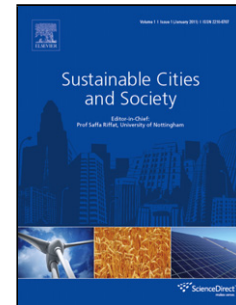


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## **Sustainable tourism development efforts by local governments in Poland**

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### **Highlights**

- Actions related to tourism development are relatively often also related to sustainable development, although it is sometimes the case that some local government officials do not understand this concept.
- In the realm of tourism development, the diversity of the stakeholders is significant and they act to defend their interests and often contrasting goals.
- The level of agreement between groups of stakeholders increases, so does the likelihood of collaboration and compromise.
- Collaboration with the academic community needs to be enhanced, as frequently it is described as inadequate. Some local government officials go as far as to claim that academic leaders do not collaborate with local governments at all.

Abstract

Sustainable development is increasingly becoming a priority issue in tourism development in the modern world. The basic goal is to educate local communities in the principles of this new approach. The purpose of the study was to diagnose programs produced by local governments in the area of sustainable tourism development, identify problem areas, and propose solutions. The study was based on surveys in paper form. Most local governments in Poland (62%) state that sustainable development is considered in their planning and implementation of tourism-related programs. More than three out of four local government officials state that the opinions of local residents are also considered in the process. At the same time, more than 60% of survey participants state that their local municipality does not facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the area of sustainable development via the organization of relevant conferences, meetings, and workshops. In addition, local government officials note the existence of conflicts associated with collaboration in the tourism sector, mostly manifested by differences of opinion in terms of environmental protection versus tourism development. However, research has shown that the number of conflicts is smaller when the quality (i.e. higher mark) of the collaboration is higher.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism, local government, municipality, Poland

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development is increasingly becoming part of various areas of life and development decisions made by man. This trend is also affecting the area of tourism due to its environmental, economic, social, and cultural impact. The success of the introduction of sustainable development rests in part on support from and participation of the parties involved in the business of tourism. While not all stakeholders need be equally involved in the decision process associated with sustainable development, all their interests need to be identified and understood (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). If the interests of a key group of stakeholders are not identified, then the entire process may fail (Clarkson, 1995). Of the different stakeholder groups including domestic and foreign tourists, local residents, business owners, and officials of local governments, it is the latter two groups that tend to focus more on engagement in the process of sustainable development (D'Mello et al., 2016).

This is because tourism yields a number of benefits for local communities experiencing the influx of visitors and affects their quality of life. Historical functions of local communities become transformed and the analysis of the interaction between tourism and community life

becomes increasingly important (Liu et al., 2017). This forces local governments to pay more attention to support for the emergence of a tourism industry that respects the “quality of life needs” of local communities (Liu et al., 2017). At the local government level, there is a growing consensus that tourism development ought to be driven by local communities and not globally established tourism organizations (Goodwin, 2016). This new approach yields important implications for the sustainable development of the tourism sector given that it affects the relationship between political entities and the ability of the government to impact the economy. It also affects the choice of political instruments and indicators as well as sparks political debate in some cases (Hall, 2011). The manner in which institutional management systems are established determines the manner in which stakeholders operate in the arena of tourism policy as well as the instruments and indicators used to achieve political aims across all fields of policy including tourism development (Sofield, Guia, & Specht, 2017).

At the local level, representatives of the local community or local government officials usually are assigned specific areas of authority and tasks to be completed including those related to the tourism sector. In order to make their work more effective, local governments collaborate at the national and international level with other political and non-political entities. One particularly important form of collaboration consists of joint efforts between local residents, tourists, and the public sector (Liao & Chern, 2015). However, other entities need participate in this process as well in order to facilitate the development of the tourism sector using the rules and guidelines associated with the concept of sustainable development. All interested parties need to discuss relevant issues together (Hardy & Pearson, 2017). This is due to the fact that all interested parties vary in terms of their interests and goals, and do not represent a united front (Lyon, Hunter-Jones, & Warnaby, 2017). In the conversation on tourism, the diversity of stakeholders defending their own views and in many cases opposing aims calls for the use of an innovative approach to the management of the decision-making process as well as the use of appropriate tools (Domínguez-Gómez & González-Gómez, 2017). In addition to the analysis of the differing viewpoints of the various stakeholders involved in the decision-making process, it is vital to consider the fact that uncontrolled tourism development may negatively affect local communities and also the natural environment. While it is difficult to completely eliminate negative outcomes, key players in the tourism market and local residents need to work on ways to reduce the effects of dysfunctions associated with tourism development (Al. Haija, 2011).

