

RURAL SANCTUARIES AS ‘SMART DESTINATIONS’ – SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS (MAZOVIA REGION, POLAND)

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Abstract: The general objective of this paper is to present and discuss the factors that need to be taken into account to ensure that the development and management of religious tourism at rural sites was sustainable from an economic, environmental and socio-cultural point of view. Among other issues, sustainable religious tourism means accessibility to the sanctuaries, protection of cultural and heritage values of the local community, benefits for the local residents and meaningful experience for visitors. Authors were especially interested in the less popular, more remotely located holy sites in Mazovia Region (Poland) and two concerns: readiness to respond the needs of persons with different disabilities and local community opinion on tourists. As was documented by our research outcomes despite the recent numerous improvements, the most popular rural sanctuaries in Mazovia Region, remain only partially accessible for persons with disabilities. As masses of pilgrims have a significant effect on wellbeing and everyday life quality of residents (contributing both to positive and to negative effects), those who accept that tourists are important for economic development, benefit from it, creating ‘smart host area’. These rural communities which are not knowledgeable about positive impacts – see only negative consequences.

Key Words: rural sanctuaries, rural tourism, holy sites sustainability, local community

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1. Introduction

In the European tradition, the most famous sanctuaries are Rome, Jasna Gora, Santiago de Compostella, Fatima, Kutná Hora, Zelena Hora, Medjugorje and Lourdes. However, many pilgrims visit small, rurally located holy sites to understand better themselves, to feel connected personally to the sacrum and to learn more about culture and tradition of visited regions (Adair 1978, Altenberg 2008, Blackwell 2001, Dallen 2009, Hamilton 2005, Horak 2015, Nolan 1992, Smith 2003). In Europe the Middle Ages epoch was marked by journeys and pilgrimages to holy sites. This was the period in which pilgrimages were an integral part of the society and tradition. Today, pilgrims are not hold so much in high regard by society. Nevertheless, going on a pilgrimage still means both to be spiritual and to travel for pleasure. This 'double' motivation reflects the eternal need to increase purity of one's faith and to satisfy the curiosity of unknown destinations (Alecu 2010, Lomine 2007, Rinchede 1992, Santos 2013, Swatos 2002). It might be also the source of some conflicts between pilgrims and tourists interested only in cultural values of the site, not having religious motives (secular tourists) (Nolan, 1992). Regarding the importance and value of religious tourism, since more than three decades the Council of Europe has been developing cultural itineraries and themes routs, that include also the pilgrims pathways (as for example Santiago de Compostella) (Smith 2006).

Today in Poland religious tourism is especially popular among traditional and conservative rural communities, families with considerable low income. It resulted in the development of the whole business, as there is growing demand for basic, rather low - standard services and infrastructure: transport, accommodation and catering. The world famous holy site, Jasna Gora, has to host as much as 1,500,000 pilgrims each year. Also less popular sanctuaries, located in the rural areas have to respond to different needs and expectations of their visitors. Moreover some host communities might see the religious tourism as the effective promotion of cultural and natural resources of their village and region.

2. Theme of the research study: rural sanctuaries and sustainability

Sustainability in tourism space means a balance between limits and usage of natural and cultural resources and aspects of sustainable development must include interests of all stakeholders (local communities and visitors). As many pilgrims are elders or impaired the important part of sustainability of the tourist host area is the accessibility to the holy sites (Hall 2000, Inskip 2001, Pawlikowska-Piechotka 2007, Rotherham 2009). Approximately 5 million people with disabilities live in Poland and the Polish government decided to improve public space accessibility, also adjusting important elements of the tourist base, e.g., hotels, transport and information (GUS 2015). Accordingly to the recommendations declared by European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENTA), the accessible tourism includes:

- a) Barrier – free destinations: infrastructure and facilities
- b) Transport: by air, land, sea suitable for all users
- c) High quality services: delivered by trained staff
- d) Activities, exhibits, attractions: allowing participation in tourism by everyone
- e) Marketing, booking systems, web sites and services: information accessible to all.

On the base of the ENTA recommendations, a government initiative - the 'Poland Without Barriers' campaign', was launched in 1994. This action, supported by the local self-governments and governmental institutions, was aiming to improve the accessibility of the public space for all users. In particular this campaign was addressed to the historic urban layouts and architectural monuments (as popular holy sites) that were recognised as highly attractive sites to tourists to be visited and explored. Accordingly to these project goals, religious sanctuaries should be accessible for persons with different degrees and types of disability (including visual disability, wheelchair users), adults with small children and elderly persons. As the most urgent actions, the following projects were considered: renovation of the sidewalks surface, removing or lowering high pavements, revitalisation of the sanctuaries and open space around the holy sites, adapting museums, hotels, restaurants, public toilets and local transport for persons with

disabilities. Another important project segment was the provision of information dedicated to tourists with different types of disabilities.

