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## From overtourism to no-tourism – costs and benefits of extreme volume of tourism traffic as perceived by inhabitants of two Polish destinations

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**Abstract.** Overtourism might be one of the most characteristic trends and phenomena of tourism in the 2010s. However, after a rapid transformation caused by overtourism, an even faster and more unexpected change appeared in 2020: due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism temporarily disappeared from cities and other destinations worldwide. These two opposite and extreme phenomena were so close in time that they can be compared and their perception by different tourism stakeholders can be analyzed. Host communities were often major victims of overtourism, which led to the development of anti-tourism attitudes in many destinations. However, many inhabitants were also severely affected by the recent decline in tourism, as plenty of them depended economically on tourist arrivals and tourism revenues. This research is conducted for two of the most important destinations in Poland: Kraków and Białka Tatrzańska. The study aims to compare how the transformations to and from overtourism are perceived by inhabitants of these two typical and important tourism destinations. The results show that the impact of tourism was not perceived as crucial by the residents of either destination and that this remains true for both overtourism and no-tourism. However, the economic importance of tourism was strongly emphasized. Additionally, the indicated impact of tourism on their lives and their destination was much stronger for the residents of Białka Tatrzańska than those of Kraków.

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The study aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding how tourism development (including overtourism and no-tourism) is perceived by inhabitants of cities and tourism resorts, particularly in terms of experiencing the benefits and costs of both extreme situations.

**Keywords:** overtourism, no-tourism, COVID-19 pandemics, tourism impact, destination residents.

**JEL Classification:** R58, O18, M38.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the 2010s brought about rapid changes in the development of tourism and in the way it is perceived. These changes reached a peak in 2020. During 2017-2019, overtourism, with all its negative social and natural consequences, dominated both scientific and practical discourse over the development of tourism. Overtourism has been called ‘game changer’ (Volgger, 2019), ‘third-order change’ (Žemla, 2020), ‘radical change’ (Ebejer et al., 2018), or ‘embracing change’ (Donelli et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic completely changed this picture, along with the restrictions introduced. Due to further restrictions or even lockdowns introduced in most countries in the spring of 2020, in many places, overtourism was replaced by under-tourism (Fletcher et al., 2020; Gowreesunkar, Thanh, 2020) or even no-tourism (Koh, 2020). As a result of the next successive waves of the epidemic and fluctuating loosened and tightened restrictions over the following months, the traffic decreased throughout the year compared to the previous years, and its seasonal pattern did not correspond to the previously known patterns.

The nature of the restrictions imposed in most countries made tourism, including the hotel and air transport sectors, one of the industries most profoundly affected by the pandemic in every country. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) even wrote that the COVID-19 pandemic played the role of a game-changer in the tourism market. Nevertheless, the scale of the decline and its severity was significantly different from country to country and by type of destination. Since in most northern hemisphere countries, the restrictions were somewhat loosened in the summer holiday season, relatively high tourist traffic was recorded in typical holiday destinations, including seaside and mountain resorts. On the other hand, tourism in cities perceived as more risky destinations decreased to particularly low levels (Jiricka-Pürerer et al., 2020; Anguera-Torrell et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Moreover, seasonal fluctuations of tourist traffic in cities are lower, and the holiday peak is not associated with such a high concentration of tourist traffic as it is in the case of resorts (Donelli et al., 2021). It is worth noting at this point that cities were also places where overtourism was clearly manifested. Nevertheless, in the spring of 2020, not only in the case of cities but also in the case of most other destinations, an interesting phenomenon was observed, i.e. excessive tourist traffic was transformed into almost no traffic at all. What is more, this radical change took place within just a few weeks. Therefore, spring 2020 is a very special time in global tourism development. These extreme phenomena occurred relatively close to each other in time, so residents can also analyze the impact of this change. The presented paper aims to analyze how the inhabitants of various destinations perceive the socio-cultural and economic effects related to the transition from overtourism to no-tourism. The essential question to be answered was whether in view of the negative effects of overtourism, the inhabitants perceived the almost no-tourism phenomenon as a positive phenomenon that brings relief to the present problems or maybe it was perceived as a different but equally unfavorable situation.

The reason for researching this issue is a response to multiple opinions of researchers, i.e. that the COVID-19 pandemic situation was an excellent opportunity to implement significant qualitative changes in tourist traffic is organized (Skare et al., 2021; Bertella 2020). Paradoxically, despite the prevailing undertourism, it became more important to analyze overtourism, as it was an opportunity to think about

how to reduce excessive tourism after the pandemic and, at the same time, how to support the revival of the tourism industry (Koh, 2020).

