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The application of social survey methods in analysing the tourist activity of seniors

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to discuss the possibilities of applying social research methods in the analysis of seniors' tourism activity. It emphasises the fact that research related to the participation of seniors in tourism is of major significance in many countries with rapidly changing population. The author mentions the methodological determinants of conducting social research that derive from two basic paradigms: quantitative and qualitative. Based on examples from the literature, the article presents the benefits and limitations of their use in conducting research on seniors' tourism activity. In the final part of the article, the author lists the methodological postulates regarding the implementation of the research among seniors as a specific segment of tourism activity.

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Contents:

1. Introduction	51
2. Ageing of society and tourism	52
3. The methodological determinants of the research on tourist activity	53
4. The methods of social research in the analysis of tourist activity	57
5. Conclusions	61
References	62

1. Introduction

The research on tourist activity of different social groups has a long history and has been conduct-

ed by specialists in various fields. Tourism activity is understood as the participation of people in various forms of tourism within a particular period of time (Alejziak, 2012).

In her work on tourism movement, Warszyńska (2003) states that the variety of conditions (environmental, social, economic) that influence the phenomenon, as well as its spontaneity, dynamism, strong concentration and mass lead to a number of difficulties both in collecting source materials and, in respect of methodology, conducting the research.

Alejziak (2009) claims that the above-stated difficulties have led to the situation in which, in spite of the fact that research on spatial behaviours of tourists has been conducted for over 100 years, the problem of measurement of tourism has not been solved and no effective method for fixing the number of tourists in time and space has been created.

Other researchers (Podemski, Isański, 2008) mention other methodological difficulties concerning research on tourists. Firstly, there is no possibility of creating (and there does not exist) a database of tourists from which one could draw, in a statistically proper way, a sample for research which could represent the whole population of people arriving in a particular city, region or country. Due to the lack of the general obligation of registry, it is also not possible to precisely specify the number of people arriving in a particular area. Another problem is that the research on tourists in the spot of their short-term stay cannot be repeated or verified. Furthermore, the conditions of conducting surveys among tourists in the spot of their stay do not contribute to the reliability and completeness of the answers, which results from the brevity of the stay, schedule and rush. Finally, tourism entities are particularly reluctant to provide any information appealing to trade secret or lack of registry of the data which is of interest to the researchers, e.g. in the research on business tourism in Poland in 2003 only 3% out of 514 entities responded.

In his paper on the methodology of research on tourism movement, Matczak (1992) submits the following model of a structure of the research process which results from the systems approach: (a) observation – to determine facts: what is it?; (b) description – to determine features: what is it like?; (c) explanation – to determine connections and reliance; (d) transformation – to analyse the results; (e) prognosis – to determine what and how it is likely to be.

The author states that, by applying different research methods (interrogation, query, measurement), one may observe the tourist movement

either directly (own research) or indirectly (the research conducted by various institutions). A significant part of the process of collecting data is determining the conditions in which the research was conducted as it enables its verification. Having specified the facts and having connected them with the existing knowledge, one can proceed to the stage of description.

The description should lead to the identification of the components of the studied phenomenon. In order to do that, one ought to complete the process of systematisation, typology and classification of the collected empirical data. The following stage should cover searching for cause-effect relationships among the studied phenomena that are the elements of the system. What is very important in this part of research process is the attempt to determine the causes and effects of the studied phenomena. This constitutes a particularly difficult task, and therefore the process of explaining any forms of tourist movement encounters numerous obstacles.

The succeeding stages of the research process should assume the description of the studied phenomena to be the key for their explanation on the basis of the accepted theory. Consequently, having accomplished the process of explanation, one should proceed to the process of predicting the changes of the studied empirical phenomena.

2. Ageing of society and tourism

The authors of the report “Demography, active ageing and pensions” (European Commission, 2012) claim that the number of the European Union citizens that remain professionally active will, within the nearest 30 years, decrease from 1.0 to 1.5 million people a year, whereas the number of people aged 60 and more will increase by 2.0 million people a year. As they state, Europe is currently on the verge of a demographic revolution which is one of the most significant reasons why the politicians, administration authorities as well as the scientists are paying more and more attention to the problems of ageing society.

There are many views on determining the age which initiates the process of ageing. The World Health Organization has established the following

specification (Pasik, 2005): the pre-old: 45 - 59 years old; the young old: 60 - 74 years old; the old old: 75 - 89 years old; long life: over 90 years old

The United Nations, on the other hand, have set the limit of 65 years old as the threshold of demographic old age. The old age border varies in different countries; for example, the USA: 75 years old, Germany: 60 years old, Great Britain: 50 years old, (Bombol, Słaby, 2011). Regardless of the assumed old age border, it has been commonly stated that seniors today are much more active, healthier and in a better condition than the previous generations. Therefore, seniors' tourism activity constitutes one of the most important social and economic issues. This is the basic reason why the research on the tourism of seniors has been of increasing interest.