All recently undertaken revitalisation activities in Poland are legally obliged to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities. Still, tourists with special requirements regarding the mobility, when visiting the holy sites are often frustrated with the lack of facilities that would enable or make easier their travel and sightseeing. Especially wheelchair users often find out that their mobility within the sanctuaries is hampered or even impossible by various barriers, both immaterial (social barriers, e.g., prejudice, thoughtlessness and lack of empathy) and technical ones (technical barriers, e.g., architectural, urban, transport and information).

Mobility in pilgrimage means making it easy for all to experience travelling for religious reasons and pleasure. To make it possible the special services and facilities should answer to the individual physical conditions (visual or hearing impairments, wheelchair users). Therefore there is a need for greater understanding and concern on visitor's mobility, special infrastructure provided in the holy sites. One can learn from the others and implement the 'best practice' solutions to improve accessibility to the sanctuaries, as many examples of popular sanctuaries show (Rome, Fatima, Lourdes, Santiago de Compostella) that shaping accessible destination by providing basic adjustments to the tourist facilities, clear and reliable information, new technologies helping – in a broad sense – to overcome barriers, could result in an increased number of visitors and higher customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, as it is underlined by many scholars, the improvement of the accessibility to tourist services and facilities at the given reception area, could enhance at the same time the quality of life of the local community (Archer 2005, Hamilton 2005, Nunkoo 2011, 2012, Rotherham 2009).

3. Research study assumptions: aim, methods and material

Research aim and questions. The general objective of the presented research was to recognise the factors that need to be taken into account to ensure that development of religious tourism in the rural areas is sustainable from an economic, environmental and socio-cultural point of view. This means that tourism contribute to heritage protection and tourists respect local community values, tourism is beneficial to the rural community residents and visitors experience is meaningful. To measure and examine the pilgrims mobility in the rural sanctuaries located in the Mazovia Region (Poland), was necessary to examine the accessibility of holy sites, museums, main tourist attractions, as well as of hotels, restaurants, transport and information. The research study encompassed also another issue, tourism sustainability from the perspective of rural community residents and tourist opinions on reception site and host community.

The important research question was what modern technologies were applied to improve local transport, museums and information system. The following factors were taken into account during research survey:

- Transport accessibility (local transport, alternative solutions and car parks);
- Accessibility of the most popular tourist attractions in the sanctuary (religious objects, relics of architecture, museum);
- Accessibility to basic tourist services (as accommodation and catering)
- Public toilets without barriers
- Information and new information technologies (provided pre-visit and in situ)
- Tourist infrastructure and services from the perspective of holy site visitors
- Tourism from the perspective of rural community residents

Research methods, techniques and instruments. The research study included both: theoretical studies aimed to provide some secondary data already published (as statistical data showing number of tourists visiting surveyed sanctuaries), as well as field studies, aimed to provide primary data, non published information (as for example pilgrims opinions on accessibility to the heritage sites). The authors believed that both quantitative data (as the amount of

accessible tourist services) and qualitative data (as comments expressed by visitors or local community members) were equally important to withdraw general conclusions. It required the usage of qualitative techniques as semi-structured interviews, with the use of questionnaires and unstructured interviews, administrated *face to face*, *in situ*, in the form of informal conversations with the focused group (local community members and tourists).

Theoretical studies were focused primarily on understanding the legal conditions, including recommendations issued by the Heritage Conservatory Office of Cracow and Warsaw and the City Councils spatial planning strategies, associated with providing the barrier – free tourist destination space. Through the critical study of literature, law regulations and documents, the secondary (formally published) data were obtained, both of qualitative and quantitative character. The secondary data have been completed with the critical analysis of the recommendations issued by the ICOM UNESCO Documentation Centre, i.e., 'Museums without Barriers: Heritage: Care-Preservation-Management' and 'Museums Without Barriers: A New Deal for the Disabled'.

The qualitative data and quantitative data to be analyzed were collected on the base of the field survey completed in these villages. Information on tourist accessibility to the holy sites was gathered on the ground of the authors' occasional visits, publications and Internet sources. It was completed on the ground of systematic surveys (non-published primary data collection), carried out by the Bachelors Course students, Faculty of Tourism and Recreation Joseph Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw (usually in the spring semester: April – June, as part of the History of Art and Architecture coursework). This part of the research study was carried out under supervision of the authors. It was conducted in 2015 and 2016, in the form of semi-structured, interviews, carried out *in situ*, *face to face* with the focused group. There were 20 student groups involved in the project and as an effect as much as almost 400 questionnaires during 'street interviews' were completed. Each student group was obliged to interview the sample pool of 10 adult visitors and the sample group of 10 adult local community members. The interviews were conducted with the use of the questionnaire, but in the rather informal way, to make interviewers feel easy and confident to express his or her opinions. There was no pre-selection of the surveyed group; however the individual (oral) agreement for the interview was required. The responders remained anonymous; questions were focused on interests in the pilgrimage, holy site infrastructure, cultural and religious events, opinions on accessibility, and suggestions for improvements. The local community members were asked about the pilgrimage presence in the village, opinions about behaviour of visitors, positive and negative outcomes of the tourists visiting the holy site. The researchers must admit, that there was a possibility that interviewed sample of the local community members was not always fully representative, as many refused to take part in the interviews. It was the reason why much more interviews were successfully made with pilgrims (there were 200 answers obtained from pilgrims and only 156 from the local community members).

