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# The impact of COVID-19 on tourism in Kraków in the eyes of tourism entrepreneurs

**Abstract.** The purpose of the study was to collect opinions of Krakow's tourism entrepreneurs about the impact of the pandemic on their activities and their expectations concerning tools of marketing communication that could facilitate recovery. The respondents were asked to assess the drop in sales of tourism services, their opinions concerning the prospect of a tourist traffic recovery, possible measures that could facilitate the recovery and what they expected the local government to do in this respect. In recent years Kraków has become one of Poland's most recognisable destinations, benefiting from increasing revenues generated by a systematically growing number of visitors. This growth has even prompted concerns about overtourism in Kraków. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected the entire supply chain in the tourism industry, leaving the city empty of tourists and causing a financial breakdown for many companies. In order to diagnose the scale of the crisis triggered by the pandemic, the authors conducted a CAWI survey of Kraków based tourism entrepreneurs in the middle of March. The development of the epidemic and steps taken to protect the tourism sector from mid-March to the end of June 2020 were used to validate views formulated by the respondent. The results of the survey reveal the level of economic losses anticipated by tourism entrepreneurs and their predicted occurrence over time, opinions about the likely sequence in which particular tourism products in Kraków are going to recover, as well as expectations concerning the tools of marketing communication that could facilitate the recovery.

Keywords: COVID-19, tourism, Kraków, tourism entrepreneurs, attitudes, impact

**JEL Codes**: R58, Z32, Z38

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism plays a very important economic role in Kraków and has a significant effect on the city's economy. In addition, together with other destinations located in relative proximity, such as Wieliczka, former German Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bochnia, Ojców, Zakopane, Krynica, the city is part of a metropolitan tourism area [Kruczek, Mazanek 2019]. In recent years, the number of tourists coming to Kraków has been growing and in 2019 was visited by over 14 million people, including 3 million foreign tourists [Ruch turystyczny w Krakowie... 2019]. The majority of one-day visitors are Poles. In 2019 tourists staying in Kraków spent PLN 7.5 billion, and tourism-related GDP accounted for 8% of the city's total GDP. The tourism sector in Kraków is estimated to have created 29 thousand permanent jobs, and, after accounting for multiplier effects, over 40 thousand. This means that the contribution of the tourism industry to the city's entire economy exceeded 10%. In 2016, the combined tax revenue directly generated by the tourism sector amounted to about PLN 170 million. Kraków

Table 1. A matrix of competitiveness and attractiveness of Kraków's tourism products at the end of 2019

	Competitiveness				Attractiveness			
Products	attrac- tions	infra- struc- ture	acces- sibility	index	seg- ment	eco- nomic benefits	feasibil- ity	index
Weight (in %)	20	40	40		40	30	30	
Religious tourism	5	4	4	3.6	3	3	4	3.5
Medical tourism	2	3	3	2.8	3	5	2	3.3
City breaks	5	5	4	4.6	4	4	5	4.3
Cultural events	2	4	3	3.2	2	3	2	3.3
Congresses conferences	5	4	4	3.8	3	5	3	3.6
Incentive travel	3	3	3	3.0	3	4	2	3.0
Thematic stays	2	3	3	2.8	3	3	2	2.7
Catering	3	4	4	3.8	2	4	3	2.9

Source: elaborated by B. Walas, based on information collected during a workshop with entrepreneurs.

is estimated to have created 29 thousand permanent jobs, and, after accounting for multiplier effects, the overall tax contribution of the tourism industry to the city's budget was equal to PLN 244 million, which constituted 5.25% of the city's revenue [Seweryn at al. 2017].

Results of the strategic analysis of Kraków tourism products, obtained from a modified ADL matrix of competitiveness and attractiveness [Walas 2019], which was calculated at the end of 2019, reveal that some of them enjoy an international significance (Table 1).

Nonetheless, Kraków has started to be affected by the negative effects of excessive tourist traffic, which have been described in the literature and include phenomena such as 'night economy' [Pawlusiński, Zmyślony 2018], *urban tourism hypertrophy* [Zmyślony, Kowalczyk-Anioł 2019], gentrification [Kruczek 2018; Kowalczyk-Anioł 2018], socio-psychological capacity of residents measured by Doxey's irritation index [Szromek, Kruczek, Walas 2020] or short-term rentals [Walas 2019].