The first international conference on senior tourism was held in Spain in 1993; it was followed by a conference in Brazil (1993) and then in Portugal (1999). Some of the major problems listed at the above-mentioned conferences concerned the fact that (Dann, 2000): (a) the tourist market of the elderly is very heterogeneous and remains correlated with both the age of tourists and their other personal features (i.e. attitude towards family life, moral values, growing sense of individuality and attitude to leisure and entertainment); (b) senior tourism requires further research, particularly on the relations between types of tourist behaviour and the general standard of living.

In Poland, senior tourism activity is more and more frequently discussed by representatives of various scientific disciplines: economy (Śniadek, 2006, 2007; Gryszel et al., 2012; Bąk, 2013), geography (Grzelak-Kostulska et al., 2011), physical education (Szwarc et al., 1986; Łobożewicz, 1991; Toczek-Werner, Sołtysik, 2009), gerontology (Trafiałek, 2006), sociology (Zalewska, 2006), psychology (Pasik, 2005; Toeplitz, 2005), pedagogy (Halicki, 2000; Witek, 2004; Klim-Klimaszewska, 2005; Łosiakowska, 2006), and theology (Adamczyk, 2006).

The majority of the above-mentioned authors emphasise that, in order to provide for the needs of the elderly, one comes across a number of obstacles, particularly concerning filling their spare time. Taking an active part in social life through education, development of various skills, interesting forms of physical activity and, last but not least, participation in tourist trips has a very positive influence on both health and the general frame of mind of an elderly

person. We are now experiencing the phenomenon of fast ageing society, yet, the knowledge concerning the preferences, expectations, needs, benefits and demands within the field of tourism activity of the elder part of Poland's and other countries' populations is still, to a large extent, insufficient.

Additionally, this problem is also of great socio-economic significance and it is particularly important for the tourism economy. The need for greater awareness of the effects of this phenomenon among representatives of the tourism industry has been mentioned by various authors (National Tour Association, 2000; Dann, 2000; Śniadek, 2006). They point out that, due to the process of demographic changes, the role of the elderly in tourism is bound to increase.

Thus, it is necessary to recognise the elements determining the tourism behaviour of both contemporary and future seniors in three aspects: diagnostic – recognition of the existing state; analytic – recognition of the factors that affect this state; prognostic – the attempt to determine tendencies.

In order to diagnose the current situation in the field of senior tourist activities, one may pose the following questions:

- 1) Is the tourism activity of people aged 55+ conditioned spatially (intensity, seasonality, territoriality)?
- 2) Which factors (health, economic, social, mental) have an influence on the forms of tourism activity of people aged 55+?
- 3) Is the current tourist offer adjusted to the needs of people aged 55+?
- 4) Do the generation of baby boomers that are nowadays entering retirement age, demonstrate different, from those of the previous generations of seniors, expectations within preferences and motives for travelling?

The answers to the questions have a significant role in developing tourism of this particular social group in different aspects: social, economic and spatial.

3. The methodological determinants of the research on tourism activity

Methodological issues have a great impact on the attempts to describe, explain and forecast the tourism

behaviours of individuals, social groups or whole societies. The main differences in the research approaches result from the adopted paradigms which, in turn, are affected by philosophical orientations.

A discussion among the supporters of various ways of perceiving and examining the reality has been conducted for almost 200 years. On the one hand, there is the approach derived from positivism and rationalism, which states that society can be studied only by reason and completely objectively. It assumes that the object of study exists independently of the researcher, and that the researcher is operationally independent of the surrounding reality.

On the other hand, such post-modern approaches as, among others, ethnomethodology, social constructionism or symbolic interactionism, cast doubt on the objectivity and rationality of the examination procedure. These trends indicate that each researcher conducts his or her observations in a specific social context, and that every experience is subjective.

Such diversity of philosophical and methodological orientation is the reason of a fundamental disagreement within social research on the validity of the use of quantitative or qualitative methods. Those researchers who represent the dominant quantitative approach emphasise mathematical precision and the possibility of quantifying and comparing research results. The quantitative approach enables testing hypotheses that have been adopted in accordance with the principles of probability theory. In this perspective, the emphasis is on facts, the empirical indicators are expressed in the form of numbers and the relationships between variables are statistical in nature (Golafshani, 2003).

