

Tourism activity of Polish seniors

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Abstract: Research into tourism activity of seniors is a response to social changes taking place in European countries, including Poland. Because of ageing societies, senior tourism becomes an important and developing sector of the tourism market. The purpose of this study was to explore the travelling patterns of elderly people who are socially active in their day-to-day environment. Also, this study addressed some research problems which boil down to determining: how often do Polish seniors travel; what are the main reasons behind senior tourism; and how are their trips organized. This paper includes a literature review and presents findings from an empirical study based on a survey questionnaire administered to learners at the University of the Third Age of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. Based on their research, the authors identified the need for stimulating social activity, including tourism activity of seniors. The respondents enjoyed taking part in organized domestic and international trips. Research also suggests that seniors had a preference for long (at least 5-day) trips, willingly used travel agency services, and enjoyed travelling by plane and staying in hotels.

Keywords: tourism, tourism activity, seniors, research

1. Introduction

In Poland, the issue of seniors becoming engaged in tourism activities has been addressed in a number of scientific papers over the last years (including: Nimrod and Rotem, 2010; Kowalczyk-Anioł, 2011; Hołowiecka and Grzelak-Kostulska, 2013; Reece, 2014; Śniadek, 2014; Oleśniewicz and Widawski, 2015; Szpara, 2015; Kociszewski, 2016; Ociepka and Pytel, 2016; Parzych and Gotowski, 2016; Zawadka, 2016; Januszewska, 2017; Markiewicz-Patkowska et al., 2018). According to Eurostat data, the elderly population grows around the world, with the largest share of seniors being recorded in Europe. According to EU data, ca. 19% of the Union population were aged 65 or more in 2018. Currently, the European Union's population is over 446 million

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(this excludes the UK which exited the EU) (Eurostat, 2018). In turn, according to Eurostat's forecasts, the European Union's population will reach 522.2 million by 2065 (Eurostat, 2018). The analysis of the age structure suggests that young people (aged 0–24) account for 25.8% of the total population whereas the working-age population (aged 25–49) have a share of one-third. Over 20% are people aged 50–64; persons aged over 65 represent 14% of the EU's population (Eurostat, 2018). As Parzych and Gotowski (2016) emphasize, the ageing of European societies is unequivocally linked with the increased life expectancy in Europe. This is due to improvements in economic standards of living and to considerable progress in healthcare services. Although Poland has for years been among the youngest societies, it now approaches the Western European social structure. Meanwhile, leisure and tourism are believed to be important aspects of lifestyle in developed countries. Seniors are often viewed as the least active segment of the tourism market due to body ageing and low levels of average incomes. The ongoing socio-demographic changes and progress in medical development are the reasons why seniors see their purchasing power grow and become an increasingly important consumer group, including in the tourism market.

2. Seniors as buyers of tourism services

Ageing is a complex and prolonged process which can vary in pace depending on the interaction between multiple factors, including social, genetic, environmental, physical and lifestyle aspects (Abramowska-Kmon, 2011). Irrespective of how fast they occur in individuals, changes that affect human bodies result in declining physical fitness, sensory disorders and numerous chronic diseases. Hence, as a consequence of biological ageing, human bodies gradually lose their physical reliance which affects individuals' general activity, including tourism. Ageing is both the consequence and the cause of many major changes in life and of transformations driven by psychological, biological, social and economic aspects. These changes determine the needs and motivations of elderly consumers (seniors) related to tourism consumption or tourism activity (Śniadek, 2014).

As emphasized in numerous scientific papers, it is difficult to define a "senior". It is a word of Latin origin (*senex*, old), means "older", and refers to the oldest member of a family or group (Szymczak [ed.], 1989, p. 196). Górna (2015) indicated that several aspects may be considered when defining the border between a mature and an elderly person. The first one is the social aspect, i.e. becoming a grandmother or a grandfather. The second one is the cultural aspect related to the customs and traditions of a society. Next goes the health aspect, i.e. a deterioration in the physical condition and fitness. According to Górna, the economic aspect results from ending one's professional life, and retirement is a major factor in defining an elderly person. Another approach to defining a senior was proposed by Walker (2002) and Lisowska (2006). Walker identified four categories of old age: the pre-retirement and early retirement group (55–64 years old), retirees (65–74 years old), older retirees (75–84 years old) and people aged 85 or more. In turn, Lisowska (2006) divided the seniors into three groups, i.e. old-age people (60–75 years old), senile people (76–90 years old) and long-lived people (over 90 years old). The World Health Organization indicates that 65+ years may be usually denoted as old age (Kowalik [ed.], 2009). Having the above old-age classifications in mind, it can be concluded that the literature uses the word "seniors" when referring to people aged 60 or more. Research demonstrates that