Empirical research was conducted among the inhabitants of two popular tourist destinations in Poland, where overtourism has been noted in the recent scientific literature. The first destination was Kraków (Plichta, 2018; Plichta, 2019; Kruczek, Szromek, 2020; Szromek et al., 2020; Zmyślony et al., 2020), while the second one was Białka Tatrzańska (Żemła, & Szromek, 2018). The destinations where the research was conducted were selected to include in the survey the opinions of both a large city's (Kraków) residents and residents of the popular mountain resort with an extensive winter sports offer (Białka Tatrzańska). The research was conducted in a particular period (May-July 2020). Like many other places in Poland and in other countries, Kraków and Białka Tatrzańska experienced a complete lockdown at that time, which was gradually loosened in the period when the survey was done. This gave researchers the opportunity to compare and analyze whether the absence of tourism in their towns due to the lockdown made the inconvenience and benefits associated with tourism was also removed. Given the rapidly and dynamically changing situation, it was necessary to ask questions about specific moments of time very precisely. Therefore, it was indicated in the questionnaire that the questions about overtourism referred to the summer of 2019 and the winter season of 2019/2020, while the questions about the lockdown referred to April 2020.

## **2. THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON DESTINATIONS' COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY IN TIMES OF OVERTOURISM AND THE PANDEMICS**

The positive and negative impact of tourism on the visited places and their inhabitants has been the subject of scientific research for many years (Rosenow, Pulsipher, 1979; Ap, 1992; Andereck et al., 2005). It was also obvious that this impact depends directly on the scale of tourism development. Therefore, the change that took place in the second half of the second decade of the 21st century and is described as the emergence of the overtourism phenomenon can be treated as new wine in old bottles (Buhalis, 2022). However, a closer analysis of the phenomenon allows us to indicate significant qualitative and quantitative changes, which make the impact of overtourism on the inhabitants of the affected destinations significantly different from how this impact was described in the previous studies. On the one hand, the research shows that in destinations affected by overtourism, phenomena typical of heavy tourist traffic, such as overcrowding (Milano, 2017; Perkumienė, Pranskūnienė, 2019; Szromek et al., 2019), noise (Koens et al., 2018; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Kruczek, Szromek, 2020), an increase in crime rate and a decrease in the sense of public safety (Goodwin, 2017; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Seraphin et al., 2019; Seraphin, 2020), increase in prices of goods and services (Horn, Merante, 2017; Milano, 2017; Żemła, 2020), and unacceptable tourists' behavior (Goodwin, 2017; Phi, 2018; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019) can be seen. However, the scale of these phenomena has become so large that many residents of destinations have begun to perceive tourism as an element that significantly limits the quality of their lives (Namberger et al., 2019; Seraphin et al., 2020). As it seems, changes of a qualitative nature are even more important. Destinations are affected by tourism factors that have not been observed or have only been observed on a small scale. These elements are related to overtourism. Most often, overtourism is seen in large cities (Goodwin, 2017; Milano, 2017; Phi, 2018; Namberger et al., 2019), and it is metropolises that are currently becoming the focus of attention in the scientific discourse on managing tourist destinations and replacing traditional resorts. They drew a lot of attention in previous publications. Many of these destination management principles, developed with resorts in mind, are not fully effective in metropolitan conditions (Goodwin, 2017; Żemła, 2020). There has also been a huge change in the relationship between the destinations' market success and the residents' attitudes. Results presented in numerous publications published at the very beginning of the century and earlier on suggested that residents' extensive support for tourism development is strongly related to the success of tourism development (Gürsoy et al., 2002, Su et al., 2018). This point of view, however, had to be changed given other examples of destinations that have recently become significantly successful in the tourism