However, certain restrictions on the widespread use of quantitative methods have recently been introduced. As Chojnicki states (1999), the precision of the mathematical and statistical tools applied in quantitative methods does not often keep up with the quality of empirical data. The quantitative methods, in his view, should be used to solve such problems of research whose explanation is possible. The author claims that applying any methods of research should be subordinated to the purpose of the study on the basis of the accepted theory, so that the result would be reliable.

This view is shared by Silverman (2007) who states that quantitative researchers working in the social sciences should be cautious with interpreting

a statistically significant correlation as a cause-and-effect relationship. In his opinion, such proceedings, void of adequate theoretical assumptions, can lead to “discovering” relationships that are entirely superficial.

Other authors who share the above-mentioned beliefs state that, when it comes to social studies, even sophisticated statistical methods cannot replace the conceptualisation of a research problem, as well as its respective operationalisation and the appropriately selected tools of research (Blalock, 1975; Lutyński, 1983; Steczkowski, 1995; Hammerley, Atkinson, 2000; Sawiński et al., 2000; Babbie, 2007).

Having assumed the principles of social constructivism, Alasuutari (1996) - the supporter of qualitative methods - claims that, when conducting social research, one should pay attention to the uniqueness of the social, historical and geographical context. What he also emphasises is the fact that not every case study analysis must lead to broader generalisations or attempts to generalise a particular phenomenon. In his opinion, research should be based on a theoretical foundation, but the theory should not limit the researcher in collecting different observations. Such approach enables a researcher to see the wider context of the analysed phenomena.

Some researchers who use qualitative methods argue that the reliability of observation applies only to quantitative research. In their view, human life is so dynamic that there is no need to make accurate measurements. As Silverman (2007) states, such an approach may lead, in an extreme form, to the lack of any possibility of verification and comparison of test results.

The views that are more and more frequently represented take into account the advantages and disadvantages of both methodologies. Some researchers state that both approaches can and should be used in social studies (Babbie, 2007; Silverman, 2007; Pluye et al., 2009; Maison, 2001: 2010). What constitutes the justification for this view is the assumption that the aim of all research trends is, after all, to understand the reality, to improve the quality of life and to develop knowledge for practical purposes.

The differences in both scientific approaches are vividly presented by Sale, Lohfeld, Brazil (2002)

who claim that they can be compared to studies using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT). Both techniques attempt to reflect a certain reality that is independent of our perception. They argue that one should not underestimate the differences in both quantitative and qualitative approaches, which are fundamental. However, in order to achieve the objective, which is to understand and explain the studied phenomena, the strengths of both research approaches need to be applied and used simultaneously or one after the other.

According to Walle (1997), the study of tourist phenomena reveals the need for a comprehensive research approach and the use of different research methods that refer to quantitative and qualitative approaches. In his view, tourist activity constitutes such a complex phenomenon that, without applying the entire set of available research methods, the results will be incomplete. The application of appropriate tools should be determined only by the goal of the study and not by the problems of its narrowly perceived accuracy.

What constitutes a major problem, from the methodological point of view, is the validity and reliability of the applied research tools. The validity should be understood as an observable state of affairs that may be an indicator of the phenomenon which cannot be observed directly (Mayntz et al., 1985; Babbie, 2007; Silverman, 2007). In turn, reliability assures certainty that a repeated use of the research tool in the same conditions and by another researcher will give the same results. This particularly applies to diagnostic questions which, when imprecisely phrased, can be differently understood by the respondent who, as a result, may give a different answer.

Golafshani (2003) emphasises the importance of validity and reliability stating that they were previously considered primarily in quantitative research. As he claims, they should also be taken into account in qualitative research and should be understood as the quest for trustworthiness and accuracy of the methods of conducting research. The problem of trustworthiness in qualitative research is put in a broader context by Silverman (2007) who approaches it from the perspective of Karl Popper's critical rationalism. The author states that research should involve attempts to falsify all initial assump-

tions concerning the collected data. Only after the existence of the relationship between the studied phenomena has not been overthrown by means of different methods can one say that it exists objectively, and not only apparently.

The author, furthermore, discusses the issue of providing quality in social research through triangulation, to which he refers critically. The supporter of triangulation, N.K. Denzin (Denzin, Lincoln, 2009), postulates the collection of data from various sources. What he additionally states is that, in order to ensure adequate trustworthiness of research, one should apply triangulation of data, triangulation of researchers and triangulation of methods.

All of these measurements are designed to reduce bias in a particular research problem. However, according to Silverman (2007), applying the above-mentioned procedures does not guarantee the elimination of mistakes resulting from the varied context of acquiring and processing data by means of a variety of research methods. The author, therefore, proposes using analytic induction, constant comparative method, deviant-case analysis, in-depth analysis of the data and appropriate summary tables.

