

PARTICIPATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN TOURISM ON THE EXAMPLE OF STUDENT COMMUNITY OF UNIVERSITY OF RZESZÓW

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Key words:

- disability,
- tourism,
- obstacles.

Abstract:

The aim of this article was to present the way in which a disabled person takes part in tourism, establishing the meaning and influence of various obstacles present in travelling of the handicapped people. The studies aimed to describe the current offer of the tourist offices for people with selected type of disability.

INTRODUCTION

Among many different forms of leisure activities, most of people decide to travel. It is the easiest way not only to broaden the mind, but also it gives the opportunity to meet different cultures, people, to get to know other traditions. It is also a good chance to improve one's health, physical and psychical. Tourism is a specific device used in rehabilitation process, its enormous impact on health conditions is visible and appreciable. It is crucial to outline the great role of touristic activities. One of the basic conditions for the active inclusion of people with disabilities in tourism is its total availability [2].

Speaking about travelling, it is necessary to take into consideration not only able bodied people but mostly humans with disabilities. The active participation of persons with disabilities in tourism is limited by the existence of barriers [2]. This article tries to understand touring as a means to raise the standard of living of handicapped people .

The disability concept is not always clearly understood. The meaning of it combines the significance of the state described as a functional obstruction or hindrance in everyday life activity, caused by damage or injury of psychophysical performance. Due to such a wide range of explored names, three specific terms are used:

- impairment – loss or disorder of anatomical or physiological possibilities/capacity of human body, its structures;
- disability – a condition which is a consequence of an existing disorder, characterized by physical limitation of possibility of taking action in all human activities;
- handicap – unsuccessful and unfortunate circumstance which resulted as a consequence of injury or disability; it is based on being unable to realize the main vital roles deemed to be natural for people at particular age, gender, within certain social and cultural conditions [1].

While reading these definitions many similarities and differences were noted; they all were taken into account in explaining the concept of 'disability'. The evidence was found that this concept can be defined in different ways, depending on aspect, situation, or even the circumstances to which it refers.

METHODOLOGY

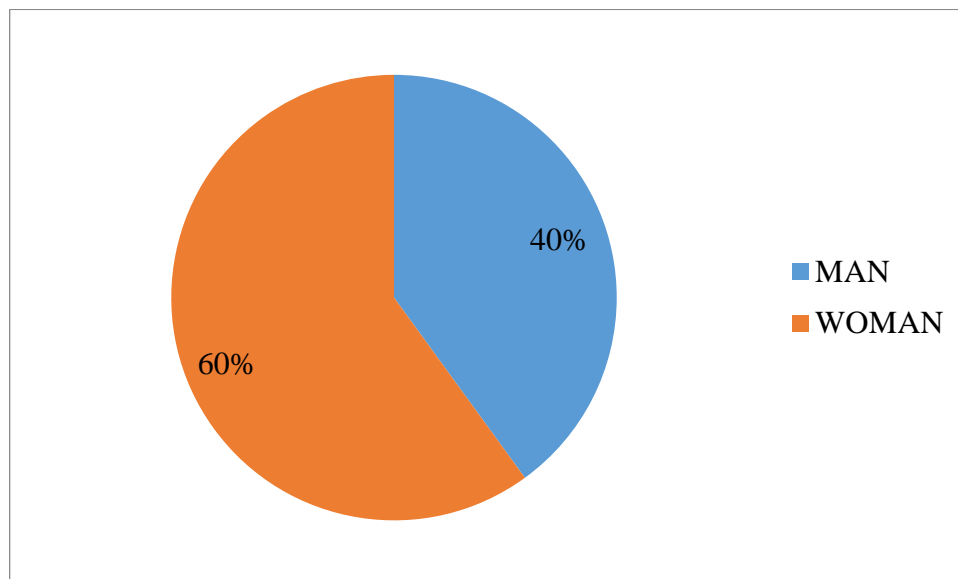
To illustrate the phenomenon of disabled people travelling, social scientific research was conducted. The main aim of this study is to determine the relevance and impact of existing barriers to participation of people with disabilities in tourism activities. The specific objectives are: examination of society's attitude towards people with disabilities; analysis of the most troublesome barriers; the role of tour operators and their help in travelling of the handicapped; determination/examination of degree of interest of people with disabilities in tourist-integration events; assessment of participation of people with disabilities in various forms of adventure tourism; determining what in opinion of disabled people may be offered as the most needed form of support from the tourism organisers. The subject of the study is the student community of Rzeszow University. Taken into consideration were the opinions of disabled community of students and graduates of the above mentioned university.