In 2015 - 2016 also the deeper insight studies were carried out, mainly in form of non-participant observations of semi-structured and unstructured character. The semi – structured observations enabled the researchers to generate numerical data from the observations. The researchers believed that this part of case studies was important to understand better the social – spatial context of surveyed holy sites. It covered both semi-structured, non-participant observations with records (photographs) and notes made *in situ* and rather informal in character, interviews with the visitors and the local community members, but without recording it. It was important to get valuable data through critical investigation, familiarisation of surveyed areas, learning about the visitors and inhabitants (listening, observing, questioning and trying to understand pilgrims and local community members).

Research material. Authors were especially interested in the less popular, more remotely located holy sites. The local community opinion on tourism development and their readiness to respond the needs of persons with different disabilities: elders, persons with motor disabilities, blind or visually impaired and families travelling with small children. The case study and field surveys covered the following selected rural sanctuaries located in Mazovia Region (Fig. 1).



Fig 1. Mazovia Region rural sanctuaries - research material layout. Description: 1- Secymin Sanctuary, 2 – Ożarów Sanctuary, 3 – Niepokalanów Sanctuary, 4 – Powsin Sanctuary, 5 – Rokitno Sanctuary, 6 – Lewiczyn Sanctuary. Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw Ds -245, carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant

- Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw
- Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw
- Sanctuary in Secymin – Nowiny near Warsaw
- Sanctuary in Ożarów Mazowiecki near Warsaw
- Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw
- Sanctuary in Niepokalanów near Warsaw

On the base of collected research material a number of subjective and objective factors were identified, which could determine the accessibility to the surveyed rural sanctuaries and enhance the level of pilgrims and the local community members satisfaction. That included the accessibility to the sanctuary, museums, religious and cultural events, local transport, information and other elements of the basic tourist infrastructure (accommodation, catering), also new technologies implemented to create 'smart destination and accessible sanctuary' (Table 1, 2, Fig. 2 - 15).

Tab 1. Rural sanctuaries of Mazovia Region and disabled visitors concerns.

Sanctuary name (location), date of foundation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 s/c/a
-Sanktuarium Matki Boskiej Tęskniącej (Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw), 1683	+	+	-	-	+	+	+/-/-
-Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Lewczyńskiej Pocieszycielki Strapionych (Sanctuary in Lewczyn near Warsaw), 1668	+/-	+	+	+	+	+	+/+/ +
-Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Radosnej Opiekunki Przyrody (Sanctuary in Secymin – Nowiny), 1998	+	+	-	-	+	+	+/-/-
-Sanktuarium Parafii Miłosierdzia Bożego (Sanctuary in Ożarów Mazowiecki), 1989	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-/-
-Sanktuarium Prymasowej Wspomożycielki (Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw), 1603	+/-	+/-	-	-	+	+	+/-/-
-Sanktuarium NMP w Niepokalanowie (Sanctuary in Niepokalanów near Sochaczew), 1950 (M*)	+	+/-	+	+	+	+	+/+/ +

Notice: (M*) – Museum of Father Maximilian Kolbe; 1- accessible sanctuary (including museum), 2 – accessible surrounding around The sanctuary, 3 – pre – visit information dedicated to disabled, including sight impairments 4 – in – situ information dedicated to disabled, including with sight impairments, 5 – parking site with lots dedicated to disabled, 6 – toilets dedicated to disabled, 7 – other services dedicated to disabled: shops (s), catering (c), accommodation (a). Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw, ds -245, carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant.

Tab 2. Rural sanctuaries of Mazovia Region: local community members' attitude toward tourism (all data expressed in percent).

Sanctuary name (location), date of foundation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
-Sanktuarium Matki Boskiej Tęskniącej (Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw), 1683	60	25	15	45	30	25	45
-Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Lewczyńskiej Pocieszycielki Strapionych (Sanctuary in Lewczyn near Grójec), 1668	55	15	30	40	30	65	5
-Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Radosnej Opiekunki Przyrody (Sanctuary in Secymin – Nowiny), 1998	55	25	20	40	35	5	60
-Sanktuarium Parafii Miłosierdzia Bożego (Sanctuary in Ożarów Mazowiecki), 1989	70	20	10	50	70	25	5
-Sanktuarium Prymasowej Wspomożycielki (Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw), 1603	65	25	10	30	35	60	5
-Sanktuarium NMP w Niepokalanowie (Sanctuary in Niepokalanów near Sochaczew), 1950	75	15	10	60	65	20	15

Notice: all data expressed in (%); 1 – local community members accepting visitors in the holy site, 2 – local community members not accepting visitors in the holy site, 3 – local community members not seeing neither negative nor positive consequences of tourism development in their village, 4 – local community members employed in local services for pilgrims (shops, catering, accommodation, guide services), 5 – local community members wishing to stop tourist movement on the present level, 6 – local community members wishing to develop tourist movement, 7 – local community members wishing to have less pilgrims than today. Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw, Ds -245, carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant.