the senior tourism offering requires the target group to be addressed in a different way as they have specific needs and expectations (Hołowiecka and Grzelak-Kostulska, 2013; Łaciak, 2013; Oleśniewicz and Widawski, 2015; Januszewska, 2017; Markiewicz-Patkowska et al., 2018). Importantly, seniors are viewed as a heterogeneous group because it includes people guided by different motives. The senior-oriented segment of the tourism market requires a specific approach to be adopted due to a number of characteristics, including age, education, marital status, income, health, family and financial status, and previous lifestyle (Grzelak-Kostulska, Hołowiecka and Kwiatkowski, 2011). In this context, note that some of these characteristics can have a much greater impact on the tourism activity of seniors. For instance, learners at universities of the third age form a very special group of elderly people.

3. Seniors as a segment of the Polish tourism market

According to the Central Statistical Office, Poland had a population of 38.413 million in 2018, of which 19.2% were people aged over 65 (GUS, 2019b). In 2020 and 2035, the Polish population is forecasted by the Central Statistical Office to be only 37.8 million and 36 million, respectively (GUS, 2019b). Papers on the demographic condition of Poland suggest that in addition to consistent depopulation, the country is also affected by the ageing of its society (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic structure of the Polish population aged 60 or more

Specification	2014	2015	31.12.2018
Population aged 60–64	2,673,734	2,726,536	2,776,033
Women	1,431,397	1,456,858	1,473,540
Men	1,242,337	1,269,678	1,302,493
Population aged 65–69	1,969,087	2,161,758	2,412,936
Women	1,094,991	1,200,267	1,334,960
Men	874,096	961,491	1,077,976
Population aged 70–74	1,228,749	1,208,233	1,595,967
Women	724,114	709,220	923,844
Men	504,635	499,013	672,123
Population aged 75–79	1,147,215	1,139,332	1,057,712
Women	719,682	713,305	655,388
Men	427,533	426,027	402,324
Population aged 80–84	864,182	862,711	876,469
Women	575,848	573,722	580,478
Men	288,334	288,989	295,991
Population aged 85 or more	664,814	704,384	789,276

	Women	485,991	512,465	568,606
	Men	178,823	191,919	220,670
Polish population [total]		38,478,602	38,437,239	38,411,148

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Central Statistical Office data, GUS, 2019b.

Data from the Central Statistical Office shows that the post-working-age population will grow at an average annual rate of 100,000; and that in 2010–2018, the population aged 60 or more grew at an average annual rate of 200,000. When analyzing the Polish population structured by age and gender, it can be concluded that there are 2.7 million men aged 65 or more and 5.5 million women aged 60 or more (GUS, 2019a).

An active recreation has a beneficial effect on human health, mood and quality of living at all ages. Highlighting that aspect and recognizing its importance not only in a social but also in an economic context contributed to the introduction of legal regulations for the way people spend their free time. Gołembski (2002) emphasized that the evolution of “free time” started together with the reduction in the number of working hours per day and of working days per week. This was followed by the introduction of paid holidays and of legislation regarding old-age and disability pensions, all of which promote activity, including tourism. From the perspective of their tourism activity, seniors are a highly specific group. Restrictions resulting from their age and physical condition, together with economic barriers, often play an important role in whether or not they participate in tourism (Figure 1).