In this context, the local government appears to be the natural leader whose two main tasks are improving the standard of living of the local population and managing local resources.

The aim of the study was to check whether municipality governments in Poland are in fact considering the principles of sustainable development in their efforts to assist local tourism development. In order to accomplish this end, the following research questions needed to be answered:

- Do municipalities pursue actions in the area of sustainable tourism development?
- Do municipalities collaborate at the national and international levels in the area of tourism development?
- How do municipalities rank collaborative efforts with other entities active in the tourism development sector?
- Do conflicts arise between partners with respect to tourism development?
- From the perspective of local governments, does collaboration depend on the occurrence of conflict situations?

The study was designed to diagnose efforts undertaken by local governments in the promotion of sustainable development in the tourism sector, identify problem areas, and propose solutions. Both Polish and non-Polish literature sources were analyzed in the study along with the results of a questionnaire survey. The paper is divided into sections on materials and methods, research results, and discussion in the context of literature sources.

#### *Review of the literature and current research in tourism development*

There exists a very large array of literature sources on sustainable development (Lyon, Hunter-Jones, & Warnaby, 2017). Its application to tourism development is a new trend reaching back only to the late 1980s. Earlier studies did mention sustainable development in the area of tourism, but this was done in a variety of different contexts (Hetzer, 1965; Young, 1973). Documents produced by organizations and institutions associated the development of the tourism sector were particularly important in the emergence of sustainable development as an element of tourism development. For example, a document called the “Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism Management” from 1995 included fundamental ideas associated with sustainable development. Another example was a document called “Global Code of Ethics in Tourism” in the year 1999. Early examples of analyses of sustainable tourism development include frequent references to the need to define this concept (Butler, 1999; Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002). The implementation of the principles of sustainable development requires the engagement of a wide array of representatives of stakeholder groups ranging from the public sector to local communities. In addition, grassroots efforts are needed in order to build potential and establish directions for action for each interest group (MacLeod & Todnem, 2007). Stakeholders ought to work together (Welford, Ytterhus, & Eligh, 1999), although

strong leadership is also needed and assistance from local governments as well (Eligh, Welford, & Ytterhus, 2002). As noted by Cuthill (2002), relations between organizations and interest groups at the social level often are disorganized and chaotic when they ought to be based on collaboration at the local level via the creation of partnerships between residents and local governments. In order to make better use of these partnerships, interest groups need to become better educated in the principles of sustainable development and efforts to initiate collaboration ought to be supported.

Most definitions of sustainable tourism development include some common denominators such as economics, ecology, and society (Domínguez-Gómez & González-Gómez, 2017). In the most general terms possible, the development of the tourism sector should focus on creating linkages to the principles of sustainable development by respecting the permanence of the natural environment, creating relationships with the local economy, and considering the good of the local community both in a social and ethical sense. The sustainable development of the tourism sector focuses on the realization of three basic goals:

- ecological goals such as the preservation of natural resources needed by the tourism sector and the reduction of dangerous emissions generated by the said sector
- economic goals such as the facilitation of the economic success of the local community as well as the maintenance and optimal utilization of available tourist infrastructure
- social goals such as the attainment of satisfactory employment levels in the tourism sector, provision of relaxation opportunities both for tourists and local residents, protection of local culture and heritage, and an increase in the level of participation of the local population in the realm of sustainable policy development (Nieżgoda & Zmysłony, 2002).

This paper focuses on all three aspects and assumes that the sustainable development of tourism is friendly towards the natural environment by not working against ecological processes and biological diversity as well as remains firmly grounded in the realm of economics through a focus on timing to build and manage the local production base needed to support the future generations in a given geographic area. In addition, it considers the input of local communities in the decision-making process and in strategic development (Štetić & Šimičević, 2008). At the same time, it is frequently argued today that sustainable tourism development is strongly focused on the natural environment and economic development, while more attention is needed in the area of social engagement and development (Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002).

The role of local community engagement and the need to engage such communities in the process of tourism sector development were analyzed by a number of researchers

including Nunkoo, Smith, and Ramkissoonin (2013) who analyzed local residents' attitudes towards tourism across 140 papers published between 1984 and 2010. Other researchers focused on discrepancies between the idea of sustainable tourism development and its practical implementation (Agyeiwaah, McKercher, & Suntikul, 2017). On the one hand, the concept of sustainable tourism development is accepted and stated by an increasingly large number of entities associated with tourism, while on the other hand, it is still easy to observe cases of destruction to the natural and cultural environment in geographic areas affected by excess tourist traffic. In addition, the commercialization of tourism along with a decline in cultural identity continue to affect many geographic areas favored by tourists. Some researchers go as far as to claim that, after years of rhetoric, the rate of progress in sustainable tourism development has slowed down, and the few good examples of such progress are just that – few (Agyeiwaah, McKercher, & Suntikul, 2017). In this context, it seems reasonable to look at real actions in the realm of sustainable development not through the lens of agendas and rhetoric, but from the perspective of local communities represented by local governments.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. *Research area and background*