The hypothesis of this article is that Polish society discriminates against people with disabilities. The second hypothesis assumes that the existing numerous barriers for travellers with disabilities have a significant and negative impact on their willingness to participate in various forms of tourism.

A diagnostic survey was used as a testing method. The results of the survey will be analyzed in the next section. A questionnaire was used as a research technique.

The survey was conducted in January 2014 and applied to a disabled student community of Rzeszow University. The study covered in total 40 people. The questionnaire was filled in by 16 men and 24 women in three age groups: 18-20, 23-26, over 27 years old.

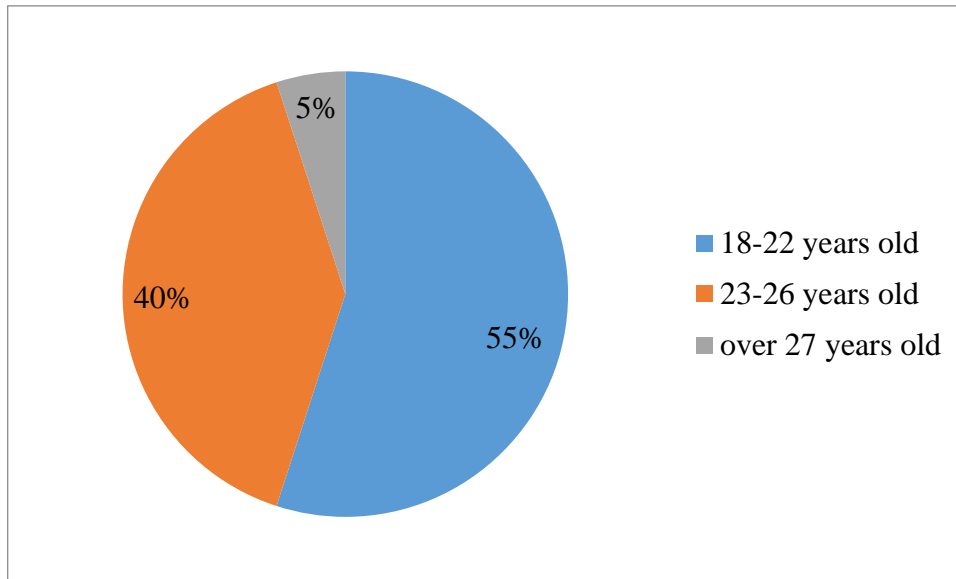
RESEARCH ANALYSIS



Graph 1. Structure of respondents by gender.