These methods should lead to greater precision in qualitative research and to the generalisability of research findings.

In the context of the foregoing discussion, an interesting conclusion is drawn by Babbie (2007) who states that researchers should obviously strive to make their research valid and reliable. In his view, however, a basic dilemma arises while maintaining both quality criteria. The research which remains more detailed and which takes many details into account is more accurate but, due to the number of considered factors, it may hinder the standardisation of the measurement process, and thus reduce reliability. Conducting research with a higher level of standardisation, on the other hand, deprives the observed phenomena of its complexity. As the author states, this dilemma captures, in a sense, the essence of the two basic orientations functioning in social research: the quantitative and qualitative one. The former one is more reliable, while the second one remains more valid.

What is of great significance for both research approaches is the possibility of generalisability. In terms of quantitative research, it is allowed by the

methodology of sample surveys and the use of probability sampling (Steczowski, 1995; Bracha, 1998; Babbie, 2007). Most large surveys are conducted by means of random selection which makes it possible to achieve the highest level of representativeness of the results for the whole population under study. What should be noted, however, is the fact that such studies are usually expensive and often difficult to implement.

Nonprobability sampling is far more frequently used by researchers who represent qualitative research (Babbie, 2007; Silverman, 2007). As Coyne (1997) points out, it is the sampling technique that is crucial for the quality of the results in qualitative research. It is, therefore, necessary to present a detailed examination procedure. Unfortunately, many researchers ignore this issue, making it difficult or even impossible to compare the findings. The types of nonprobability sampling involve: convenience sampling, purposeful sampling (purposive sampling, judgmental sampling), theoretical sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling.

Purposeful sampling is applied in a situation where, basing on prior knowledge about the population and the specific purpose of the research, one can expect in the analysed cases a high probability of occurrence of the features or processes that are of interest to the researcher. However, as Silverman (2007) indicates, purposeful sampling requires a critical evaluation of the rates occurring in the population that are of interest to the researcher.

In his view, the ideas of purposeful sampling are developed by theoretical sampling, which is equivalent to the choice of groups or research categories that enable an explanation of the problem on the basis of the accepted theory. The idea of theoretical sampling was based on the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (Babbie, 2007). It puts emphasis on the precision of research procedures and, in particular, on the validity and reliability in qualitative methods. The theory assumes the significance of the fact that the selected sample makes it possible to analyse a wider social dimension of the phenomenon to which the accepted assumptions refer. The selection of individuals to be studied is based on theoretically defined criteria. As Silverman (2007) states, with theoretical sampling, a sort of reversed situation is likely to occur while looking for the deviant case, which will contradict widely accepted assumptions. Such

a case may constitute a kind of test to either rebut or strengthen the commonly existing opinions.

A special type of theoretical sampling may be the concept of “hourglass”, proposed by Alasuutari (1996). He points out that, in certain circumstances and on the basis of the accepted assumptions, particularly interesting cases are gradually selected from a broad spectrum of the entire population. Then a detailed analysis of these cases leads to expanding the field of interest, which develops until it reaches the wider social context of the studied phenomenon. The author states that, in qualitative research, the initial research concept may change or develop into a new research project.

Snowball sampling is applied when access to members of a specific population is limited (Mayntz et al., 1985; Sawiński et al., 2000; Babbie, 2007). The initial phase involves collecting data on the number of representatives of a particular population, and then asking them to indicate its next representatives. This kind of proceeding results in the increase in the number of respondents and the accumulation of information. Unfortunately, this method of sampling does not meet the criteria of representativeness and is difficult to be theoretically justified, and therefore it is recommended only in the preliminary stages of exploratory research.

The social research conducted by agencies and research institutes often applies the method of quota sampling (Mayntz et al., 1985; Sawiński et al., 2000; Babbie, 2007). This method involves an interviewer who receives general directives on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. What is strictly defined are only the most important assumptions concerning gender, age and the place of residence of the respondents. The application of quota sampling method allows each person who belongs to the surveyed population to participate in the research. What constitutes an important limitation is the fact that the interviewer and the respondent should not know each other in advance. The reason is the potential awkwardness of the situation in which people who know each other reveal their views. It is the interviewer who bears big responsibility for the selection of respondents in this method, as it is the interviewer’s knowledge of the structure of the surveyed population, as well as his or her experience and knowledge that the quality of the results depends on.