The study was performed in Poland. In 2016 Poland was visited by 80.5 million foreigners, which included 17.5 million foreigners officially counted as tourists (GUS, 2017). Tourism plays a key role in the economic development of Poland as a whole. This development is facilitated by the presence of appropriate environmental and social attributes. Poland is also home to 23 national parks that cover about 1% of its total surface area. In the last few years, tourist volume in Poland has remained largely unchanged, with a small growth tendency. An examination of specific cases from the perspective of the national context and the local tourist community as well as a critical analysis of successes and failures help to better understand sustainable development efforts in the realm of tourism beginning at the local level. Poland possesses significant tourism potential and tourism could become a key sector of the national economy in the future. It is reasonable to expect that the competitiveness of Poland's tourism economy will increasingly depend on an understanding of contemporary trends in tourism including concern for the natural environment, social policy, and the ability of tourism-related organizations to work together. The 2015 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report provides a "travel and tourism competitiveness index" Poland ranked 47<sup>th</sup> overall, but in terms of government support for sustainable travel and tourism, it ranked a distant 112<sup>th</sup> (World Economic Forum, 2015). A large part of this ranking is related to locally-oriented actions. Local governments possess the ability to educate local residents and business owners in the

best practices of sustainable development. Poland is a good example of a country where these types of educational programs need to be initiated, which would also yield valuable teaching tools for other countries lagging in this particular area. The principle of sustainable development has become a constitutional principle in Poland. It is the policy of the Polish state to adopt appropriate guidelines of sustainable development in all sectors of its economy (Nieżgoda 2004). The concept of sustainable development is defined in the broadest sense possible in laws concerning environmental protection, but references to this concept can be found in many other types of laws and strategic documents formulated at the national level and the local government level. Many references of sustainable development in these types of documents also make direct and indirect reference to tourism. One key strategic document concerning tourism in Poland is known as the Tourism Development Programme in effect until 2020, which includes an array of references to the main principles of sustainable development. However, the main aim of this program is to improve the competitiveness and innovativeness of tourism in Poland by supporting businesses, organizations, institutions, and tourism sector initiatives in the context of the principles of sustainable development (Ministry of Sport and Tourism, 2015). The realization of the goals of sustainable development found in this document requires nevertheless the participation of lower level local governments.

The country is divided into 16 provinces known as voivodeships, which are then further divided into counties known as poviats and municipalities or townships known as gminas (2,478). Municipalities are authorized to act in many different areas of local governance including areas associated with tourism development. A number of tasks associated with tourism are also linked with other programs operated by municipal governments including spatial planning, ecological management, technical infrastructure, social policy, law, and public safety.

## *2.2. Data collection and analysis*

The study employed a questionnaire survey, which was sent to all municipal offices in Poland. All of the research work was done in 2015. A standardized questionnaire was used in the study and it was sent to close to 2,500 municipal offices throughout the country. The survey was sent directly to each municipal office, which then was supposed to direct it to individuals responsible for local tourism development. The delivery of the surveys to municipal offices was preceded by the creation of a telephone and address database for all municipalities in Poland. A total of 600 municipalities responded to the survey study or more than one out of four. The purpose of the study was not to generate the highest possible number of responses, but to present a picture of the current level of local government



involvement in tourism development in the context of the principles of sustainable development. Given that the survey data come from one out of four local governments in Poland, the information obtained via the survey may be considered quite representative of the general situation with respect to efforts associated with basic level tourism development, although the lack of response from many local governments also merits a certain amount of consideration. A standardized form was used in the survey study. Agreement between responses to two dichotomous questions was determined via a mean square contingency coefficient ( $\phi$ ). Collaboration between local governments and other key entities was determined using the following response classification scheme related to Likert's scale: 1 – poor, 2 – no collaboration, 3 – average, 4 – good. The next step consisted of the calculation of the average of the ratings obtained, which was then treated as the overall collaboration grade (Ferguson & Takane, 1989). As the distribution of this variable strongly diverged from a normal distribution ( $W=0.9436$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ), the analysis was conducted using the Mann-Whitney U-Test. In addition to the questionnaire data, other sources of information in the study included key reports and strategic documents. The purpose of the present study was to examine actions undertaken by local governments in the promotion of sustainable development in tourism, identify problem areas, and also propose potential solutions.