To achieve the desired final effects and avoid critics of the case study results – the authors tried to design the research work to be consistent with the recommendations of the renowned literature on scientific research concerning rural studies, religious tourism and holy sites accessibility concerns. It included selection of the methodological survey tools and analysing qualitative data and interpretation of quantitative data (Andereck 2005, Finn 2000, Haley 2005, Phillimore 2004, Smith 2006, Uysal 2015).

4. Research Results

Surveyed sanctuaries characteristic. Mazovia Region of Poland is a historical region in the central Poland, which has been existed since Middle Ages. The area covers about 33,600 km² and population is 5 million (3 million inhabit the Warsaw Metropolitan Area). The main religion centre of the region is Warsaw, where numerous churches are located and 12 of them have sanctuary status (the most popular are the Temple of Divine Providence and the Sanctuary of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko). In the Mazovia Region rural areas there are about hundred other sanctuaries and the most popular is Niepokalanów Sanctuary (near Warsaw), visited by 700 000 pilgrims each year. Other popular holy sites in rural areas include: Czerwińsk (Medieval church and cloister), Brochów (Early Medieval church), Brok (Baroque church), Zakroczym, Szreńsk, Przasnysz, Szczuczyn, Wizna, Rostkowo, Boguszyce and Zuzela. Many Mazovia sanctuaries have unique architectural values, for example interesting historical wooden structure deriving from 17 century. The oldest historical wooden churches are following (in brackets there are dates of church foundation): Drogiszka (1635), Jesionna (1665), Królewko (1639), Kurdwanów (1676), Lewiczyn (1668), Płock Trzepowo (1598), Rębowo (1620), Skuły (1678), Węgrów (1678), Węgrzynowo (1694), Zakrzewo Koscielne (1620), Zwola Poduchowna (1667) and Żuków (1676-1677) (Dąbrowka 2004, Kryciński 2015).



Fig 2. St. Mary Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw (wooden church from 17 c). Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

The research study encompassed not the eldest, but the most popular holy sites of Mazovia Region. Selected were six rural sanctuaries, the examples of sacred sites connected with both religious and secular importance, being attraction for both religious tourism and cultural tourism. For example: the Sanctuary of Powsin is a historical baroque structure (17c.), located in the vicinity of the Royal Palace Wilanów Museum and another popular tourist destination, Sanctuary of Niepokalanów by Sochaczew (20c.), is located very close to the Museum of Frederic Chopin Birthplace in Żelazowa Wola. The authors believed that various attractions of host site might help to diversify the tourism flow and enhance sustainability (Fig.1).



Fig 3. St. Mary Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw (wooden church from 17 c). Not accessible church entrance for disabled. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

The religious tourist's travel motivations and personal characteristic

As we have found during our survey, the determinants of pilgrim travelling to the rural holy sites were not built on purely religious ground and we managed to identify a range of other motivations. Only 20% of pilgrims declared that belief was the fundamental motivation. The majority of visitors to the holy sites confessed (75%), that belief motivation was strong, but other reasons for travelling (entertainment, education, pleasure of travelling, visiting other tourist attractions) were enough important. Interestingly, only 5% of tourists declared, that visiting religious site was less important than entertainment and culture needs. Analysing the information of our survey data, it showed that despite devotional and spiritual purposes also other motivations were important for visitors:

- interest in the cultural heritage
- a desire to escape from a mundane environment to the beauty of idyllic rural nature,
- very cheap excursion opportunity (most of tourists are low-income rural farmers, retired elders, school groups or even unemployed member of community),
- family and social interactions (very popular are parish community pilgrim groups),
- cultural and education opportunities, pilgrim travel program often encompasses visit to other holy sites and heritage monuments, for example visitors of Niepokalanów sanctuary often visit also nearby located Frederic Chopin Museum in Żelazowa Wola, Nieborów Palace Museum and medieval church in Brochów.

In the surveyed sanctuaries the majority of pilgrims were Poles, with the exception of Niepokalanów Sanctuary, where there were some visitors coming from abroad. Accordingly to the sanctuary administration statistic data, these were mainly organised groups from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, France and Ukraine (about 1% of pilgrims visiting the site).

The average age of pilgrim was 45 - 65 years, mostly woman of college education level. Only 3% of pilgrims were visible disabled (wheelchair users or sight impaired), what was much below the true representative number of European society (10% disabled of total population) (Fig. 4 - 6).