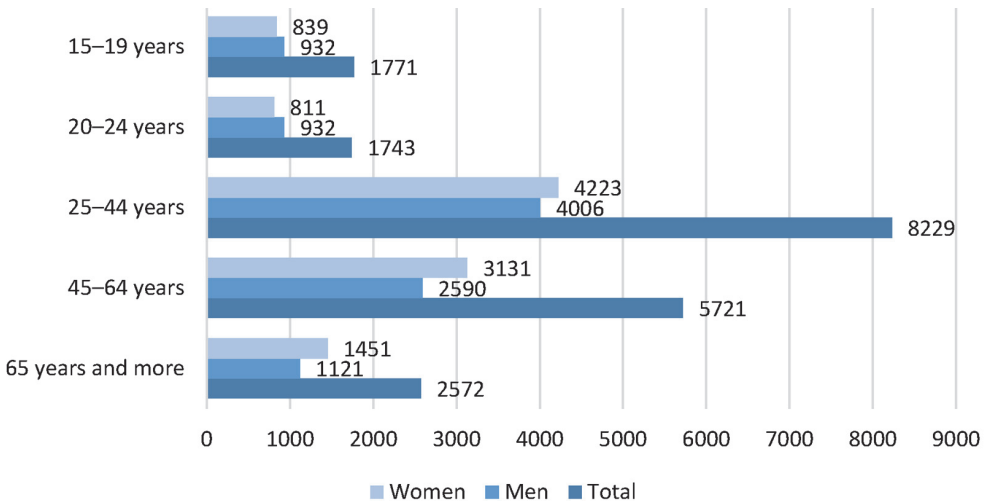


Figure 1. Levels of seniors' participation in tourism compared to other age groups in 2018 [thousand people]

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Central Statistical Office data, GUS, 2019c.

Compared to other European societies, the participation in tourism of Poles aged over 65 (Respondek [ed.], 2009) suggests that the Polish elderly population are much less frequently involved in tourism activities than their Western European peers. According to *Sytuacja osób starszych w Polsce w 2018 r.* (Situation of the Polish elderly in 2018), a publication by the Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2020), seniors are highly willing to go on tourist trips, whether with a religious, health-promoting or explorative context. In 2018, nearly 4.1 million people aged 60 or more made at least one private tourist trip. A key aspect of the activity of Polish seniors is that they prefer spending their free time in a passive way. Secondly, they only rarely participate in tourism (with respect to both domestic and international tourism), which is often due to financial restrictions.

4. How do seniors behave in the tourism market: Findings from the authors' own research

4.1. Purpose, scope and organization of research

The purpose of research presented in this paper was to explore the particularities of how do socially active elderly people (learners at universities of the third age) travel. The following research problems are addressed in this paper:

1. What are the key reasons why seniors go on tourist trips?
2. What organizational form of tourist trips was the most frequently chosen by the respondents?

This study assumed that leisure is the main reason why the respondents go on tourist trips, and that in order to address that need, they go on self-organized domestic trips.

In order to meet that objective and answer the research questions, a survey was administered in 2017 to a sample of 173 elderly people who live in the Warsaw agglomeration and attend lectures at the University of the Third Age of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. The empirical study relied on the diagnostic survey method, including the administration of paper questionnaires. The questionnaire contained 12 questions and a personal data section. The survey was carried out with all attendees of courses held at the University of the Third Age of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences in June 2017. Input materials were analyzed in quantitative and qualitative terms. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient was used in order to verify the dependencies between the share of income allocated to tourism and: professional situation; family size; and tourism destinations. This group of respondents was chosen mostly because such university meetings are attended by active people looking for new experiences. Previous research on tourism activity of seniors has taken little account of their social activity in the place where they live and of the relationship between that activity (on the one side) and the intensity of tourism activities and tourism destinations (on the other). Due to the sampling procedure, these findings do not provide grounds for any generalizations. However, they do reveal a certain trend.

4.2. Results of empirical studies

The study covered a total of 173 people, of which 69.4% were women. People aged 55–65 had a slightly dominant share of 52.6%. Most respondents (57.8%) had a tertiary education; every third respondent (33.5%) had a secondary or vocational education; only 8.7% had a primary education. A vast majority of respondents (61.8%) were retirees. Every third respondent was economically active and worked on a full-time (33.5%) or part-time (1.2%) basis. Only 5% of respondents were disability pensioners. Their tourism activity was strongly impacted by where they live. The largest part of respondents (56.1%) were residents of a city with a population over 500,000 (in this case, Warsaw), followed by people living in: rural areas (20.2%); cities with a population of 10,000–100,000 (15%); cities with a population of 100,000–500,000 (6.4%); and cities with a population of up to 10,000 (2.3%). The relatively large share of rural dwellers was due to rural areas becoming increasingly popular as a place to live in. Usually, these are rural areas adjacent to cities.

The vast majority (64.2%) were married. Other people were single, usually because their spouse died (23.7% of all respondents) or because they never started a family. Divorce was a rare reason (4.6%). Hence, the respondents differed in household size. Households of two had the largest share (37%), followed by single households (28.3%), households of three (14.4%), households of four (11.6%), and households of five or more (8.7%). All respondents declared to have a tourist activity, though to a different extent, as shown in Figure 2.