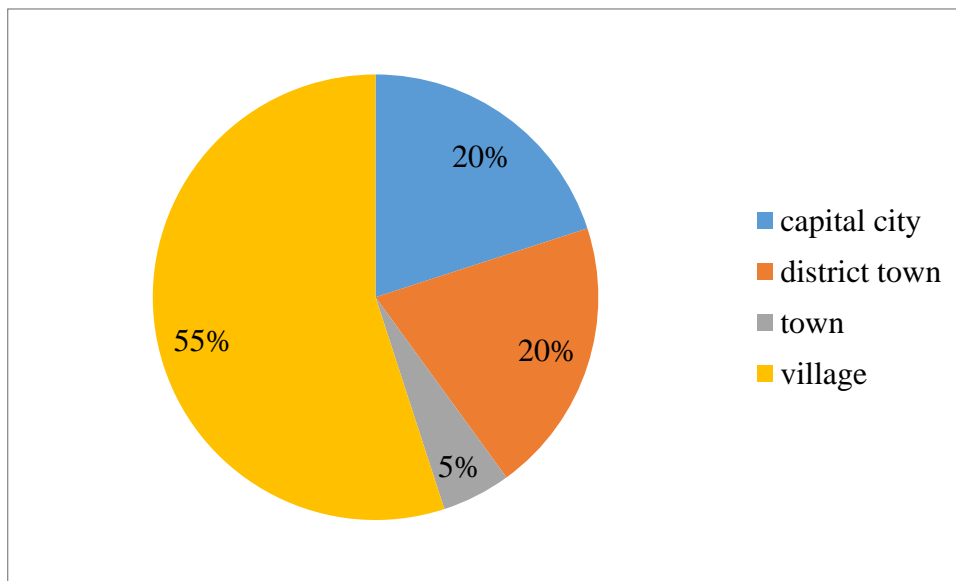
Source: Own

Graph 1 shows the group of respondents, the majority were women, who accounted for 60%, to a less extent, because only 40% of the respondents were men.



Graph 2. Structure of respondents by age.
Source: Own

Graph 2 illustrates the structure of respondents by age. The largest group of respondents, which accounted for 55%, ranged from 18-22 years, followed by the group of people aged, 23-26 who accounted for 40%, the smallest group was 27 years old and more, and accounted for only 5%.

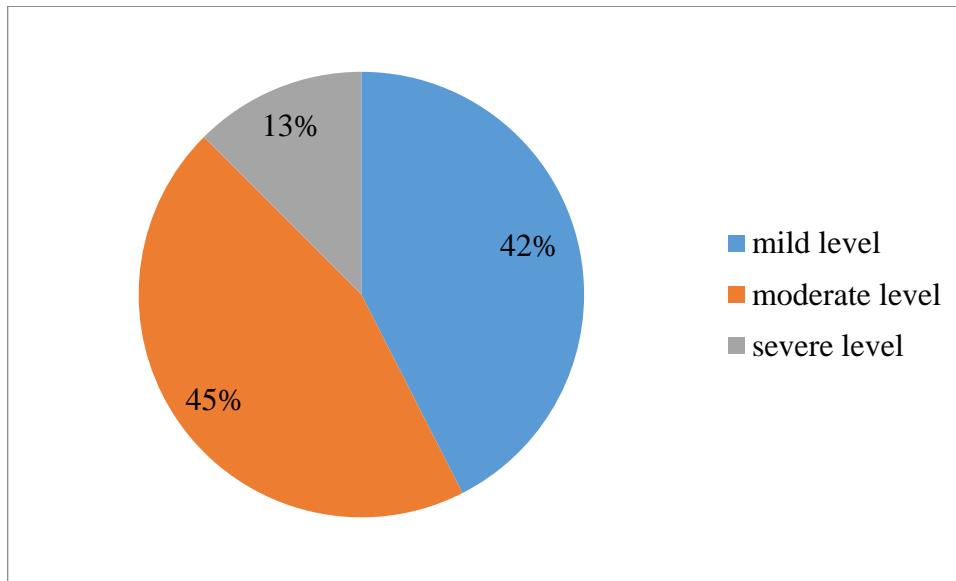


Graph 3. Place of residence of the respondents.
Source: Own

Graph 3 includes the structure of the respondents according to their place of residence. The largest number of disabled students attending Rzeszow University inhabit villages, they constitute as much as 55%. 20% of respondents live in capital city and district towns. The smallest group, only 5% of respondents have their houses/apartments in towns.