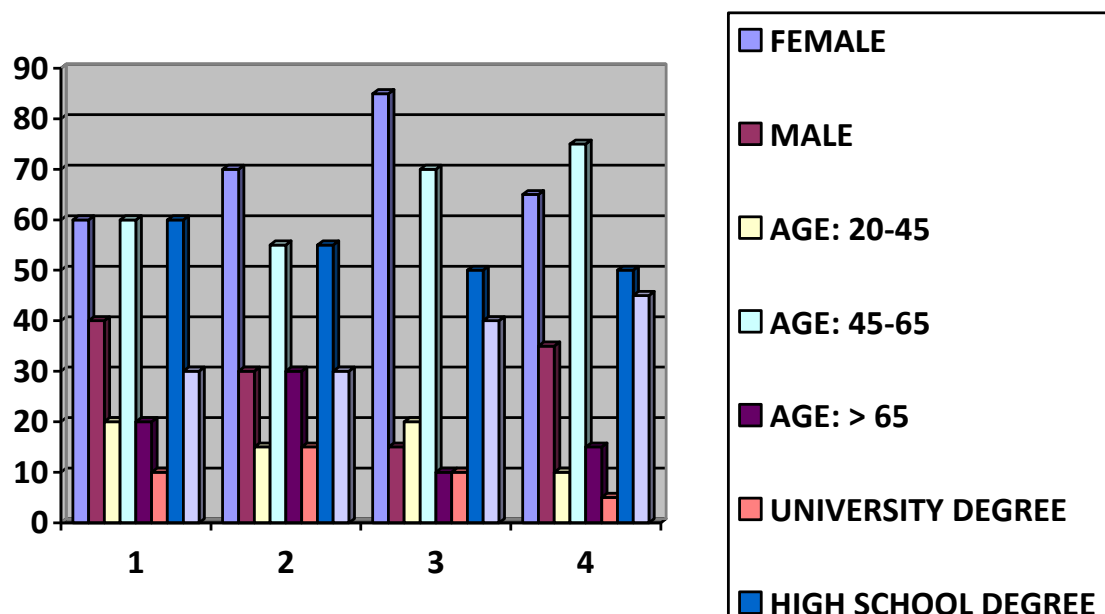


Fig 4. Pilgrims characteristic (selected rural sanctuaries of Mazovia Region, Poland): 1 – Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw, 2 – Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw, 3 – Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw, 4 – Sanctuary in Niepokalanow near Warsaw. Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw, Ds -245, carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant.

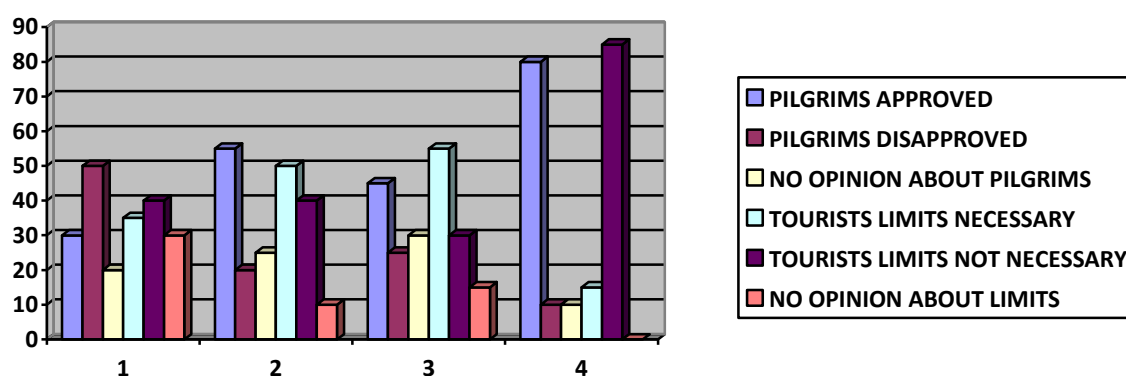


Fig 5. Local community opinions on pilgrims behaviour and tourism development limits (selected rural sanctuaries of Mazovia Region, Poland): 1 – Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw, 2 – Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw, 3 – Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw, 4 – Sanctuary in Niepokalanow near Warsaw. Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw, Ds -245, carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant.