Table 2. Indicators of tourism intensity

Places	Baretje-Defert`s index	Schneider's index	Charvat`s index	Defert`s index	tourist accommodation density index	Number of tourist accommodation facilities per 100 km <sup>2</sup>
Poland	2.1	88.2	321.3	108	2.6	3.5
The region of Małopolska	3.0	153.4	409.9	916	6.7	9.9
Kraków (according to GUS*)	4.1	312.2	688.6	7 307	94.6	82.5
Kraków (according to UMK**)	5.6	1260.9	2783.2	29 510	132.6	298.6
Warsaw	2.6	257.5	447.9	8 855	132.6	70.4
Vienna	3.6	366.5	755.1	16 355	163.8	103.9
Prague	3.5	358.4	759.1	15 917	183.2	160.6
Budapest	7.0	616.5	1425.7	23 809	417.1	501.5

<sup>\*</sup> GUS – the Polish acronym of Statistics Poland.

Source: own calculations based on data published by national statistical institutes of Poland (GUS), Austria, Czechia and Hungary and estimates for 2019 [Polityka turystyki zrównoważonej... 2020].

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Media reports in recent years have contained numerous claims about the rise of overtourism, especially in the Old Town, which is visited by the largest number of tourists, drawn by obligatory attractions, such as the Main Square, the Cloth Hall (Pol. *Sukiennice*), Saint Mary's Basilica, The Royal Route and the Wawel Castle [Kruczek 2019]. These problems were even the subject of an international conference organized in Kraków as part of the project "Historical Cities 3.0" [*Miasta Historyczne 3.0...* 2018]. Table 2 presents quantitative indicators showing critical levels of tourist traffic in the city.

The development of phenomena associated with tourist traffic has called for actions aimed at implementing a more sustainable model of tourism development in Kraków. However, following the outbreak of the pandemic, analyses underlying the development strategy for sustainable tourism in the coming years are no longer valid [*Polityka turystyki zrównoważonej...* 2020].

# 2. The COVID-19-related crisis in tourism – current state of research

The WHO's decision to declare a coronavirus pandemic and the resulting impact of lockdown restrictions on tourism prompted many tourism researchers and analysts to investigate this issue. Some studies focus on describing changes in the tourism industry brought about by COVID-19 [Goodger, Ferran 2020]. Other authors propose different scenarios of how the situation might develop in the future, including strategies of overcoming the crisis and recovery measures. Among destinations hit particularly hard by the crisis are cities that benefit mainly from the demand for a product known as 'city breaks'. The website turystykawmiescie. org, dedicated to urban tourism, offers several dozen publications, reports and articles on this topic<sup>1</sup>. The special issue of *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, contains as many as 25 articles dealing with problems related to COVID-19. Their authors offer predictions for post-pandemic tourism [Haywood 2020], propose essential economic measure to rescue the tourism economy [Cave, Dredge 2020], point out the need for a transformation [Hall, Scott, Gössling 2020]. Some authors argue that after COVID-19 tourism needs to be transformed according to the principles of social and ecological justice [Higgins-Desbiolles 2020; Crossley 2020], with an emphasis on sustainable development and responsible tourism [Niewiadomski 2020]. Other studies have investigated the relationship between recorded infections and the use of hotels in Polish cities [Napierała, Leśniewska-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> https://turystykawmiescie.org/2020/04/03/wplyw-koronawirusa-na-turystyke-raporty-badawcze-i-artykuly-naukowe/ [accessed: 2.06.2020].

Napierala, Burski 2020]. It is argued that during the period of recovery tourists are likely to prefer domestic rather than foreign trips, stays at agricultural farms or other facilities that can ensure safety and hygiene<sup>2</sup>.

There have also been attempts at estimating losses caused by the pandemic and making predictions for Kraków and the region of Małopolska [Grabiński, Borkowski 2020], for which different scenarios of development in the tourism sector until 2021 have been prepared [Grabiński, Borkowski 2020].

### 3. Evolution of the crisis situation

As early as 16 March 2020, Tourism Economics published a report entitled "Travel & Tourism GlobalCOVID-19: updated outlook and pandemic impacts" [Dass et al. 2020], which predicted that "global arrivals would fall by at least 10.5% relative to the previous year (equivalent to 155 million arrivals)", but there were "significant downside risks to the 2020 outlook. Under the downside scenario, global arrivals would fall 17.9% in 2020, 263 million fewer arrivals than in 2019" [Dass et al. 2020]. Once the epidemic situation has stabilized, the authors predicted a rapid recovery, with travel levels expected to recover by 2023.