The sample obtained from the quota sampling method constitutes a substitute of the representative sample when it is not possible to fully obtain a random sample. Despite considerable arbitrariness and many subjective elements, the research conducted by means of quota sampling yields good results.

As Coyne (2000) states, despite applying different definitions in qualitative research, each type of sampling is intentional and is a form of purposeful sampling dependent on the needs and positions represented by the researcher. Small (2009), in turn, claims that, when thinking about the method of sampling, one should be aware of the logic behind the selection of cases, and not just of their statistical representativeness and bear the presentation of a wide spectrum of the analysed cases in mind. The final target should be achieving sufficient saturation of the cases under study, it is not their number that counts.

4. The methods of social research in the analysis of tourism activity

Social research (Blalock, 1975; Lutyński, 1983; Maynz et al., 1985; Steczkowski, 1995; Hammerley, Atkinson, 2000; Oppenheim, 2005; Babbie, 2007; Silverman, 2007) gathers information on social phenomena by means of techniques of obtaining materials understood as complexes of activities and means which are subject to some rules. The following classification of research methods is applied: observational techniques (uncontrolled, controlled); the techniques of directed communication with other people: the techniques based on direct communication (a reflexive interview and a questionnaire interview), and the techniques based on indirect communication (written non-standardised and standardised survey techniques which consist of communicating through written media).

The techniques of directed communication with other people are definitely more frequently applied. It constitutes the fundamental difference between social science and natural science, whose basic research procedure is observation rather than communication. Furthermore, when communicating during social research, one needs to use concepts which: (a) are comprehensible and identical for

both the researcher and the respondent; (b) are precisely defined; (c) mean that something is observable, either directly or by means of indicators.

Performing survey research, one should, moreover, consider both social and situational factors which may affect the respondents' answers. Standardisation of the questionnaire itself does not suffice; what is essential is to additionally standardise the circumstances in which the research is conducted. The external features of a pollster (sex, race, ethnicity) may affect the responds. As some of the examples drawn from American literature indicate, the above-mentioned features may, in extreme cases, cause differences reaching 20 per cent (Mayntz et al., 1985).

The question of the credibility of the respondents constitutes another serious methodological problem of the survey method research. Having conducted observations of the respondents' behaviour during the survey, Staszyńska (1989) concluded that convincing a respondent of scientificity, anonymity and voluntariness of the research did not ensure reliable answers. A pollster may significantly influence the attitude of a respondent by creating atmosphere of trust and safety. One should also avoid exerting pressure on a respondent and strive to make a respondent perceive the research process as one that will guarantee anonymity. Moreover, it is essential to convince a respondent that his or her participation in the research does not entail any risk. Emphasising the sense of subjectivity of each participant of the research is another significant issue. It can be achieved when conducting the research in conditions corresponding to daily activity of a respondent, which will make him or her feel natural.

The subject of research may include human beings, products of human activities or social collectivities. Another important issue is the way in which the process of communication is conducted: directly or indirectly? It is a matter of great methodological importance as, when applying the techniques of direct communication, a researcher, to some extent, controls the situation and influences communication with a respondent (physical appearance, facial expression and gestures of a researcher). By applying the techniques of indirect communication, on the other hand, a researcher has almost no influence as he or she does not usually know how and who actually responded (Lutyński, 1983).

Participant observation is a research technique deriving from a qualitative research paradigm, and its main advantage is the fact that it allows a researcher to observe tourists' actual behaviours. It enables discovering what a tourist really thinks, feels and does rather than what he or she says what he or she thinks, feels and does. What constitutes the weakness of this technique may be both the impact of the researcher on the analysed situation and the lack of the possibility of generalisation. This type of research is, undoubtedly, suited to studying those behaviours that are hidden and reluctantly disclosed by tourists. It has not so far been used with regard to senior tourists' behaviours and, if the elderly were the subject of observation, it was conducted within a wider research problem. Babbie (2007), Hammersley and Atkinson (2000) as well as Silverman (2007) present the detailed methodological considerations of participant observation.

It is obviously possible to apply observational techniques in the research on tourism activity; however, due to the necessity of the presence of an observer (researcher) in a particular tourist destination, it is expensive and technically difficult. For this reason, such research is rarely conducted and so far has concerned the behaviour of tourists during their trips (Nalaskowski, 1999; Bowen, 2002; Blichfeldt, 2008; Balińska, Nowakowski, 2011) and less frequently during their participation in events (Mackellar, 2013).

Experimental study is an example of controlled observation, which involves gathering people in one place, subjecting them to a certain action and observing the effects of this action (Babbie, 2007). To achieve the objectives of the experiment both the independent variable and the dependent variable must be specified, and the experimental group, as well as the control group need to be indicated. Selecting the test group is performed by random selection or by matching, which resembles quota sampling.

