](#), [the kumoterki races](#), [sledge runs](#), [fishing under ice](#), [kayaking trips](#), [climates of the far north](#) (<http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/winter-en.html>) (10.2013).

³⁶ <http://www.polandforall.com/winter-attractions.html> (10.2013).

³⁷ <http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/winter-en.html> (10.2013).

³⁸ <http://www.local-life.com/zakopane/articles/tatra-mountains-zakopane> (10.2013).

The Cracow-Częstochowa Jurassic Upland consists of a rich ecosystem due to the unique climate and the whole high ground is surrounded by virgin forest. This place is abundant with great forests and its paths are ideal for horse excursions. The place, also famous for horse riding and numerous trails covered with sand, will encourage horses and equestrians to infinite gallops. Nature lovers will have a chance to admire majestic fields of grain while having an adventurous trip. The best to watch, the Cracow-Częstochowa includes many species of insects, including beetles, butterflies and birds. Mammals include the beaver, badger, ermine, bats, many of which hibernate in the park's caves during the winter.³⁹

The Pieniny is a small mountain range, lying on the Slovak border east of the Podhale region and north of the Tatras. The Pieniny Mountains extend for 22 miles in a narrow range. These old limestone mountains have weathered in many wonderful ways. They also provide visitors with the opportunity to ride on the little mountain horses known as '*huculy*'. Here the famous resort Szczawnica is located, a recently opened Ski Centre. It is possible get to the top by the cableway or lift. As well as with skiing enthusiasts, this place is popular with snowboarders because of a specially constructed track.⁴⁰

The main ski resorts are located in the Tatra Mountains: Zakopane,⁴¹ Szklarska Poręba,⁴² Karpacz,⁴³ Krynica Gurska, Piwniczna-Zdrój, Ustrzyki Dolne, Szczyrk.⁴⁴ In winter, these resorts are full of thousands of tourists, thanks to the development of infrastructure and high quality of service.⁴⁵

Zakopane is a major centre that attracts many tourists every year. This place, a small village at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, has been a popular destination with the Polish intelligentsia since 1870. Up to this day, Zakopane has maintained the reputation of a city of artists and it still attracts creative people in search of a suitable environment to live and work. 30,000 people live there, beyond whom we must consider the 2 million visitors arriving every year, mostly skiers. In fact, Zakopane has excellent facilities for winter sports (Polce, p. 13).

In Poland, there are other mountain resorts, including the High Beskids in the west, separated from the Low Beskids by the impetuous river Dunajec (that tourists can cross on board of log barges steered by experienced mountaineers).⁴⁶

³⁹ <http://www.poland.travel/en-gb/national-parks/ojcowski-national-park> (10.2013).

⁴⁰ <http://www.pieniny.com/en/> (10.2013).

⁴¹ Zakopane is the centre of mountain tourism, where there are different competitions in winter sports. In this recreation site there is a wide range of hotels, restaurants, cafes and well-equipped tracks and complexes (<http://www.zakopane.pl/>, 10.2013).

⁴² Szklarska-Poręba is a ski resort in Sudety. Here it is possible to find various skiing and snowboard championships (<http://www.szklarskaporeba.pl/>, 10.2013).

⁴³ The most fashionable ski resort in Poland is Karpacz, situated in the south-east of the country in the Karkonosze Mountains, the highest mountains of Sudety. This youth resort is popular as among the lovers of classical skiing as among the fans of the increasingly popular snowboarding. Every year a very well-liked snowboard Championship takes place in January (<http://www.karpacz.pl/>, 10.2013).

⁴⁴ Szczyrk is another winter area, which has a great number of tracks for tourists and professionals (http://www.polandforvisitors.com/poland/winter_sports_games, 10.2013).

⁴⁵ <http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/winter-en.html> (10.2013).

⁴⁶ The Dunajec Gorge is the most spectacular attraction of the Pieniny Range. Tourists can raft run down the Dunajec River surrounded by peaks, vertical rock walls and high cliffs dropping down to the river. On the south side there is Niedzica Castle, also known as Dunajec Castle, which is a major tourist attraction along with Pieniny National Park, because it comprises wonderful caves, waters, flora and fauna. All these sites show an alluring view of the Dunajec Gorge and the overview of the Pieniny Range with the splendid beauty of its nature (<http://www.polandforall.com/pieniny-mountains-poland.html>, 10.2013).

Many foreigners every year travel to the mountains to relax, to practice sports, to enjoy the scenery or, perhaps, simply to follow the latest trends (*ibidem*).

In southern Poland there are resorts for skiing and hiking in the Karkonosze mountains, which is part of the Sudetes mountain range. Karkonosze includes the tourist centres of Karpacz and Szklarska Poręba.⁴⁷ All visitors to Poland can find accommodation in comfortable hotels and guesthouses, which offer delicious food and high quality of services, always accompanied by traditional Polish hospitality.

In recent times, the winter holidays in Poland enjoy great popularity among the tourist. Foreigners prefer to rest in Poland during the winter more and more. This is due to the relative cheapness of the recreation of service in line with the European level, the beautiful nature and friendly local people.⁴⁸ Besides, today Poland has already developed adequate infrastructure for winter tourism, but it is not going to stop at this level.

Most of the upland areas, although still largely intact, sooner or later will have to confront the effects, both direct and indirect, of increased tourism, in particular the overload of facilities and structures.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, with a slightly larger area than Italy (312,685 km²), Poland is able to provide a wide and various range of types of tourism, above all thanks to its diverse territory (Polce, p. 15). As said above, in recent years, more and more systematically, alternative forms of tourism are growing, closer to the needs expressed by the 'environmental sustainability' model.

These new forms of tourism give travellers the opportunity to enrich their programmes with a series of specialized activities, such as rural tourism, ecotourism, spa, religious, congress tourism, etc.

For this reason, Poland is currently working to become an ideal tourist destination not only for the traditional holiday lovers, but also for those who prefer to spend their holidays alternatively: on the one hand, the need for relaxation in an attractive country, on the other, the unique experiences offered by nature, local cuisine, cultural events and cities of artistic interest.

This is made possible by the development of Polish infrastructures, which allow transport and connections between the various places of interest and that are becoming more and more efficient and organised, also thanks to European subsidies.

Another crucial factor is the promoting activity carried out with strong commitment over the last years by the Poland National Tourism Office,⁴⁹ aware of the fact the tourism is a phenomenon in constant growth, in spite of the international economic crisis.

⁴⁷ <http://inter.mssagroup.com/en/the-economy-of-polish-market> (10.2013).

⁴⁸ <http://www.poland-vacations.com/173/winter-en.html> (10.2013).

⁴⁹ The Poland National Tourism Office website allows a user to select several languages (Polish, English, Italian, French, Spanish, German, Austrian, Dutch, Czech, Ukrainian, Russian, Danish, Hungarian, Swedish, Norwegian, Hebrew, and Japanese etc.) and provides diverse, detailed helpful information about transport, hotel accommodation, sight-seeing, food, events, photos, maps, etc. (<http://www.poland.travel/en>, 10.2013).

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