market and where strong anti-tourism attitudes and movements are currently emerging. This situation has been seen in many large cities over the recent years. The inhabitants of big cities, who neither perceived their financial situation nor the way their cities operated as dependent on the income obtained from tourism, showed a completely different view of the balance of benefits and losses generated by tourism development. In cities, new forms of tourism impact the inhabitants of destinations can now be seen particularly clearly. This was mainly, but not exclusively, related to the development of short-term real estate rental platforms as part of the pattern created by sharing economy (Plichta, 2018; Zwolińska-Ligaj, and Kacprzak, 2019; Moreno-Gil and Stefaniak, 2020; Zmysłony et al., 2020). The surge in Airbnb and similar portals' popularity over the last decade has resulted in problems in many cities with the availability of housing for the residents, with their prices, and with long-term rental costs, which has become a less attractive option for property owners (Dredge et al., 2016; Merante, 2017; Żemła, 2020). In addition, the slogan 'live like a local' that accompanied the development of Airbnb (Goodwin, 2017) made tourists more and more willing to use services located outside traditional tourist penetration centers, and the residents have fewer and fewer opportunities to escape from constant contact with tourists (Gurran and Phibbst, 2017). Multiple city districts (e.g. Kazimierz in Kraków (Kruczek, Szromek, 2020), or Alfama in Lisbon (Sequera, Nofre, 2020)) have become places of intense tourism gentrification (Goodwin, 2017; Diaz-Parra, and Jover, 2020; Nilsson, 2020). Inhabitants, whose lives have become the subject of tourist interest and who experience a permanent lack of privacy, have become embers of anti-tourism attitudes and the so-called tourism phobia. In addition to this, in many places, a surge in tourist traffic has resulted (e.g. Maya Beach in Thailand (Hess, 2019); Dolomites in Italy (Scuttari et al., 2019); Julian Alps and Bled (Peeters et al., 2021)) in exceeding the capacity to absorb tourism and the impact of tourism on the natural environment has reached an unacceptable scale.

This situation, with excellent economic results for the tourism industry on the one hand and with multiple tensions in numerous destinations on the other, was preceded by an almost completely halted tourist traffic in most destinations due to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in spring 2020 (Li et al., 2021). Since the changes have been rapid and unexpected and due to their momentum and unpredictability, there is little data showing how the inhabitants of destinations perceived the transition from overtourism to no-tourism. The scale of losses suffered by the tourism industry and the huge number of jobs at risk meant that the first scientific analyzes (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Karabulut et al., 2020; Kreiner, Ram, 2020; Sharma, Nicolau, 2020) were focused primarily on the fundamental issues of the industry's survival globally and in individual countries, while the local perspective, in particular the view of the inhabitants of individual towns, has not so far been the subject of extensive research. Nevertheless, the need to understand and take into account the impact of the pandemics on residents as well as the needs and expectations of destinations' residents in creating global national and local recovery strategies is also more and more often emphasized in publications (Kour et al., 2020; Qiu et al., 2020; Salman et al., 2021).

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As pointed out in the Introduction, to achieve scientific goals, empirical research was necessary. The survey was conducted among the inhabitants of two popular tourist destinations in Poland – Kraków and Białka Tatrzańska, i.e. a large city with a very high tourist attractiveness and a modern winter sports resort. An additional assumption was the small distance between the destinations and a similar distance from large groups of potential tourists.

In the research, a questionnaire containing eighteen questions in the form of measurement scales related to several subject categories describing the nature of the impact of tourism on destinations (Table 1) was used. These areas are: relationships between residents and tourists (1-3; 13-15) (Goodwin, 2017; Żemła, 2020); (4-8) economy and income (Namberger et al., 2019; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019); overcrowding (2; 9) (Milano, 2017; Perkumienė, Pranskūnienė, 2019; Szromek et al., 2019); security (10-12) (Goodwin, 2017; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Seraphin et al., 2019; Seraphin, 2020); and the number of tourists

(16-18) (Novy, Colomb, 2016; Namberger et al., 2019; Kruczek, Szromek, 2020). The respondents were asked to present specific views and opinions on the issues raised and to indicate whether they find certain views true or false. The variants of answers were ranked by assigning them subsequent ranks. The scale of grades used here was a five-grade scale in the integer range from -2 to 2, i.e. calibrated in point 0, where values below zero mean disagreements with the opinion formulated, and above zero – consent to the opinion presented. An inference could have been made by averaging the results and performing a comparative analysis using nonparametric statistical tests. The results were presented by giving the value of the arithmetic mean. In addition, an analysis of each pair of opinions was carried out, wherein each of the pairs, one question concerned the impact of overtourism, and the other concerned the identical impact of no-tourism. This analysis considered the averaged results (on the adopted scale from -2 to 2) for both analyzed destinations. In Figure 1, the differences between the destinations are shown. The red dot means Kraków and the green dot – Białka Tatrzańska, while the blue line between the dots means the average value. Additionally, the value of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and the significance of the correlation coefficient were estimated.

Table 1

Average results of respondents' assessments for eighteen measurement scales.