With regard to seniors' tourism behaviours, the experimental study was conducted by Mackay and Smith (2006). It concerned the differences in how the read text information and images on four tourist destinations are perceived and memorised by people aged over 60 in contrast to students. The research was carried out in churches or senior centres and, with the students, at the university. To encour-

age the participation in the experiment the senior organisations received a donation, whereas the students received a salary (\$10 per person).

The research has revealed that age is not a criterion that differentiates the way in which visual information is received. Fewer seniors than students, in contrast, memorised the text information. The practical significance of this study in relation to the activity of seniors is the fact that it may indicate that they are more susceptible to visual rather than oral stimuli. It should be noted, however, that experimental study of seniors' tourism activity is difficult and costly.

A reflexive interview may be conducted either in the place of the respondent's everyday activity or in a special room. The first case may constitute an extension of participant observation (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000). In each case, the researcher must express his or her approval of the informant. Although the influence of the researcher on the subject's response has not been determined, the respondent's answers should not be considered as a certain source of information. On the other hand, they should not be completely rejected either. In the case of reflexive interview, it is very important to create the right atmosphere for conducting it, as this type of interview is essentially a conversation, in which the interviewer imposes only its general direction. Bombol and Słaby (2011) applied the foregoing method as an extension of the research project on the degree of using services (tourist ones included) by seniors, which was earlier conducted by means of questionnaire technique. The authors observed that it was through direct conversation, rather than on the basis of standardised techniques, that one could better understand the living conditions and the overall well-being of the pensioners. The cost of conducting the interviews is, however, a serious obstacle, and therefore the obtained findings should be supplemented with the information gained by other techniques.

Questionnaire interview, as a technique based on direct communication, was used in research conducted on seniors by various authors (Mansvelt, 1997; Hsu et al., 2007; Hunter-Johns, Blackburn, 2007; Nimrod, 2008) who claimed it to be a very productive method with respect to that group of people. This method puts more emphasis on detail, depth and quality of the obtained data rather

than on the sample size. The questions are normally open-ended and less structured, while the number of interviews usually varies from a few to about 20. The interviews are usually conducted in the respondents' homes, and rarely in public places. Theoretical sampling or snowball sampling were applied in the foregoing research.

A specific method of qualitative social research that is based on the technique of direct communication is *the focused group interview (FGI)* (Maison, 2001, 2010; Lisek-Michalska, Daniłowicz, 2007). It still arouses a lot of methodological controversy. The focused group interview, commonly called "focus", is defined as "an informal discussion led by a group of selected people on a chosen subject that refers to particular situations which are familiar to these people" (Lisek-Michalska, Daniłowicz, 2007). As the researchers emphasise, the usefulness of the above-mentioned method lies in the fact that it helps to clarify the reasons for human behaviour. The operational and methodological conditions for conducting "focus" assume that: the group of respondents that participate in the research is an informal assembly of purposely selected people; the number of people should amount from 6 to 12 respondents (some authors indicate the number between 7 and 9); the group is directed by a moderator who leads the discussion; the discussion is centred around a single issue and it is in-depth rather than superficial in its character; it is a discussion rather than simple answers to the questions of a moderator, and therefore the data obtained by this method results from the effort of all the participants; it is a method of qualitative research and its results cannot be extended to the entire population.

Maison (2001) stresses that the research conducted through focused group interviews is a qualitative method and it aims at comprehending the reality rather than measuring the phenomena. In this type of research the emphasis is laid on the fact that the quality of the data obtained through the interview depends, to a large extent, on a moderator's experience and knowledge about the examined problem.

This technique was used to conduct research among seniors by, among others, Horneman et al. (2002). The research concerned the reasons for travelling as well as the sources of information on tourist attractions. In turn, Pennington-Gray et al.

(2003) state that the focused group interviews may constitute a good way to analyse the features of tourism behaviours characteristic for demographic cohorts of the elderly. The method is increasingly used by the Polish public opinion research agencies Millward Brown SMG/ KRC (2009) and Research House Maison (2010), which attempt to analyse the behaviours of tourists arriving in different regions. So far, it has not, however, been used to study the behaviours of seniors.

The analysis of the data in the form of *written non-standardised statements* was applied by, among others, Sedgley et al. (2006) in research on tourism activity of women aged 75+ residing in Wales. The authors confirm the high utility of the technique in relation to the elderly, as it allows the analysis of the broad context of the respondent's life. They indicate that this type of method makes it possible to reveal more opportunities rather than limitations that are connected with seniors' travelling. As the authors state, applying the standardised methods that are based on indirect communication frequently gives superficial results when referring to the elderly. Lutyński (1983) shares this opinion and he claims that, in contrast to survey research, non-standardised interviews allow for obtaining much more profound information.