### 3. Results

In the study, local government officials were asked if they consider the principles of sustainable development in their decisions associated with tourism-related programs in their municipalities. Most of the survey participants responded “yes” to this key question (Table 1).

Responses to the question on the scope of local government actions varied substantially in the amount of detail provided. Some officials linked sustainable development work with any local spatial planning documents available. Sample responses included the following: “building new playgrounds and creating parks in densely populated parts of the municipality,” “expansion of hiking and bike trails to help tourists hike and bike in the area.” Some responses were general and tended to link sustainable development with investment in the overall infrastructure in the given municipality, investment in tourism-related infrastructure, actions related to protecting the natural environment, actions related to economic

development, and the protection, support for, and creation of access to cultural sites. Some responses mentioned tourism as one form of sustainable development – in some cases using older terms such as “noninvasive tourism.” There were also some responses that suggested that local government representatives did not understand what sustainable development is and would describe it as the “even distribution of tasks between several municipalities.”

Local governments stress collaboration with local communities. The survey asked local government officials if their municipalities do help facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences related to sustainable development by organizing conferences, meetings, and other events such as workshops. Most survey participants indicated a lack of such endeavors. Close to 34% of participants noted some type of activity in terms of meetings, conferences, debates with local residents, collaboration with local associations, and other less clearly defined types of consultations. The most basic tool for creating new awareness based on a respect for the principles of sustainable development consists of the formulation of new strategies and social and economic development plans. Hence, the survey asked local government officials if the tourism planning and development process in their municipalities involves the opinions of local residents in the form of resident evaluation of programs, plans, projects, as well as meetings and other active forms of community engagement. Most of the survey participants responded to this question in the affirmative, while 5.7% noted the existence of conflicts with entities associated with local tourism development. The responses in the “conflict category” strongly varied in terms of the amount of detail provided, ranging from specific examples to general outlines. However, it may be inferred that these conflicts often concern infrastructure and investment problems, efforts to work together, and issues in environmental protection. One key area of conflict is the issue of environmental protection. Several leading sources that yield conflict include environmental protection requirements, financial state and priorities, and the local climate tax – without producing an explanation whether the conflict pertains to the amount of the tax or its collection system or community use of the tax money. Promotional efforts were also mentioned twice, but without providing any specific context or situations. The next part of the survey examined the degree of collaboration between municipal governments and entities directly or indirectly associated with the tourism industry (Table 2).

Municipal governments ranked collaboration with other municipal governments as very good. The lowest marks were given to collaboration with the scientific community. The next part of the study examined overall collaboration between municipal governments in terms of their effort to pursue international collaboration: (U=22,739.5; Z=8.3734, p<0.0001).

a – median value, b – quartile range, c – total range

The subsequent differences concern municipal collaboration at the national level (U=20,314; Z=10.0625, p<0.0001)

a – median value, b – quartile range, c – total range

The subsequent section concerns the occurrence of conflict (U=6,919.0; Z=2.5363, p<0.0112)

a – median value, b – quartile range, c – total range

The figures provided show that local governments that pursue international collaboration did rank higher on the collaboration scale than local governments that did not pursue international collaboration (Fig. 1). The same type of relationship was noted in the case of collaboration at the national level (Fig. 2). Research has also shown that the collaboration ranking is higher in cases where conflict does not exist.

#### 4. Discussion

##### *4.1. Municipalities: understanding and actions in the area of sustainable tourism development*

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Research has shown that many municipalities in their efforts related to tourism development do consider the principles of sustainable development. However, not all municipalities appeared to understand the concept of sustainable development and this type of conclusion is also drawn by Timur and Getz (2009) who show that only 25% of survey participants were able to list the three basic dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, the main groups of survey participants such as local government officials, industry representatives, and host environment representatives perceived sustainable urban tourism in a different manner. Other research studies have also shown that tourists in Poland themselves do not know much

about sustainable tourism development. Szymańska (2013) showed that 61% of tourists in Poland do not know what sustainable tourism development is, which further shows the need for education in this area. The average citizen of Poland is not familiar with the concept of sustainable development, and those who have heard about it frequently identify it exclusively with environmental protection (Kostrzewa & Piasecki, 2009).

The range of actions taken by municipal governments in the study was quite diverse. Actions taken by local governments in the area of sustainable tourism development frequently are part of larger spatial, social, and economic planning programs.