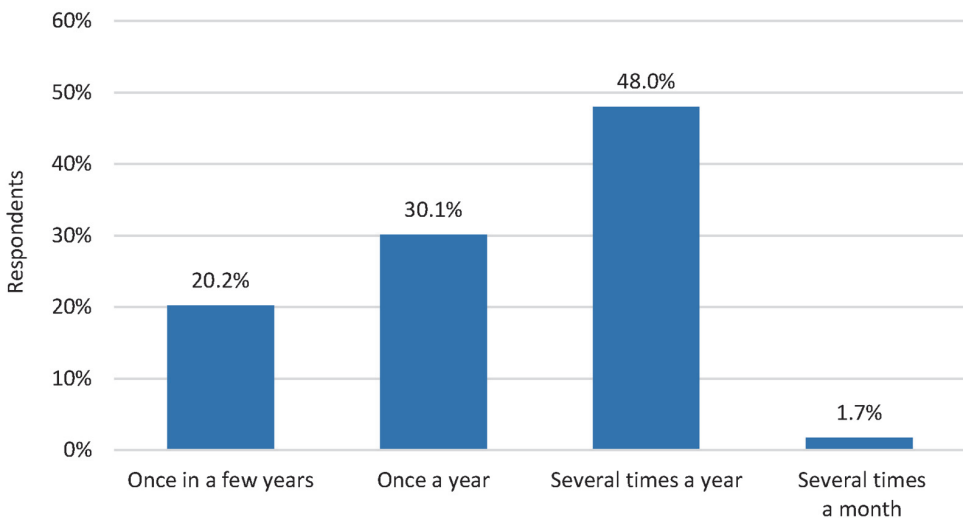


Figure 2. Frequency of the respondents' tourist trips

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on research results.

Nearly half of respondents made several trips a year; only every fifth respondent made a trip once every few years. Most respondents (34.1%) indicated international destinations, primarily including Spain, Slovakia and Germany. Every fourth respondent (25.4%) travelled to Polish cities while

nearly every fifth (19%) picked a rural destination. An own allotment garden was a relatively rare option (20.2%) indicated by every fifth respondent. These replies somehow deviate from the stereotype of elderly gardeners who spend their whole free time cultivating vegetables and flowers. Only 8.7% chose a vacation in the mountains whereas slightly more (12.1%) opted for a seaside destination. Interestingly, the frequency of travelling did not depend on the destination.

Obviously, summer was the most preferred season for tourist trips, chosen by more than half (59.6%) of respondents. Only 3.5% declared to be winter travellers. Every fifth respondent went on tourism trips during fall and spring. Although most respondents are free to do whatever they want with their time, weekend trips are the most popular option (45.0%), followed by business day trips (37.6%) and holiday trips (17.5%). The respondents preferred long (at least 5-day) trips; this was the option indicated by as many as 66.5% of them (including 83.5% who opted for a duration of up to 14 days).

The level of incomes is an important determinant of tourism demand; most importantly, this means the availability of funds that can be freely used. The respondents were asked about the proportion of incomes they allocate to tourism trips (Figure 3).