The research on senior tourism activity largely uses *the methods of survey research*. They involve: Postal Questionnaire PAPI (Paper and Pencil Interview), CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview), CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview), Press Questionnaire, Distributed Questionnaire and Self-Administrated Questionnaire with Captive Audience.

Obviously, specialised public opinion research companies that conduct polls, as well as marketing research, apply additional tools whose names depend on the applied technical devices and circumstances in which the research is conducted.

The postal survey PAPI, which is self-returnable, almost never ensures obtaining a statistically representative sample, and therefore the results of this research cannot be extended to the entire population (Lutyński 1983). Steczkowski (1995), in turn, stresses that research conducted by means of a postal survey is very risky as, even if the questionnaires are sent to properly randomly selected respondents, there is no guarantee of their return.

Bombol and Słaby (2011), as well as Nimrod and Rotem (2010), share the same attitude in their research on seniors. As they point out, the sample, even if it is methodologically properly selected from the population, is “broken” due to seniors’ frequent refusals to participate in the research.

The research by means of PAPI in the form of questionnaires given out among seniors was also conducted by interviewers in their place of residence (Lehto et al., 2001; Toeplitz, 2005), during their tourist travel (Cai et al., 2001; Wang et al., 2007) or in areas attractive to tourists (Sangpikul, 2007). The researchers point to the limitations of this method that result from numerous refusals to take part in the study, and conclude that it is fear that contributes to the lack of consent on the part of seniors. The mistakes made in the process of completing the questionnaire and the “halo” effect, i.e. the thoughtless repetition of the same response in subsequent questions, constitute additional problems. Furthermore, the research does not usually involve seniors with very poor health. In addition to the above-mentioned obstacles, there still remains the problem of reducing the possibility of generalising the results in the case of convenience sampling.

Surveys using the CATI method performed on representative groups of respondents and regarding tourism activity of seniors are conducted in different countries (Łobożewicz, 1991; Erasmus, Trafiałek, 1997; Pennington-Gray et al., 2003; Huh, Park, 2010; Korporacja Badawcza Pretendent, 2011). They are usually commissioned by researchers and carried out by social research centres or use publicly available statistical data.

Seniors who are subject to the Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) are reluctant to respond by phone and get tired very fast, which particularly concerns those aged over 75 (Fleischer, Pizam, 2002; Bombol, Słaby, 2011). This puts the reliability and validity of this method into question. Similarly, research conducted by means of the CAWI method will also be ineffective due to the fact that only some seniors use the Internet. Furthermore, the level of familiarity with virtual reality among seniors is not high enough to eagerly respond via the Internet.

Self-Administered Questionnaire with Captive Audience constitutes another kind of research technique. It is a type of research in which a researcher

communicates directly with a group of people who are usually assembled with regard to being connected by an institution (school, workplace, social organisation). Such a research tool has been applied in the research on tourism activity of seniors (Callan, Bowman, 2000; Huang, Tsai, 2003; Jang, Wu, 2006). It has been conducted in the meeting places of various organisations (associations, universities of the third age, service centres for seniors, churches).

The advantages of this type of survey are emphasised by various authors (Lutyński, 1983; Sawiński et al., 2000) who claim that the respondents may be assured full anonymity (provided that they return the completed questionnaires to the ballot box) and the right to oral explanations. First of all, the presence of a pollster enables standardisation of the situation in which a questionnaire is filled. What is more, this technique meets the postulate that the research is held in conditions corresponding to the daily life of a respondent. Thus, this method is particularly recommended in research on social groups that gather in one place due to specific occasions (conferences, conventions, common activities). Such groups include seniors, who are increasingly organising themselves in associations, clubs or universities of the third age.

Creating a proper questionnaire remains a very important issue when it comes to the questionnaire survey. As Koniarek (1983) states, in order to create a proper questionnaire, one needs to properly formulate closed-end questions. This involves: unequivocal determination of the set of alternative answers which do not raise doubts; clear determination of the type of the expected selection of responses; clear definition of the degree of completeness, and hence the determination of the part (number) of true alternatives a respondent should provide; determination that at least one of the alternatives provided should be real.

What constitutes a crucial methodological element in the case of seniors is the proper technical edition of a questionnaire. There should not be too many questions and the way they are formulated ought to be clear for the participants of the research. One should bear in mind the fact that some of the respondents might have eyesight problems, and therefore a suitable font size should be used. What is also important is providing good lightning and limiting noise sources. The presence of a poll-

ster during the survey makes it possible to control the above-mentioned conditions.