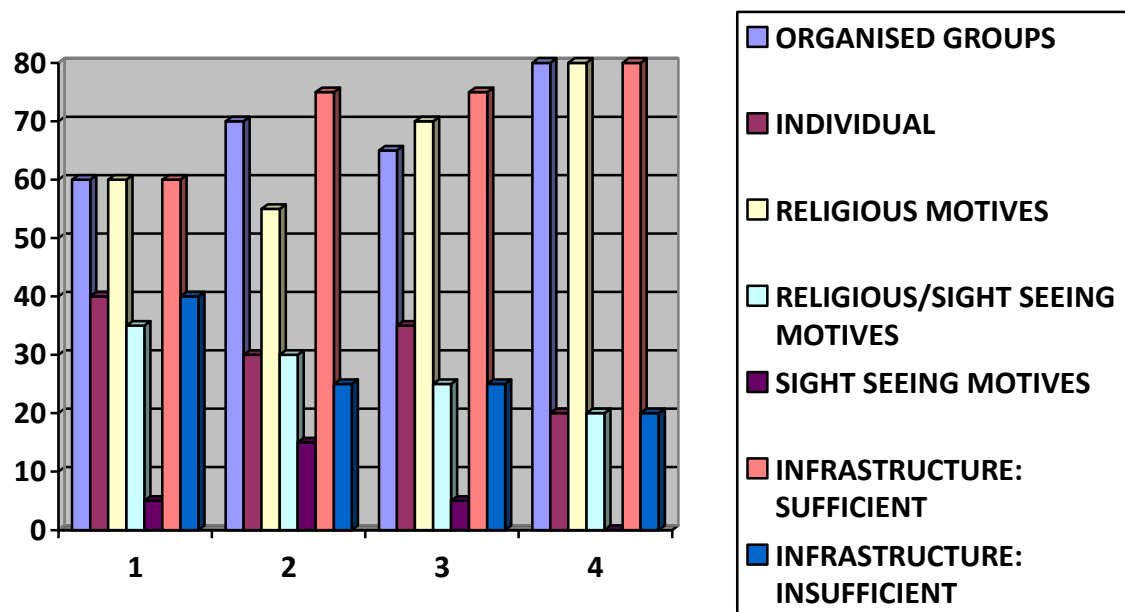


Fig 6. Pilgrims motives of travelling and opinions about tourist infrastructure and services (selected rural sanctuaries of Mazovia Region, Poland): 1 – Sanctuary in Powsin near Warsaw 2 – Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw, 3 – Sanctuary in Rokitno near Warsaw, 4 – Sanctuary in Niepokalanów near Warsaw. Source: Research Study AWF University Warsaw, Ds -245 carried out on the ground of Ministry of Science and Higher Education grant.



Fig 7. St. Mary Sanctuary in Lewiczyn near Warsaw (wooden church from 17 c). Not accessible church gardens for disabled pilgrims. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

The accessibility to the rural sanctuaries. In the surveyed rural sanctuaries the accessibility was on the very different level. Very well prepared in terms of disabled visitors consideration was Niepokalanów Sanctuary. The other holy sites lack the dedicated transport, information and

toilets. Pilgrims in wheelchairs might find it difficult to visit the sanctuary and its surrounding in Lewiczyn and Rokitno. Not always the local hotel and catering services was barrier – free (too narrow doors, no ramps helping to overcome the outdoor stairs barrier, no sidewalks with smooth but anti- slippery surface). It is to be underlined that in some rural sanctuaries there were rather Pilgrims Houses with canteens (Niepokalanów, Lewiczyn) and B&B accommodation services of lower standard rather than hotels and restaurants. Most of pilgrims groups did not stay for the night in the sanctuary (if so, rather organised groups than individuals). Many of individual tourists undertook pilgrimage to the rural churches together with their relatives or friends who lived nearby. In such a case pilgrimage was mixed with family / social occasion. Usually pilgrims had their own transport, very rarely used the public transport, which was rather on poor service standard, with the exception of Niepokalanów Sanctuary - very well connected with Warsaw and other cities in Poland by the train and bus services. (Fig. 1).



Fig 8. St. Mary Sanctuary in Rokitno, near Warsaw, main facade (neo classical style, 18 c). Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

Despite the recent numerous improvements, the most popular rural sanctuaries in the Mazovia Region (as Lewiczyn and Rokitno), remain only partially accessible for persons with disabilities (Table 1). A comparison between surveyed holy sites leads to the impression that many of rural holy sites still lacks a comprehensive development strategy for mobile tourism and could not be awarded the smart destination. This was documented by the research outcomes:

- inaccessible sanctuaries (main entrance) in Rokitno, Lewiczyn
- inaccessible interiors of the church and its surrounding (Rokitno and Lewiczyn),
- lack of low-cost hotels and catering offers dedicated to disabled (Secymin, Rokitno, Powsin, Lewiczyn),
- no dedicated to disabled parking sites or toilets (Rokitno, Lewiczyn).
- insufficient number of information unites with the use of technological innovations dedicated to disabled tourists (as Braille alphabet or audio information), in Rokitno, Lewiczyn, Powsin, Secymin and Ożarów.

Only one sanctuary, Niepokalanów near Warsaw, was very well prepared for disabled visitors (transport, good access to the sanctuary and museum, accommodation, catering services, pre-visit and in-situ information).



Fig 9. St. Mary Sanctuary in Rokitno, near Warsaw (neo classical style, 18 c), surrounded by pastures and woods landscape. Smooth surface of the church surrounding is accessible and safe for pilgrims. Main entrance has a ramp. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

Local community and pilgrims. Focusing on the residents of rural sanctuaries (living in the surrounding of the surveyed holy sites), this research examined differences in tourism perception and attitude toward pilgrims visible across local community. The results indicated that the perceived impacts of tourism, both positive and negative were recognised. With respect to resident attitudes toward religious tourism development, the results showed that in many cases it had achieved a threshold level (clearly visible especially in Niepokalanów Sanctuary). Finally, the results also showed that residents supported even the special tourist fees for services (as parking or other forms of financial duties). This research examined also relationships between tourism attitudes, length of residency, level of tourism development, and feelings of community attachment to their village and sanctuary.