In this study it was decided to obtain knowledge about the characteristics of the respondents disability. The collected data showed that the largest group of respondents has a mild level of disability (45%). Much fewer, 42% form a group with a moderate level. The

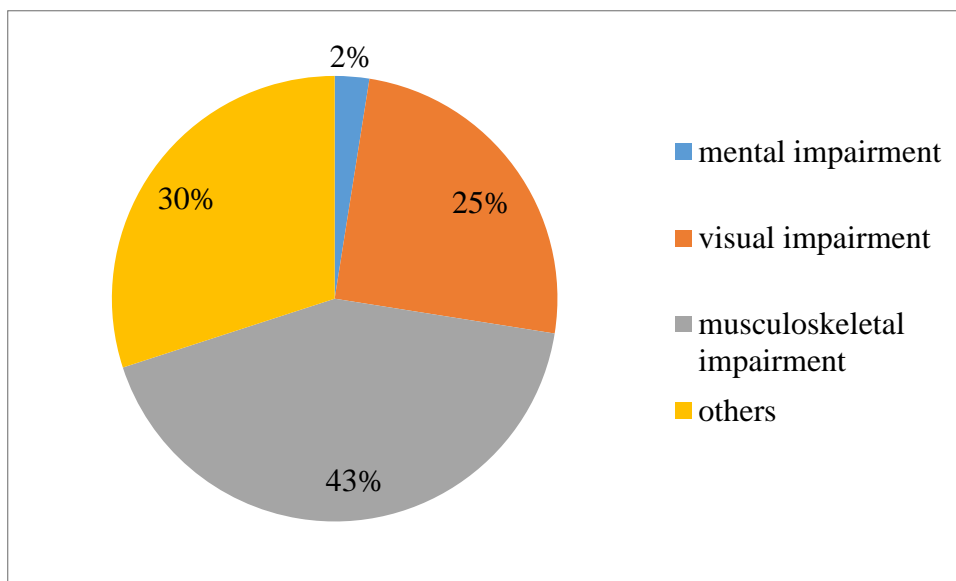
smallest group has a severe level of disability and it represents 13% of all respondents. This phenomenon is presented on graph 4.



Graph 4. The degree of disability of patients.

Source: Own

The next two questions concerned the type of disability of respondents. The first concerned the nature of the disability associated with the disease causing impairment.



Graph 5. Type of disability according to impairment.

Source: Own

As it is shown at the graph above, the largest part of the respondents have a disability associated with musculoskeletal impairments, they constitute as much as 43%. Respondents having other diseases such as asthma, epilepsy, kidney disease, gastrointestinal or circulatory system disease account for 30%. Another quite large type of disability are eye diseases, which account for 25%. The smallest percentage of the surveyed, only 2% are people with mental impairment.

The next question was to investigate the nature of the disability, taking into account the circumstances of its acquisition.

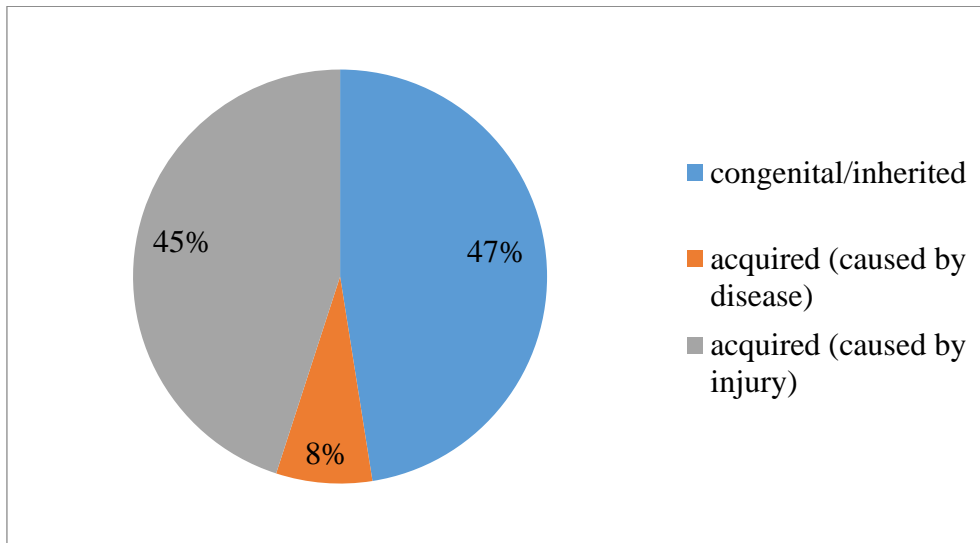


Chart 6. Type of disability according to the circumstances of the acquisition.