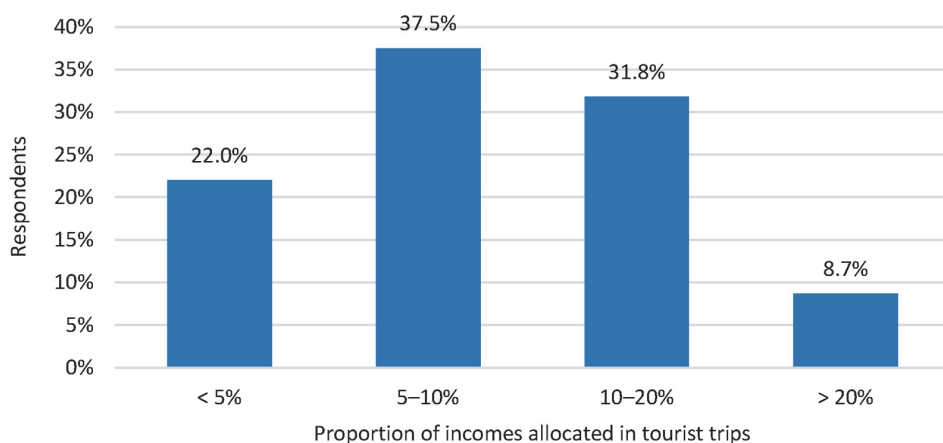
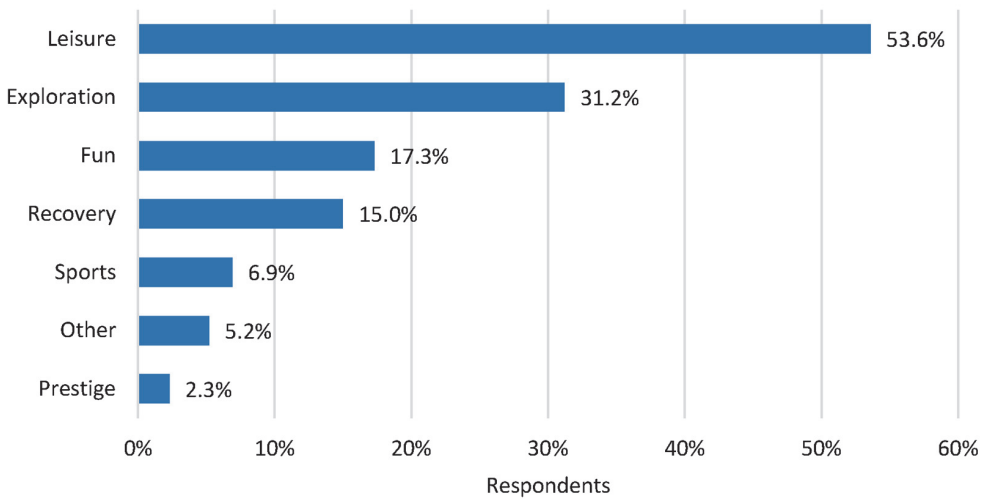


Figure 3. Proportion of incomes the respondents allocate to tourism trips

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on research results.

The largest group of interviewees allocate 5–10% of their incomes to tourism purposes. The level of real expenditure differed between them, which was probably due to: the size of their families and the related costs of living; their professional situation (some of them being economically active); and old-age pension disparities between occupational groups. However, no statistically significant relationship was discovered between the share of income allocated to tourism and professional situation, family size or tourism destination (the Spearman's rho was 0.11641, 0.09745, and -0.10560 , respectively). The main purposes of tourist trips are leisure and exploration of new places (Figure 4).



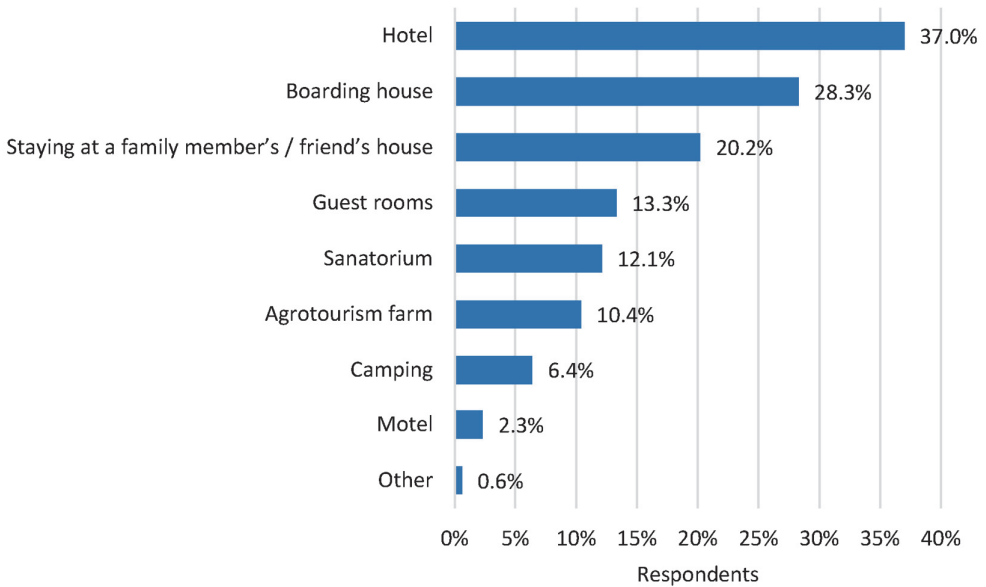
Note: The respondents could check more than one answer.

Figure 4. Declared reasons for going on tourist trips

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on research results.