So far, there have been no scenarios for a tourism recovery in Kraków, since there too many unknown factors, and no assessment of the condition of tourism entrepreneurs has been carried out. As a result, a number of divergent views are floating around as to what tools should be used to help tourism recover "after COVID-19".

Along with the development of the pandemic, the sector of tourism services was experiencing the uncertainty associated with the gradual normalization, which was the result of the global decline in demand and travel restrictions [Covid-19. Related travel... 2020]. On 20 April, 48% of European destinations were completely or partially inaccessible because of closed borders, in 28% the entry was banned for passengers from specific countries of origin, while 17% could not be reached by air owing to suspended international flights. The results of this sudden and unexpected change in the broad environment for companies in the tourism industry had an immediate impact on their performance. Stock listings of some companies dropped by over 60%, consumers were giving up or cancelling their holidays and restrictions imposed by governments practically brought the market to a standstill. If people were to start travelling from August, the industry would stand to lose 51% of the annual tourist traffic, which would mean a decline of PLN 77.2 billion in Poland's GDP [Branża turystyczna w Polsce... 2020].

 $<sup>^{2}\</sup> https://www.profitroom.com/pl/blog/ponad-90-polakow-planuje-wakacje-2020-w-kraju-ogolnopolskie-badanie/ [accessed: 2.06.2020].$ 

Consequently, the situation in global tourism is extremely complicated, highly volatile and requires international cooperation. The European Commission prepared a communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions entitled "Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond"3. The "Communication and the accompanying initiatives set a coordinated framework to enable all Europe to benefit from a restful and above all, safe tourism season. [...] In doing so, it also aims to support the sustainability of our valuable tourism ecosystem for generations to come." The communication was also "about helping Member States to lift confinement measures and resume businesses, work and social life, in line with epidemiological and public health criteria." Under the REACT-EU initiative (the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe), the European Commission has proposed adding €55 billion to the ongoing 2014-2020 cohesion policy programmes, which are to be provided in 2021-2022 to overcome the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and prepare a long-term transformation towards a green, digital and resilient recovery of the European economy. Member States will have additional flexibility to transfer resources among the funds at any point in time of the programming period.4

The EU policy for the tourism sector has also been articulated in a speech delivered by Commissioner Thierry Breton at the European Parliament on 21 April 2020, known as "A Marshall Plan for European Tourism", which focuses on tools that can ensure liquidity [Breton 2020]. The plan also envisages the creation of "a new world benchmark for responsible, sustainable and innovative tourism" consisting of three components:

- tourism must be at the heart of the European Green Deal and should be involved in promoting sustainable tourism;
- emphasis on digital solutions and finding a balance between the so-called traditional players and the major digital platforms;
- "European tourism must become strategic: because of its economic and social weight, because it is based on a rich European history and priceless European cultural diversity; because it must protect itself from aggressive investment strategies by non-European countries" [Breton 2020].

The unknown evolution of recovery measures and the collapse in the demand for tourism services at the time of the survey, have prompted a number of hypothetical scenarios describing how the situation in Kraków and Małopolska might develop in the latter part of 2020. T. Grabiński and K. Borkowski [2020] estimated Kraków's revenues (losses) in 2020 relative to 2019 as a result of the col-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-commission-tourism-transport-2020-and-beyond\_en.pdf [accessed: 2.06.2020].

https://ec.europa.eu/regional\_policy/sources/docgener/factsheet/2020\_mff\_reacteu\_en.pdf [accessed: 2.06.2020].



Fig 1. The Main Square, before the lockdown, October 2019 (photo Z. Kruczek)

lapse of tourism flows measured in terms of visitor spending recorded so far. The Best Place Institute, specializing in place marketing, prepared a forecast report [*Prognozy dot. scenariuszy rozwoju* 2020], commissioned by Małopolska Tourism Organisation, containing scenarios for the tourism sector in Małopolska by the end of 2021 with recommendations for regional tourism policy.