Source: Own

As it can be seen above, the biggest part of the academic community are people with congenital disability (47%), disability acquired as a result of past disease (45%). Only 8% of respondents are a group of students whose disability was caused by an injury.

The study aimed to examine how non-disabled society treats disabled people, with various impairments. The question "How do you think Polish society treats the handicapped?" More than a half of the respondents (52%) answered - well. The results show a contrast, however, because 40% of respondents to the same question answered - not well. An opinion that disabled people are treated badly by society is held by 8% of respondents. None of the respondents give a response that disabled people are treated very well or very badly. Chart 7 shows the results.

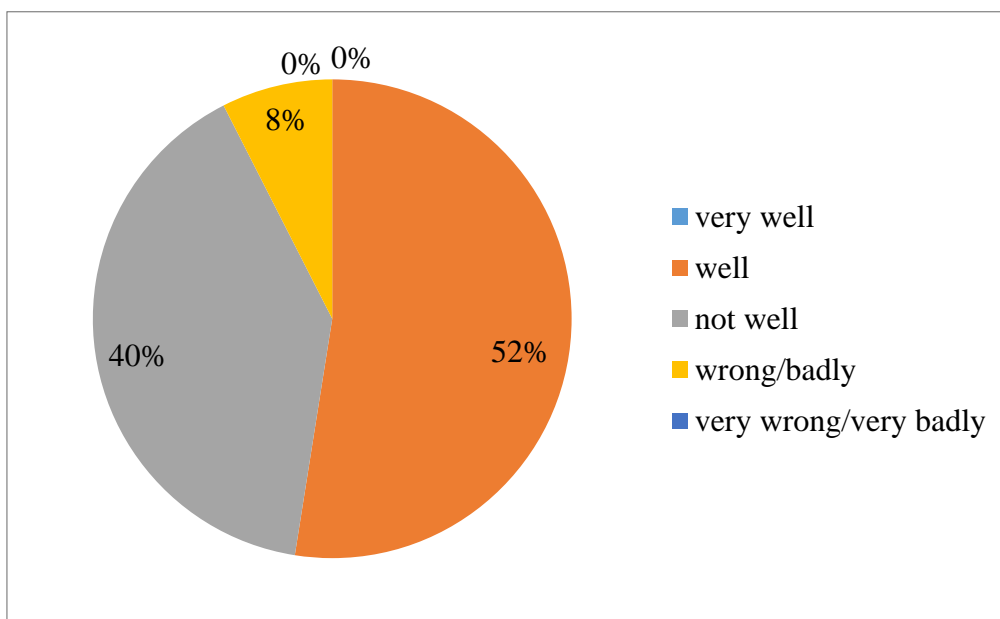


Chart 7. The chart showing how Polish society treats handicapped.

Source: Own

Further questions concerned specific manifestations of mistreatment of people with disabilities participating in tourism activities. Asked the question ‘Have you ever noticed expressions of mistreatment of disabled people from fellow travellers?’ 75% of respondents answered - no. Much fewer, because only 25% responded in the affirmative (Chart 8). Among the examples given, as inappropriate treatment the interviewed named: jokes, insulting comments, nosy questions, intolerance, lack of support, ignorance, etc.