#### *4.2. Collaboration between municipalities and stakeholders in the area of tourism development*

The formulation of parts of planning documents in Poland is preceded by community consultations, which is the point where most community involvement ends. Three out of four participants indicated local community engagement in the local tourism planning process. While full participation is not to be expected, future studies ought to involve a consideration of the exact nature of this involvement and the presentation of this issue from the perspective of local residents. Other studies have also noted a low level of local participation in the formulation of planning documents in Poland. Studies from Poland and other countries have also confirmed this pattern. Szpilko (2015) argues that it is possible to improve the planning situation in Poland via more collaboration between business leaders, academic researchers, and government officials, instead of simply having a continued discussion of this subject. Analysis of selected elements of tourism development strategy in Poland has shown that these strategies do not really follow the paradigms of sustainable development. Despite claims of a participative and expert-based strategy formulation system, the vast majority of documents in Poland are not subjected to consultation with local area residents who will be affected by the given strategy. A rare few strategic documents in Poland include a study of the characteristics of the local population, its lifestyles, and its attitudes towards tourism development in its near vicinity (Nowacki et. al., 2018). At the same time, strategies and policies associated with local entities tend not to be cohesive. Actions in the realm of spatial planning and tourism planning ought to be the product of a comprehensive approach based on many different departments of the government. This key problem also applies to lower levels of government administration including local government (Nieżgoda, 2004).

On the other hand there are noted the discrepancies between strategies and implementation and realization of the principles of sustainable development. Researchers working in New Zealand assert that sustainable development is a basic concept in strategic planning in

tourism, but may remain an idea on paper or a philosophical trend (Connell, Page, & Bentley, 2008). However, the approach to sustainable tourism and tourism planning in New Zealand evolved substantially due to changes in legislation and the approach taken by local governments in the area of tourism planning and development. Tourism-related activity increased on the part of local governments via an activation of local communities and their encouragement to participate in tourism-related projects. It was also decided to increase the level of awareness of local government officials in terms of local government involvement in the tourism sector. Another pursuit deemed to be important was the preparation of tourism-related strategies. When properly encouraged, local governments, also known as councils in New Zealand, were much more likely to prepare a local tourism strategy. In fact, 65% of the studied councils had produced a local tourism policy by 2007, as opposed to only 35% in 1995. (Connell, Page, & Bentley, 2008). In order for sustainable development to become part of the reality of all interested parties, it is necessary to motivate all stakeholders to act. Municipalities were most likely to positively describe their collaboration with other municipalities. In the case of negative reactions, municipal officials most often pointed to a lack of collaboration on the part of the academic community, business owners, and tourist organizations. Tucki and Świeca (2013) also note the inadequate level of collaboration with tourist organizations based on research in one region in Lublin Voivodeship in eastern Poland yielding survey responses from 88 municipalities. This is especially true with respect to researchers who cover this field of inquiry. The confirmed lack of collaboration with researchers is reflected in responses provided to the question on the facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and key experiences in the area of sustainable development in the form of conferences, meetings, and other events such as workshops. Survey participants noted a lack of activity on the part of the scientific community. Increased efforts to organize meetings and initiate dialog help resolve problem situations, which are often seen to affect the tourism – environment interface.

#### *4.3. Local governments and conflict situations with respect to tourism development*

This is critical in the sense that survey participants reported the existence of conflict situations. Conflict between stakeholders in a tourist region clearly does not help in the implementation of the principles of sustainable development (Nieżgoda & Czernek, 2014). The nature of the conflict varies from case to case. The most often reported cause of conflict are dissimilar goals. Local communities often face the problem of the formulation of their own priorities in terms of what they need in the area of local development (Mika, 2015). Research has shown that the problem of local stakeholder interests and the divergence of local

stakeholder interests serve as major limitations in the formulation of optimal solutions that would serve the general needs of all possible stakeholders (Mika, 2015). The most common types of conflict, as seen in survey data, were conflicts associated with environmental protection and tourism. Survey participants identified a variety of types of conflict ranging from the requirements posed by environmental protection laws to issues associated with joint promotional projects. One recent example of a conflict in Poland is that related to Białowieża Forest. This conflict is being broadly commented on in the media and concerns logging. This current conflict is just one example of the existence of conflicts in the environmental protection field. It also underscores the need to pay more attention to related changes in legislation and the need to respect current laws. It is likely that this case study will be reviewed extensively by researchers in the years to come. Conflicts of varying intensity are also examined in the area of tourism and environmental protection in places other than Poland. The issue of conflict was examined by De Pourcq et al. (2017) on the example of Colombia. Five sources of conflict were identified with respect to local leaders and community participants: fortress conservation model, administration weaknesses, violent local environments, conflict of interests, weak local organization (De Pourcq et al., 2017). Proposed changes included a reform of the government agency responsible for environmental protection and a transition towards a co-management philosophy (De Pourcq et al., 2017). The same types of conclusions were drawn by Borlido (2016) who examined laws, social capital, and tourism at Peneda-Gerês – the only officially designated national park in Portugal. The study suggests a method to improve the situation by working out a communication policy that would enhance information exchange between government agencies and between agencies and local communities, which would lead to the elimination of conflict triggered by inadequate communication. This proposed change would also make it easier for local communities to be part of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the study suggests the creation of a tourism development strategy for the studied region based on the principles of sustainable development from the perspective of community tourism. The goal would be to more broadly distribute the benefits generated by tourism and promote community participation in decision-making steps. Finally, the study suggests the introduction of awareness campaigns designed to encourage the local population to actively participate in local political life (Borlido, 2016). A discussion of the extent and assessment of collaboration between national parks and local governments in the area of tourism development is available in an earlier paper (Kapera, 2017). The paper presents an examination of collaborative efforts in the area of tourism, as seen from the perspective of all 23 national parks in Poland. The