Throughout the pandemic, the tourism industry kept negotiating with the central and local government authorities on the question of support measures for entrepreneurs. Given the long supply chain in the tourism sector, the negotiation process was complicated, giving rise to various solutions and divergent perspectives, but ultimately resulted in the creation of a number of recovery programmes (anti-crises shields) offered at the central and local level.

Kraków City Council, in addition to launching a general programme of support for local entrepreneurs called "Pauza" (Pause), has also prepared a few projects for the period "after COVID-19", which can be divided into three groups in terms of their objectives: commercialisation support ("szyte na miarę, "pakiet premium"); demand incentives, ("już lecimy", "a może Kraków") and the building of the tourism community under the slogan "I'm lucky to *live* where others can only come for while"<sup>5</sup>, aimed at preventing conflicts between local tourism stakeholders resulting from *urban tourism hypertrophy* observed in 2019.

Compared with the actual development of the crisis, some of the predictions made in the survey concerning the broad environment turned out either to be false, e.g. those regarding the situation in the airline industry, or have not been resolved yet (short-term rentals). It is only by observing demand-side behaviour

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Mam szczęście mieszkać tam, dokąd inni mogą przyjechać tylko na chwilę".



Fig. 2. The Main Square, after the lockdown, April 2020 (photo Z. Kruczek)

that it will be possible in the near future to assess the validity of commercialisation measures proposed by the responding entrepreneurs.

Border closures and bilateral travel restrictions led to a complete collapse of tourism. Virtually overnight, the once bustling city became deserted. Restaurants, hotels and museums were closed, cultural events were cancelled. The situation is illustrated by two photos of Kraków's flagship tourist attraction – the Main Square, before and after the lockdown (Fig. 1 and 2).

## 4. Research objective and methods

The lesson that can be learned from the current crisis situation is that modern management should be based on the VUCA model. The main premises of the concept include predicting issues that shape conditions, understanding the consequences of issues and actions, appreciating the interdependence of variables, preparing for alternative realities and challenges and interpreting and addressing relevant opportunities (Fig. 3).

### 5. Research aim

The purpose of the study was to collect opinions of Krakow's tourism entrepreneurs about the impact of the pandemic on their activities and their expectations concerning tools of marketing communication that could facilitate recovery. The

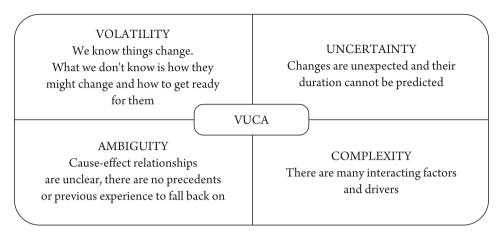


Fig. 3. The VUCA leadership model

respondents were asked to assess the drop in sales of tourism services, their opinions concerning the prospect of a tourist traffic recovery, possible measures that could facilitate the recovery and what they expected the local government to do in this respect.

The survey, conducted between 15 and 16 March 2020, involved 165 tourism entrepreneurs. The date of the survey was crucial for the interpretation of its results as the subsequent development of the epidemic situation would verify both the survey questions and the views expressed by the entrepreneurs.

Table 3. Respondents by type of activity in the tourism industry

Type of activity	Number	%
Hoteliers	25	15.2
Short-term rentals	10	6.1
Inbound tour operators	4	2.4
Outbound tour operators	33	20.0
Inbound and outbound tour operators	10	6.1
Coach operators	12	7.3
Tour guides	59	35.8
Attraction / museum	4	2.4
Catering	8	4.8
Total	165	100.0

Source: own elaboration.

Since the data were collected via computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI), the resulting sample was self-selected, with an overrepresentation of tour guides, relative to representatives of the accommodation or catering sectors (Table 3).

# 6. Kraków-based tourism entrepreneurs in the face of COVID-19

The purpose of the questions in the online interview was to determine the scale of the decline in sales at the moment of the survey, the number of cancellations in April and predictions for the coming autumn. In the middle of March, most of the respondents had recorded a practically 100% fall in sales (Table 4).

Table 4. The decline in sales recorded by the tourism entrepreneurs at the start of the epidemic

The scale of the fall	Number of responses	%
No fall recorded	0	0.0
Up to 20%	1	0.6
21-30%	1	0.6
31-40%	5	3.0
41-50%	3	1.8
51-60%	5	3.0
61-70%	5	3.0
71-80%	16	9.7
Practically 100%	129	78.2

Source: own elaboration.