The aspects indicated as the key reasons for going on tourist trips are also reflected in studies by other authors, although in a different order. According to research by Głąbiński (2018) and by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (2019, *Aktywność turystyczna osób starszych* [Tourism activity of the elderly]), intellectual curiosity and the willingness to explore are the key reasons why seniors travel. In turn, studies by Zawadka (2016) and Estrada-González (2017) suggest that the main reason is that they want to get some rest.

The respondents covered by this study also cited some other reasons (Figure 4), i.e. the intent to visit their family, contacts with grandchildren or religious motives. The study also took account of the respondents' preferences for accommodation options (Figure 5). Hotels were ranked high among the most frequently chosen accommodation options. This is because the respondents use packages offered by travel agencies (30.6% of them admitted they willingly do so). Research carried out by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism (2019) also confirms that when it comes to international trips, seniors usually stayed in a hotel. Only every tenth respondent used the services offered by agritourism farms. Conversely, a study by Zawadka (2016) suggests that private accommodation and boarding houses were the preferred option.



Note: The respondents could check more than one answer.

Figure 5. Accommodation options preferred by the respondents

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on research results.

Irrespective of the accommodation option, price was the main selection criterion, indicated by as many as 63.6% of respondents. Nearly every third respondent (28.3%) attached great importance to accommodation standards, nearly every fifth (22.5%) was guided by health concerns whereas only 10.4% relied on feedback from friends and family. Some respondents (6.4%) trusted the recommendations from travel agents.

Car (37.6%) and airplane (30.6%) were the main transport options used by the respondents. This is due to their preference for international destinations and services offered by travel agencies. Public transport, i.e. bus (27.2%) or train (7.5%), was relatively frequently selected by the respondents. This was especially so when they travelled to visit their family, their own allotments or sanatoriums.

5. Conclusion

The seniors' tourist activity is beneficial not only to themselves (e.g. by promoting recovery and preventing social exclusion) but also to the tourism economy. That segment will play an increasingly important role due to demographic change. Note that seniors are not a homogeneous group because not all people want to be looked at from the perspective of how old they are. Also, elderly people find it highly important to learn by developing their interests

and skills, and to gain new experience which contributes to their being more self-assured and improves their self-esteem.

This paper presents research carried out with seniors who learn at the university of the third age. This allowed to answer the research questions as follows:

1. Leisure was the main reason for going on tourist trips.
2. The respondents usually went on 5-day or longer trips. They did so on weekends and during summer which comes as a surprise because they usually were non-active persons who had free time on weekdays.
3. Although the trips were mostly domestic, every third respondent picked international destinations.
4. They used cars to travel and mostly stayed in hotels.
5. Note however that as many as one third of respondents used the services of travel agencies and travelled by car.

The authors realize that the sample used in this study is not representative and does not allow for generalization. Learners of courses offered at the universities of the third age are more open-minded and willingly engage in different activities, including tourism. However, this study shows that there is quite high interest in tourism travels, including commercial and international trips. Another aspect revealed by this study is the strong difficulty in accessing seniors, especially retirees. Finally, the study identified the need for activating the seniors and for checking whether and, if so, to what extent does their engagement in cultural, sport and educational activities (as available where they live) translate into different forms of tourism activity.

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Aktywność turystyczna seniorów w Polsce

Abstrakt: Badania nad aktywnością turystyczną seniorów stanowią odpowiedź na zmiany społeczne, jakie zachodzą w krajach europejskich, w tym w Polsce. Starzenie się społeczeństwa sprawia, że turystyka seniorów to ważny i rozwijający się sektor rynku turystycznego. Celem badań było rozpoznanie specyfiki wyjazdów osób starszych przejawiających w codziennym środowisku aktywność społeczną. Przyjęto również problemy badawcze, które sprowadzały się do określenia: częstotliwości wyjazdów seniorów w Polsce, głównych powodów wyjazdów turystycznych seniorów oraz sposobów organizacji tych wyjazdów. Dokonano ana-

lizy literatury oraz zaprezentowano wyniki badań empirycznych przeprowadzonych z wykorzystaniem ankiety wśród słuchaczy Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku SGGW w Warszawie. Autorki wskazały potrzebę stymulowania aktywności społecznych, w tym aktywności turystycznej seniorów. Respondenci chętnie uczestniczyli w zorganizowanych wyjazdach krajowych i zagranicznych. Ponadto badania wskazują, iż seniorzy preferowali wyjazdy długookresowe, tj. minimum pięciodniowe, chętnie korzystali z usług biur podróży, transportu samolotowego oraz noclegów w hotelach.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, aktywność turystyczna, seniorzy, badania