The question of the method of selecting respondents and obtaining their consent to participate in a survey is another issue to be considered. Owing to the fact that there have been many difficulties reported in making contact with the elderly (unwillingness to take part in a survey, distrust, frequent refusals), it is very hard to obtain a representative sample. As Steczkowski (1995) underlines, “the general collectivity is an aggregation of units from which a sample is acquired”. Moreover, he points out that, in the case of research on some social groups, one has to deal with the situation of dynamic changes. Obviously, it also concerns the elderly whose population is rising dramatically. It is, thus, very difficult to define general collectivity, which is another reason of the difficulties in obtaining the representative sample out of the population of seniors.

5. Conclusions

The research on senior tourism activity is characterised by various research approaches resulting from the accepted methodological paradigms. On the one hand, it uses the data deriving from large surveys carried out by means of a representative method and attempting to examine this phenomenon in terms of quantity. On the other hand, detailed in-depth studies recognising the importance of quality are applied. Most authors emphasise serious difficulties in conducting research among seniors by means of the representative method applying the questionnaire techniques (CATI, PAPI, CAWI) that aim at measuring the phenomenon. The difficulties are due to the nature of the respondents who belong to this particular social group and frequently refuse to participate in the study (distrust, fear, health limitations).

From another point of view, a survey conducted by means of the techniques of nonprobability sampling does not guarantee the representativeness of the results on small samples, though it allows to get a deeper explanation of the analysed problems. The qualitative research methods applying observation, experiment or direct communication techniques

allow for in-depth analysis of seniors’ tourism behaviours but they also entail the problems of interpretation, comparability and generalisation of the results. The problems result from applying different paradigms used in qualitative research.

It is widely accepted that tourism activity is a very complex phenomenon and, with regard to the research on seniors’ tourism behaviours, additional methodological and technical difficulties occur. Therefore, the author agrees that it is necessary to consider the views of some researchers who suggest that, although there is no possibility of direct comparison of the results obtained through quantitative and qualitative methods, attempts to use a variety of research techniques allowing for better knowledge about seniors’ tourism activity need to be undertaken.

Having considered all the above-mentioned conditions of applying social research methods to analyse senior tourism activity, one may state that this social group requires using both the quantitative and qualitative approach and applying various research methods. It is the only way to obtain a coherent picture of the reality representing tourist behaviours of contemporary seniors.

This issue has recently been of a particular importance in Poland which, having accessed the European Union, is dealing with the social problems of ageing population in a manner that is similar to the economically more developed countries. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, however, display some differences resulting from recent historical factors (the geopolitical situation after World War II and the socio-economic transformation after 1989), as well as from the general level of economic development.

The research on the tourism activity of seniors has so far either applied the survey methods or used the data from secondary sources. Unfortunately, some researchers have presented insufficient methodological assumptions and incomplete information on the test procedure which prevents a critical evaluation of the results and their generalisation. Bearing all the aspects in mind, one might conclude that the state of knowledge about the tourism activity of contemporary seniors in Poland is not sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake a broader study on the phenomenon which, in the view of the author, should take the following postulates into consideration:

It is recommended to use both quantitative and qualitative methods that, in relation to the collectivity of seniors, have so far given the best results in other countries. Given the difficulties in precisely defining the general collectivity, it is possible to apply nonprobability sampling techniques on the basis of the accepted theory, including a detailed description of the test procedure.

It is particularly important to create standardised conditions for all applied research methods, considering their validity and reliability, in order to enable the subsequent comparison and generalisation of results.

Due to the increasing number of senior citizens organisations in Poland (the university of the third age, senior clubs, associations) and the specific characteristics of seniors as survey respondents, it is worth to take advantage of the existence of such organisations and to consider the use of auditory questionnaire when studying tourism activity.

Due to the increasing use of the focused group interviews in the market research on tourism, this method should be recommended for in-depth analysis of tourism behaviour of seniors.

Since particularly interesting results in the study of seniors were obtained through the qualitative methods using in-depth interviews and the analysis of biography as well as written non-standardised statements, these types of qualitative research should be spread.

Despite the technical difficulties and the considerable cost of the study conducted through observation and experiment, it could provide valuable results, especially because of the fact that it has not yet been used in relation to the phenomenon of senior tourism behaviours in Poland.

In view of the introductory remarks of the problem which we nowadays have to face in both Poland and Europe (ageing society, the increase in tourism activity level among seniors), conducting this type of research seems to be an urgent necessity.

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