parks receive about 11 million visitors each year. A substantial 61% of the parks note various conflicts related to tourism development (Kapera, 2017). This subject is complicated by the fact that highly prized environmental areas, especially those afforded legal protection, experience specialized forms of tourism, which may yield lower social and economic indicators. This creates the need for a new approach to tourism development strategy formulation in special geographic areas (Romão & Neuts, 2017). In the case of Poland, it is difficult to observe any limitations on sustainable development in the tourism sector, and it is difficult to assess the permanence of such efforts. The main problem is the lack of common assessment metrics that could be used to gauge sustainable development. The implementation of a sustainable development policy demands the establishment of general rules that may be applied by all entities part of the tourism economy including local government agencies, tourist organizations, and tourism-related businesses (Szymańska, 2013). However, this type of tool may only be used by individuals who are educated in the use of this tool. According to Hales and Jennings (2017), requirements posed by the practice of sustainable development do demand the hiring of educated individuals who are able to manage problems associated with an implementation of the principles of sustainable development. The need for more education and promotion as well as increased community participation via support for the general public also is noted by Rastegar, Hatami and Mirjafari (2017). Badania Kiryluk and Glińska (2015) further emphasize the need to educate local residents and also the need for local tourism-related campaigns that include people of cultural distinction, local politicians, members of the media, and local communities in general. The low level of ecological awareness in Polish society is caused by gaps in knowledge and gaps in the understanding of the specifics of this issue (Niezgoda, 2014). The most important change needed in Poland is more ecological education and more public debate on the issue of sustainable development. First and foremost, it is government officials at all levels who need to learn the principles of this approach (Kostrzewa & Piasecki, 2009). Ecological education is needed in national school curricula in Poland for it to gradually reach all of society including tourism-related businesses, persons involved in the organization of tourist endeavors, tourism product developers, and residents of tourism-oriented towns and cities (Niezgoda, 2004).

All of these individuals and groups of individuals possess immense potential in their ability to generate an image for a given country that would entice foreign tourists to come visit (Kiryluk & Glińska, 2015). According to Sautter and Leisen (1999), as different groups of stakeholders are able to agree on various ideas and rules, the likelihood of compromise and collaboration increases. Research has shown that local governments that pursue national-level and

international collaboration are much more likely to collaborate (higher collaboration coefficient) with other entities than local governments that do not pursue higher-level collaboration. It has been shown that collaboration is rated higher in situations where conflict between the parties of interest does not occur.

## 5. Conclusions

At the local level, communities represented by local government officials usually have certain types of authority and tasks to be realized in the area of tourism development. Actions related to tourism development are relatively often also related to sustainable development, although it is sometimes the case that some local government officials do not understand this concept. In order to improve effectiveness, local officials often collaborate at the national and international levels and engage local residents in this collaborative effort. Unfortunately, joint effort often do generate conflict between the interested parties. Conflict situations are not the exception and are not something unique to Poland. In the realm of tourism development, the diversity of the stakeholders is significant and they act to defend their interests and often contrasting goals. It is necessary to employ an innovative approach to decision-making via innovative tools that aid in the conflict resolution process. Research has shown that as the level of agreement between groups of stakeholders increases, so does the likelihood of collaboration and compromise. Appropriate planning strategies and monitoring actions may limit and at least partly resolve conflict situations whose intensity can be observed in municipalities with protected areas. Sustainable tourism needs to be integrated with the development of local areas. The local level needs to be the basic level in problem resolution and generation of practical tools to be used by local governments and expressing the needs of the local community. Actions generated as part of sustainable tourism development should help activate partnerships between public authorities, business owners, and other social stakeholders. In addition, collaboration with the academic community needs to be enhanced, as frequently it is described as inadequate. Some local government officials go as far as to claim that academic leaders do not collaborate with local governments at all. Collaboration with tourist and business organizations also needs to be enhanced. In summary, there exists a need to intensify efforts in the area of education and promotion of sustainable development as well as legislative change and local management of tourism development. It is hoped that the study's results will be useful in the management of tourism development in Poland in the context of the principles of sustainable development. This is especially important given how low Poland ranks in reports on the effectiveness of government efforts to manage the travel