In April, almost half of all respondents recorded a decline in the number of reservations (47.3%), which forced 10 entrepreneurs to close down (Table 5).

Asked to estimate the fall in reservations in the autumn, a plurality of respondents thought it was too early to make such predictions (43%). Nonetheless, many respondents had already recorded a fall in autumn reservations (Table 6).

In the following part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with several statements concerning the recovery of tourism and their own business activity as well as expected forms of support from the local public sector. Obviously, when interpreting views ex-

Table 5. Do your expect a fall in reservations/orders since April 2020

The scale of the fall	Number of responses	%
No fall recorded	0	0.0
Up to 30%	6	3.6
31-50%	10	6.1
51-70%	42	25.5
Practically 100%	78	47.3
I had to close down	10	6.1
Too early to say	19	11.5

Table 6. Do you expect a fall in reservations in the autumn 2020

Do you expect a fall in reservations in the autumn?	Number of responses	%
Yes, but only slight	28	17.0
Yes, a large one.	21	12.7
Yes, practically 100%	6	3.6
There was no fall	39	23.6
Too early to say	71	43.0

Source: own elaboration.

pressed by the respondents, one has to bear in mind the moment when the survey was conducted and the fact that any support programmes had yet to be developed (municipal and governmental measures offered as part of the anti-crisis shield programme). Understandably, the respondents themselves admitted that it was "too early to make predictions. We will certainly expect support from the city, in every respect".

The results showing the level of agreement or disagreement with the statements indicate the respondents' expectation of support, a possible integration within the industry but also strong competition. Prospects of a tourist traffic recovery and their own profitability are far removed into the future (Fig. 4).

The majority of the responding entrepreneurs agreed that city breaks were going to be the first to recover, although a certain degree of optimism was also expressed with regard to other tourism products, such as school trips, cultural events, and congresses and conferences. Given the subsequent development of

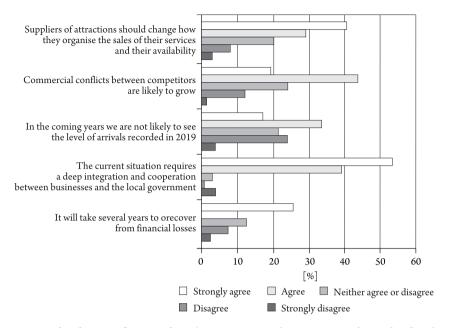


Fig. 4. The degree of respondents' agreement with statements about the development of the situation

the pandemic and prospects of an economic recovery, some of these predictions, especially those concerning school trips or congress tourism proved to be mistaken. It is possible that at the time of the survey the respondents expressed their expectations rather than realistic assessments (Table 7).

Table 7. Tourism products likely to see a real and quick recovery in terms of the number of visitors

Tourism products	Number of responses	%
City breaks	116	70.3
Medical tourism	13	7.9
Religious tourism	51	30.9
Congresses/conferences	63	38.2
Cultural events	62	37.6
Thematic / tailor-made products	66	40.0
School trips	54	32.7

Source: own elaboration.

Table 8. Categories of tourism likely to recover most quickly

Categories of tourism	Number of responses	%
Group tourism	16	9.7
Individual tourism	95	57.6
Both categories	22	13.3
Hard to say	32	19.4

Already in March the respondents indicated individual tourism as the market segment capable of the fastest recovery, but emphasizing the crucial role of the safety of travel and stay: "Simple products that can satisfy the basic expectation of an organized and safe travel are more likely to recover" (Table 8).

With hindsight, the range of promotional tools the respondents were planning to employ in order to support the sale of tourism services seems rather unrealistic. This is also true when it comes to measures expected of the city authorities. More realistic comments were also present: "It's a bit too early to think about that. We don't know when it will be possible to travel. We may have to switch to doing something else in the meantime. Without any help, many of us are likely to join the ranks of the unemployed, which means we will in fact be receiving help". Although respondents did indicate various promotional tools, the range of proposed solutions seems to be too traditional and too broad (Table 9).