No.	Opinion	Total	Kraków	Białka Tatrzańska	Significance Levels of Differences
1	I do not use catering establishments where there are always many tourists	0.00±1.49	- 0.06±1.45	0.13±1.56	0.186
2	Since there are no tourists, I am more likely to stay in places attractive to tourists in the city (the historic city center)	0.13±1.47	0.01±1.50	0.41±1.37	0.006
3	Tourists who live in my neighborhood have a negative impact on the quality of my life	-0.7±1.42	- 0.81±1.42	-0.43±1.38	0.002
4	Due to the large number of tourists coming to the city, the local urban economy operates better	1.1±1.03	0.96±0.99	1.44±1.03	0.001
5	Since there are no tourists, the income of my friends and neighbors has declined	0.12±1.50	- 0.29±1.46	1.13±1.04	0.001
6	Since there are no tourists, the city's income has declined	1.27±1.00	1.26±0.96	1.29±1.08	0.273
7	Due to the large number of tourists arrivals to the city, my household income was higher	-0.68±1.52	- 1.18±1.19	0.51±1.58	0.001
8	Since there are no tourists, my income has declined	-0.75±1.55	- 1.18±1.30	0.32±1.62	0.001
9	Due to too many tourists and the general congestion in these places, I try to avoid the places most frequently visited by tourists in my town	0.16±1.44	0.16±1.44	0.99±1.30	0.001
10	The level of security in the town is lower due to tourists, their number, and their behavior	-0.24±1.35	- 0.35±1.32	0.03±1.40	0.006
11	Without tourists, the town is a safer place	-0.27±1.32	- 0.46±1.23	0.2±1.43	0.001
12	I didn't feel safe in my town because of the tourists	-0.82±1.32	- 0.94±1.24	-0.51±1.45	0.003
13	Because of too many tourists, I did not like spending my free time in the city	-0.20±1.42	- 0.29±1.41	0.03±1.43	0.026
14	Without tourists, a city loses part of its charm	-0.01±1.47	0.02±1.47	-0.09±1.47	0.454
15	I miss seeing tourists	-0.51±1.38	- 0.47±1.38	-0.62±1.38	0.244
16	The number of tourists visiting the city was definitely too high	0.22±1.33	0.25±1.28	0.16±1.44	0.688
17	A city without tourists is a more friendly place to live	0.16±1.37	0.04±1.34	0.47±1.41	0.001
18	The large number of tourists visiting the city was a cause of my discomfort	-0.16±1.47	- 0.23±1.43	-0.01±1.58	0.184

Source: own study.

The research questionnaire was analyzed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which in this case was 0.8916. With that, we can be convinced that the research tool is highly reliable. The research

was carried out on non-probability sampling and more precisely, on convenient sampling. 523 respondents took part in the survey. With the collected size of the research sample, it would be possible to achieve the assumed threshold of random sample credibility, at which the maximum statistical error of the sample is  $\pm 4.3\%$  (the confidence level of  $p=0.95$ ), but the respondents were not randomized. The sample included 371 residents of Kraków (71%) and 152 residents of Białka Tatrzańska (29%). The difference in the share of residents from both cities in the total sample results from the large disproportion of the population of residents. The processing of the collected data consisted in performing a statistical analysis, both one-dimensional (in the form of a descriptive analysis) and two-dimensional (in the form of an analysis of the dependence of pairs of examined features).

In some cases, the significance level of differences between the obtained mean values was also examined. The U (Mann-Whitney) test was used to compare two groups for variables with a distribution other than normal, and in the case of two samples of dependent variables, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed. The hypothesis of normal distribution was verified by the Shapiro-Wilk test. The significance of differences between the structure indices was tested with the Chi-squared test. Statistical hypotheses were verified using statistical tests, taking into account the significance at the level of  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ . In some cases, multivariate statistical analyses could have been performed.