A significant relationship was found between the length of residency and attachment: people living there only last twenty years, used to complain more about masses of tourists (overcrowded shops, road traffic problems, parking difficulties). However those born in the village were more understanding, saying the pilgrims had been part of the history and tradition of this area. Clearly they expressed much more attachment and emotional sense of place, readiness to share with others the history and tradition of place (which they were very proud of).



Fig 10. St. Mary Sanctuary in Rokitno, near Warsaw (neo classical style, 18 c), surrounded by pastures and woods landscape. Back entrance from the woods is not accessible and safe for pilgrims. Only main entrance has a ramp. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

On average only about 30% of local community members saw benefits of tourism (better public transport, caring for infrastructure, great selection of retails, banks and restaurants). The others (about 60% of local community members) felt there were too many tourists and claimed that from their perspectives, the disadvantages of tourism outweighed the advantages. One of them angrily confessed: 'On religious festivals I have to take my bus very early in the morning to avoid the traffic disruptions caused by the numerous tourist coaches'. The other said that in his opinion: 'masses of pilgrims create not only safety hazards but also reduce the special atmosphere of sacred site'. About 10% of local residents claimed that they could not identify any major impact of pilgrims on the area (in terms of negative or beneficiary socio-cultural consequences).

5. Conclusion

Sustainable tourism and smart destination means protection of environment and respect to the local tradition and values. That includes, among many other issues, local community tolerance and acceptance, expressed to tourists with different disabilities. Tourists with motor, visual and hearing impairments require special aids to travel and to visit holy sites safely and relatively independently. Accessibility to holy sites might be achieved by providing both high quality infrastructure, with the use of innovative solutions and modern technology (as pre-visit information in Internet, which may help to plan better the potential visit) and by empathy and help. It is apparent that if the Mazovia rural sanctuaries wish to be promoted as a smart destinations and disabled pilgrims friendly sites, need to develop solutions that can improve the situation. Moreover, many of local community members and visitors are people with different impairments. The sanctuaries and their surroundings should be improved in this aspect.



Fig 11. St. Mary Sanctuary in Rokitno, near Warsaw (neo classical style, 18 c), surrounded by pastures and woods landscape. Main entrance to the church interior (although accompanied by ramp) is difficult due to the too narrow doorway and might be not accessible for some child carers with a pram. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Anna Ostrowska-Tryzno (2016)



Fig 12. Niepokalanów Sanctuary near Warsaw. Accessible main entrance to the church (stairs are doubled by a ramp). Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

In Poland these shortcomings stem from many different reasons, however fundamental are financial shortages and too strict law regulations concerning the heritage sites protection. It is true that adapting sanctuaries, especially historical ones, to the needs of persons with disabilities is always costly. As it seems, the heritage conservatory authorities need to understand better the urgent necessity to build a 'consensus platform'. It should be a subject to be discussed among the stakeholders: church administration, investors and architects, local authority and urban planners, historian of arts and last but not least – requiring the local community member's active participation. Another issue is a design concept that would harmonise fully with the historical background and *sacrum genius loci* of a given sanctuary.

What is more, all modifications and improvements need to be planned individually, as every holy site is different, and consequently, no universally applicable model could be developed. It means that adapting a sanctuary to the needs of persons with disabilities must be performed individually each time, as a unique character, spatial context and history of each sanctuary need to be taken into account. Furthermore, every project requires individual decisions in accordance with the building conservation recommendations.

What should be done first? For example in most of the surveyed sanctuaries (with the exemption of Niepokalanów) the pilgrims mobility when visiting the holy site (church, museum) is limited due to narrow doorways, outdoor stairs not accompanied by ramps or lifts and the lack of sanitary facilities dedicated to disabled persons. Moreover in the sanctuaries the visual information is too rarely accompanied by a transcript in Braille or aural information. As the research outcomes showed, other significant questions to be solved are affordable accommodation available to low-income pilgrims with impairments, accessible catering and other tourist basic services, as shopping. Sometimes, even a walk in the surrounding of the sanctuary might be difficult, as sidewalks usually are narrow and have uneven surface, being dangerous for families with toddlers, pregnant woman, and elders, also with crouches or wheel chairs users. Unfortunately building a ramp by outdoor stairs is often impossible due to disapproval expressed by the heritage conservatory authorities or simple the lack of enough space at the outside of the church. The only option left is to build a temporary structure, kind of a mobile (dismantle able) ramp or platform. It will require the help of family, friends, staff assistants or other sympathetic persons.

Overall, accessible sanctuaries project might have several important aims and address different crucial issues. Accessibility to the rural holy sites and in broader meaning - to all rural heritage destinations, should be one of the well-balanced spatial planning policy goals. The successful planning strategy in this respect, need to develop a collaborative approach and involve participation of several interest groups. These are often having contradictive expectations, as church administration and the heritage conservatory office, local community members and pilgrims visiting a site. It may help to built a rational consensus platform and find some satisfactory and compromising solutions. That is why the open question remains whether 'mobile tourism' is achievable in the all holy sites, on how high cost and how big compromises are necessary.