and tourism sector in a sustainable manner. Poland is currently ranked 112<sup>th</sup> in the world in this area of economic development. It is important to note that the perspective of the local community and its representatives in the form of local government officials is quite broad and not all potential solutions to problems in sustainable tourism development are examined in this study. The perspective of other groups of stakeholders is also needed at different levels of government. It is important to identify and make contact with all relevant stakeholders. Further efforts are needed to understand the nature of conflicts between them. Finally, it is necessary educate participants related to the development of tourism and monitor the outcomes of the implementation of tourism-related development in the spirit of sustainable development principles.

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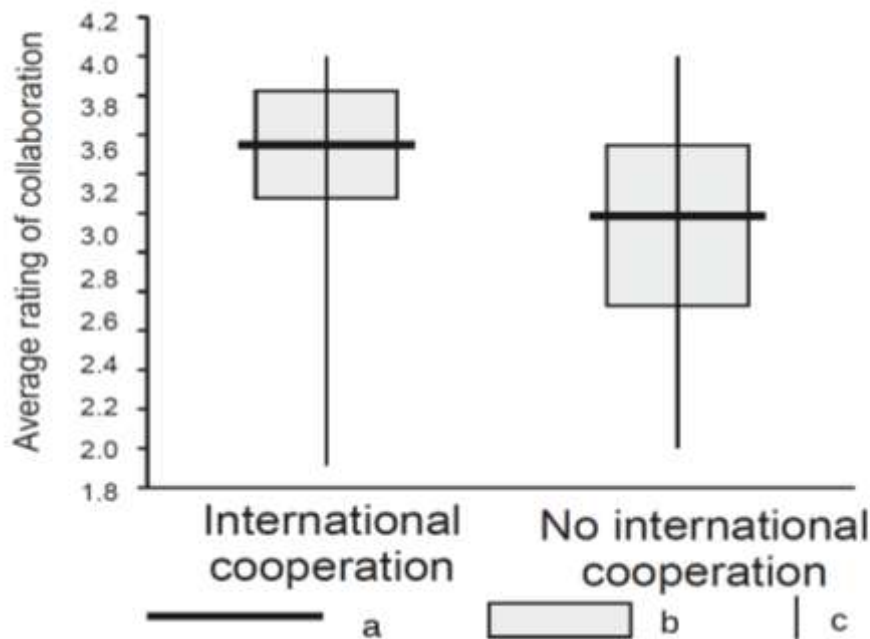
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Fig. 1. Differences in the average rating of collaboration measured as a mean of partial assessments for local governments pursuing international collaboration versus those not pursuing such collaboration.

Fig. 2. Differences in the average rating of collaboration measured as a mean of partial assessments for local governments pursuing national-level collaboration versus those not pursuing such collaboration.

Fig. 3. Differences in the average rating of collaboration with different entities between those municipalities that do experience conflicts in the area of tourism development and those that do not.