Table 9. Promotional tools the respondents planned to use in order to support their economic activity in tourism

Respondents' promotional tools of choice	Number of responses	%
Participation in B2C fairs	8	4.8
Participation in B2B fairs	23	13.9
Participation in workshops	18	10.9
Partners' study visits in Kraków	19	11.5
Business trips to foreign markets	12	7.3
AdWords campaigns	51	30.9
Remarketing campaigns	47	28.5
Promotional leaflets and catalogues	11	6.7
Flexible pricing with more discount options	48	29.1
I don't know	70	42.4

Source: own elaboration.

Table 10. Expected forms of promotional support from the city council

Expected forms of promotional support	Number of responses	%
Participation in B2C fairs	30	18.2
Participation in B2B fairs	16	9.7
Participation in workshops	31	18.8
Organising study visits in Kraków for trade partners	62	37.6
Organising trips to the city for journalists	46	27.9
Promotional leaflets and catalogues	33	20.0
Assistance in business trips to /events held in foreign markets to build the city's image	31	18.8
Remarketing campaigns	63	38.2
AdWords campaigns	53	32.1
Support in acquiring partners for the MICE* sector	47	28.5
Social media	77	46.7
Bloggers, influencers	34	20.6
TV advertising campaigns	56	33.9
Outdoor campaigns	31	18.8
Grants to commercialise Kraków's tourism offering	65	39.4
Campaigns targeting former Kraków residents to foster recommendations	27	16.4

<sup>\*</sup> MICE - Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events.

When it comes to expectations of support from the local government, the respondents mentioned various forms of promotional assistance, such as grants to commercialise their offering (39.4%), remarketing campaigns (38.2%) and organising study visits in Kraków for trade partners (37.6%). Less support was expected to facilitate respondents' participation in trade fairs and workshops (Table 10).

### 7. Conclusion

The results of the survey reveal the level of economic losses anticipated by tourism entrepreneurs and their predicted occurrence over time, opinions about the likely sequence in which particular tourism products in Kraków are going to recover, as well as expectations concerning the tools of marketing communication that could facilitate the recovery. With the benefit of hindsight (the article was written in July 2020), it is possible to track the changes and assess the validity of opinions collected in the survey. Taking into account the actual developments recorded in Poland and in the world, it can be concluded that some predictions about the development of tourism have not been confirmed, e.g. those concerning the market segments likely to be the first ones to recover or effective marketing tools that would facilitate commercialisation. The empirical data are suitable for assessing the actual situation at the outbreak of the epidemic. They clearly show how indispensable it is to conduct a strategic assessment of the situation of companies according to the VUCA principles.

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# Wpływ pandemii Covid-19 na turystykę w Krakowie w świetle opinii przedsiębiorców turystycznych

Streszczenie. Celem badań było poznanie opinii krakowskich przedsiębiorców turystycznych na temat wpływu pandemii na ich działalność oraz oczekiwań w stosunku do narzędzi komunikacji marketingowej, które miałyby odbudować komercjalizację. Respondenci zostali poproszeni o ocenę spadku sprzedaży usług turystycznych, uzyskano opinie na temat perspektywy ożywienia ruchu turystycznego i możliwych działań samorządu, które mogłyby ułatwić to ożywienie. Kraków w ostatnich latach stał się najbardziej rozpoznawalną destynacją turystyczną Polski, a liczba odwiedzających to miasto systematycznie rosła, co przekładało się na wpływy do budżetu miasta. Pojawiły się nawet opinie o krakowskim overtourismie. Wybuch pandemii Covid-19 w drastyczny sposób dotknął cały łańcuch dostaw w gospodarce turystycznej, powodując wizualną pustkę i załamanie finansowe przedsiębiorstw. Dla zdiagnozowania skali kryzysu spowodowanego pandemią przeprowadzono badanie sondażowe metodą CAWI na początku pandemii w połowie w marca 2020 r. wśród krakowskich przedsiębiorców turystycznych. Rozwój sytuacji epidemicznej i podejmowane działania ochrony branży turystycznej w okresie od połowy marca do końca czerwca 2020 r. posłużyły do zweryfikowania formułowanych przez respondentów hipotez. Wyniki badania ukazują przewidywany przez przedsiębiorców turystycznych poziom strat ekonomicznych i przewidywane ich wystąpienie w czasie, opinie o prawdopodobnej kolejności odbudowy poszczególnych produktów turystycznych Krakowa, a także oczekiwania dotyczące narzędzi komunikacji marketingowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Covid-19, turystyka, Krakow, przedsiębiorcy turystyczni, postawy, wpływ



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