#### 4. RESULTS

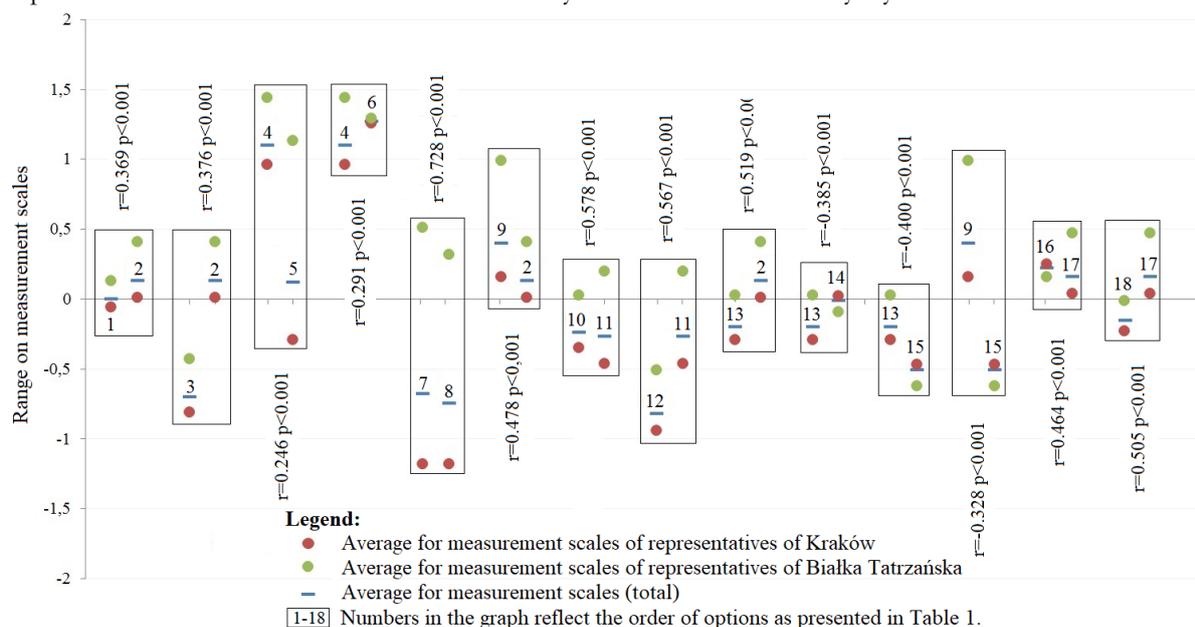
The obtained results have been presented in the form of a graph (Fig. 1). When comparing the results for both destinations in research, it is obvious that the results for opinions of Kraków respondents are lower than those obtained in Białka Tatrzańska. Opinion 16 (The number of tourists visiting the city is too high) is an exception to this rule. Opinion 6 (Since there are no tourists, the city's income has declined), which shows very similar results ( $p > 0.05$ ), is also a partial exception. Therefore, it seems that, in general, the respondents' opinions showed significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ), but their quantification indicates that these differences repeat regularly.

What draws attention is the significant discrepancies in Opinion 7 in both destinations. (Due to the large number of tourists arrivals to the city, my household income was higher), 8. (Since there are no tourists, my income has declined), 5. (Since there are no tourists, the income of my friends and neighbors has declined) and 9. (Due to too many tourists and the general congestion in these places, I try to avoid the places most frequently visited by tourists in my town). In these opinions, the respondents of both destinations showed statistically significant differences and clearly noticeable nominal differences. Therefore, these opinions can be considered extreme.

When compared as pairs, the analysis of the assessments of each similar opinion also shows some significant contradictions in opinions, but these contradictions are incidental. An example is a comparison of Opinions 4 and 5, which are similar and should receive similar notes. Whereas, Opinion 4 for Kraków is different from Białka, as the inhabitants of Kraków agree that Since there are no tourists, the income of my friends and neighbors has declined (5.), and at the same time, they do not agree that Due to the large number of tourists coming to the city, the local urban economy operates better (4.). It follows that the respondents assess the consequences of the lack of tourists differently towards their friends and neighbors than towards the local economy. The situation is different in Białka, where these statements are treated as identical. This is not confirmed by the correlation analysis, as the correlation coefficient is low but positive ( $r=0.246$   $p < 0.001$ ).

Correlation analysis showed only three pairs of opinions that were opposite in terms of the answers provided. The first pair included questions 13 (Because of too many tourists, I did not like spending my free time in the city) and 14 (Without tourists, a city loses part of its charm). Considering the content of the questions, it should be stated that the negative correlation ( $r=0.385$   $p < 0.001$ ) between the opinions is justified.

Similarly, negative relationships among the answers are noted in the case of the correlation of Opinion 13 (Because of too many tourists, I did not like spending my free time in the city) and 15 (I miss seeing tourists), which amounted to ( $r=-0.400$   $p<0.001$ ), as well as between Opinions No. 9 (Due to too many tourists and the general congestion in these places, I try to avoid the places most frequently visited by tourists in my town) and 13 (Because of too many tourists, I did not like spending my free time in the city) ( $r=-0.328$   $p<0.001$ ). However, in the case of the last pair of opinions presented, it should be stated that the opposite should be expected. A negative correlation is also observed regarding the division into destinations, i.e., it occurred in both places. The reason for such discrepancies may be the reference to the residents' leisure time in the second opinion, while in the first opinion, the overcrowding may be interpreted by the respondents as a communication obstacle not only in free time but in everyday travel.