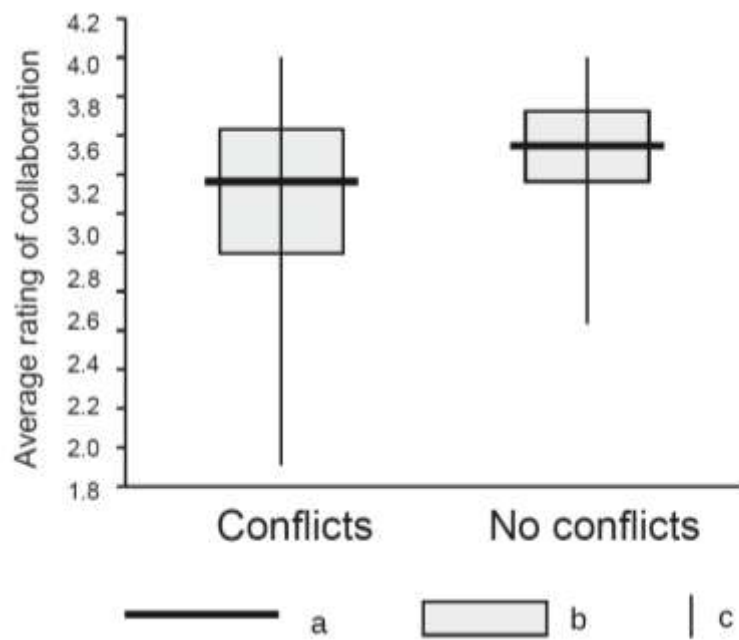
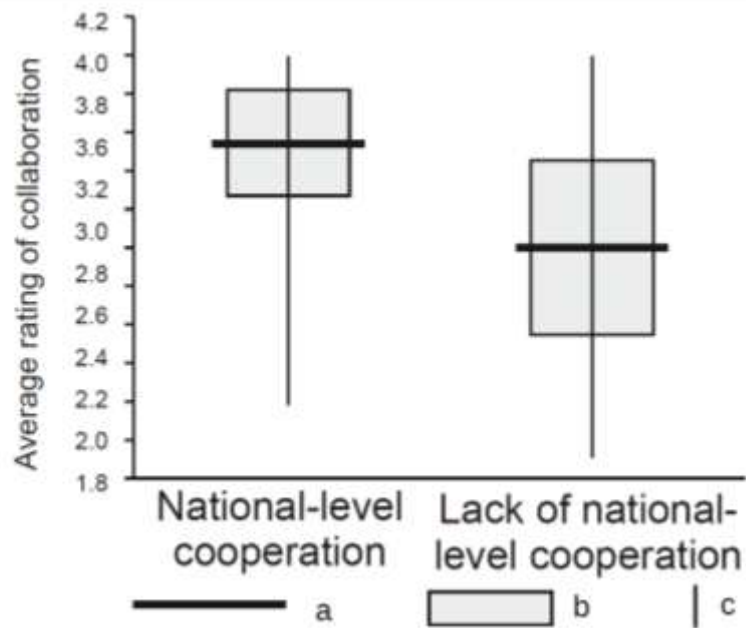


Table 1. Survey participant responses to open questions in the questionnaire and on sustainable development.

The question	Response		
	Yes	No	Null
Does the municipal government consider the principles of sustainable development in the tourism planning and development process	374 [62.5%]	185 [30.1%]	41 [6.8%]
Does the municipality create opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experiences in the area of sustainable development by organizing conferences, meetings, and workshops?	202 [33.7%]	378 [63.0%]	20 [3.3%]
Are the opinions of local residents considered in the tourism planning and development process in this municipality? This may include opinions on programs, plans, projects, meetings, active forms of community engagement, and other forms of activity.	465 [77.5%]	104 [17.3%]	31 [5.2%]
Municipalities that pursue national-level collaboration in tourism development	340 [56.7%]	245 [40.8%]	15 [2.5%]
Municipalities that pursue international-level collaboration in tourism development	215 [35.8%]	373 [62.2%]	12 [2.05%]
Do conflicts occur between entities associated with tourism development?	34 [5.7%]	559 [93.2%]	7 [1.2%]

Source: author's own work

Table 2. Assessment of collaboration.

Entity	Assessment of collaboration				
	No response	Good	Average	Poor	No collaboration
National government agencies	28 [4.7%]	166 [27.7%]	183 [30.5%]	7 [1.2%]	216 [36%]
Local governments (other municipalities)	17 [2.8%]	388 [64.7%]	140 [23.3%]	4 [0.7%]	51 [8.5%]
Local governments (counties)	20 [3.3%]	340 [56.7%]	186 [31.0%]	8 [1.3%]	46 [7.7%]
Local governments (provinces)	23 [3.8%]	299 [49.8%]	207 [34.5%]	5 [0.8%]	66 [11%]
Tourism organizations	20 [3.3%]	250 [41.7%]	202 [33.7%]	7 [1.2%]	121 [20.2%]
Community organizations	20 [3.3%]	327 [54.5%]	182 [30.3%]	5 [0.8%]	66 [11%]
Scientific community	25 [4.2%]	118 [19.7%]	185 [30.08%]	18 [3.0%]	254 [42.3%]
Businesses	19 [3.2%]	205 [34.2%]	243 [40.5%]	7 [1.2%]	126 [21%]

Media	19 [3.2%]	304 [50.7%]	186 [31.0%]	8 [1.3%]	83 [13.8%]
Local communities	18 [3.0%]	362 [60.3%]	167 [27.8%]	3 [0.5%]	50 [8.3%]
Tourists	22 [3.7%]	313 [52.5%]	168 [28%]	2 [0.3%]	95 [15.8%]
Other	550 [91.7%]	11 [1.8%]	3 [0.5%]	0 [0%]	36 [6%]

Source: author's own work