As each sanctuary and its *sacrum* values are unique, an individual approach rather than universal model is necessary to enhance the pilgrim's mobility. Nevertheless the revision of present, still too poor, conceptual framework of rural tourism development in Mazovia Region is necessary. The rural tourism potential is a particular and one of the potentials is historical sanctuaries, being important tourism attraction. These might be created as 'smart destinations' – now mainly deprived from the expected services, infrastructure and promotion. To target different age groups, also younger tourists, promoting holy sites of the region (for example Mazovia historical wooden churches) could be done through new technological concepts and information instruments focused on the modern, knowledge – based society. The role of the Internet in promoting not only the holy site but other cultural and natural attractions might be crucial.



Fig 13. Niepokalanów Sanctuary near Warsaw. Accessible main entrance to the church (stairs are doubled by a ramp). Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Photo by: Maciej Piechotka (2016)

As it seems, a knowledge – based society in the context of rural tourism could contribute much more to overcome technical and cultural barriers, promote set of values and principles, protect better natural and cultural environment, reduce social exclusion and increase tolerance, improve good behaviour regulations and services quality and last but not least help to make every day life of local community easier and of higher quality. It is clear that those who see how tourism is important for economic development could broadly benefit from it, once these rural communities which do not accept pilgrims - see only the negative consequences. Undeniable the knowledge gained through the education campaign may be an important step toward better understanding and greater benefits (not only in economic dimension) for the rural community residents.

In some lesser - known rural areas of Central and East Europe, removed from any focus of activity, religious tourism can raise the profile of a host destination, attracting the potential investors and offering a local community members better standard of living. As it seems, religious tourism might contribute better to the socio - economic benefits and inter – cultural understanding, however under several conditions:

- respecting local traditions and values,
- protection of natural and cultural environment,
- expansion of tourism must be accepted by local residents,
- holy sites need to answer to basic tourist needs and expectations (including accessibility for disabled pilgrims).

However, it must be also underlined, that sustainability in tourism means also limits of visitors in the host areas. The most popular Polish rural sanctuaries (Niepokalanów, Wambierzyce, Swieta Lipka) have local population of only several hundred but are visited by thousands of tourists each year (GUS 2015). That might always cause some arguments and disruptions, when the village space is shared by groups with different needs and expectations.

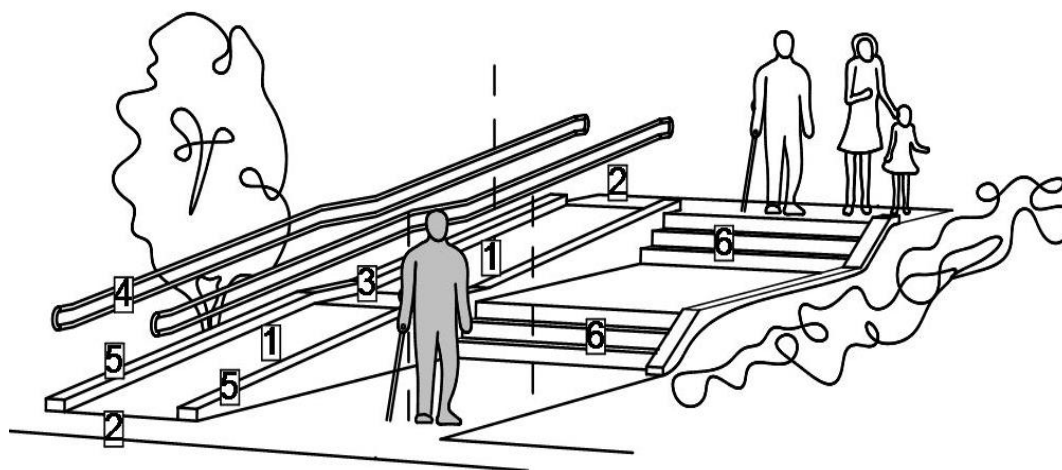


Fig 14. Rural sanctuaries and accessibility. Problem, which is identified as inaccessible building main entrance due to the difference between indoor and outdoor level might be solved by ramps provided wherever stairs obstruct the free passage of pedestrians, mainly wheelchair users and people with mobility problems (seniors, individuals with crutches, temporary disabled, toddlers, child carers with prams, people with luggage): 1 – ramp, 2 – landing, 3 – mid landing, 4 – railings, 5 – curbs, 6 – stairs. Ramp rails should have smooth surface, extending min 30 cm beyond beginning and end of ramp ridge, handrails required 95 cm high, walking surface should be smooth but not slippery, one-way ramp should be minimum 90 cm wide, 2-way ramp minimum 180 cm wide. Recommended maximum gradient is 8% for outdoor ramp. No changes of gradient along the ramp are allowed. Plant should be located enough far that shadows do not prevent sun light from melting snow or ice on the ramp surface and will provide natural light. Note: the above standards may vary accordingly to the local building law regulations. Source: The presented material is the result of research conducted on the base of the grant issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Sciences (ds-245 AWF), carried out by the authors at the Joseph Pilsudski Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland. Drawn by: Anna Pawlikowska-Piechotka (2015).

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