**Figure 1. Comparison of the average results from both destinations for eighteen measurement scales (the result of the inhabitants of Kraków is marked with red, the results of the inhabitants of Białka Tatrzańska with green, and the overall average is marked with blue).**

Source: own study.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The presented research results suggest that the inhabitants of the analyzed destinations have a problem unambiguously assessing the impact of a pandemic on tourism and their lives. In most cases, the respondents' average answers to the questions on the effect of restrictions related to the pandemic oscillate around the neutral answer. Definitely, the most categorical statements made by the respondents concern the impact of both overtourism and the suspending of the impact of tourism on the economy during the pandemic. The respondents agreed that thanks to the influx of a significant number of tourists, the destination's economy operated better and, as a result of the pandemic, the lack of tourists resulted in a decrease in the destination's income. Slightly less categorical comments were made about the decline in the income of neighbors and friends during the pandemic. In this case, there was a clear difference between the responses of the city's inhabitants and the ski resort's inhabitants. The former did not notice such a decline, while the latter did. A similar difference applies to the assessment of the impact of overtourism and pandemics on respondents' incomes. The Białka Tatrzańska's inhabitants perceive both of these phenomena, while the inhabitants of Kraków do not. Thus, it can be assumed that the tourist resort's inhabitants perceive both their own financial situation and the entire town's financial situation as much

more strongly depending on the income obtained from tourists' visits. In the case of the entire city's condition of economy, the city's inhabitants consider such dependence as small, while most of them obtain their income from sources other than tourism. This supposition confirms common sense observations as well as statements made in earlier publications (Schofield, 2011; Żemła, 2020).

The respondents' assessment of the way they operate in a town affected by overtourism and then by stopping tourism is very ambiguous. Although the respondents indicate that in times of overtourism, they avoided staying in places where large numbers of tourists gather, and as the restrictions are in force, they are more willing to visit these places, in many other respects, the impact of both phenomena is marginalized. In their surroundings, they do not see the negative impact of tourists on the quality of their lives, and they like to spend time in their town, even in times of overtourism. On the other hand, they neither say they miss tourists nor agree with the statement that without tourists, the city loses its charm. It seems that the majority of the respondents do see the impact of tourism on their surroundings both in times of overtourism and in times of no-tourism, but they experience it only as pretty moderate in their own lives. Hence their indifference to both of these situations. Once again, however, there are significant differences between the resort's residents, who more severely experience the impact of overtourism and no-tourism, and the city's residents, who remain much more indifferent. At the same time, it is worth noting that the Kraków inhabitants' responses are varied and the strict city center's inhabitants express opinions similar to those of Białka Tatrzańska's inhabitants, while the other districts' inhabitants often perceive the impact of tourism on their lives as of completely marginal significance.

The area of life under little influence brought by the level of tourist traffic is personal safety (Seraphin, 2020). According to the respondents, neither during overtourism was this level too low, nor did it rise during the lockdown.

When indicating the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the obtained research results, it should be emphasized that they refer to a very specific moment in which the excessive tourist traffic was replaced by almost complete no-tourism. Nevertheless, at the time of responding, the respondents experienced only a few to several weeks of pandemic restrictions, and the research conducted during the subsequent waves of the pandemic would certainly show different characteristics. Therefore, the presented results cannot be read as representing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as perceived by destinations' residents but only as an illustration of how they perceived this transition from experiencing overtourism to the no-tourism experience. In this context, it is necessary to indicate further research on the later phases of pandemics development as an important direction of future research (Bae, Chang, 2020; Grech et al., 2020).

The fact that the research was conducted only in two destinations in one country is also an important limitation of the results of the research presented, which will require continuation in the future. On the one hand, typical intercultural differences from country to country are, in this case, a typical element that can differentiate the attitudes of residents of destinations located in different countries, in particular on different continents and in different cultural circles. In this case, one more additional element that differentiates the potential results obtained for destinations from different countries may be important. This factor is the very different course of the first pandemic wave in different countries, including those countries located on the same continent and in the same cultural circle. For example, identical questionnaires distributed in countries that were heavily affected by the first pandemic wave in Europe (e.g. Italy or Spain) may contain different responses than those obtained in Poland, i.e. in a country with a minimal intensity of the first wave.

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