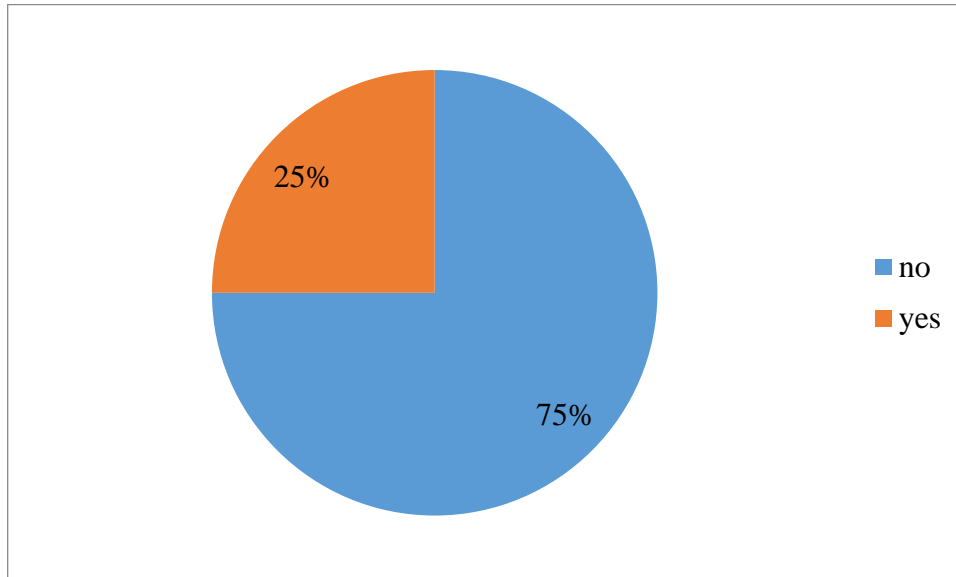


Chart 8. The ratio of non-disabled fellow travellers to people with disabilities.

Source: Own

Chart 9 shows the opinion of respondents about the attitude of personnel (group leader, tour leader, tour guide) to disabled participants of travel. The question was, ‘Have you ever noticed manifestations of mistreatment of disabled people from the staff?’

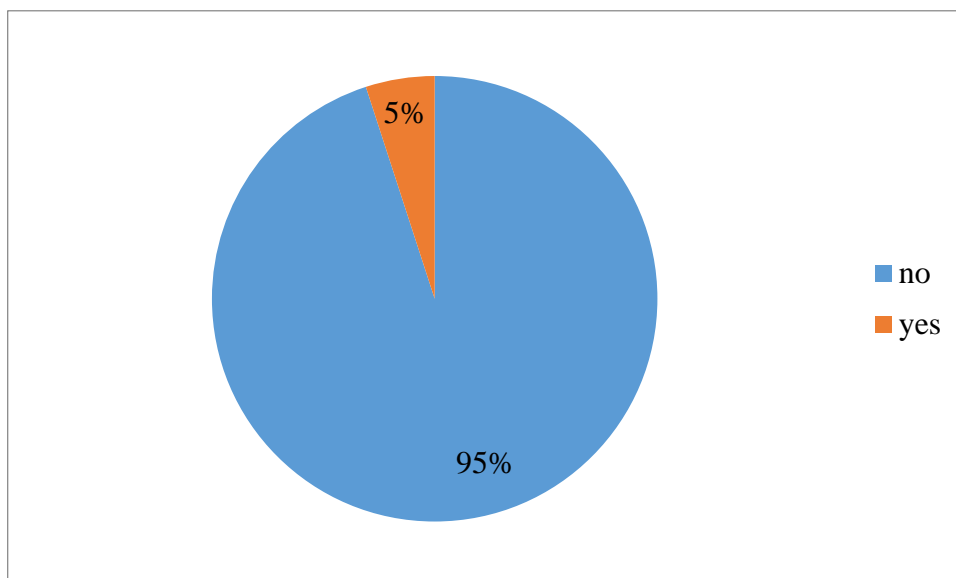


Chart 9. Attitude on the part of staff members (supervisor, tour guide) towards people with disabilities.

Source: Own

As you can see in the graph above, only a few reported cases of mistreatment of disabled people on the part of staff who travel (5%). Almost all respondents (95%) believe that they are properly treated by staff members involved in any trips or tours.

The same results were obtained asking the question, 'Have you ever noticed manifestations of mistreatment of people with disabilities on the part of employees working at touristic buildings intended for sightseeing (museums, galleries)?'

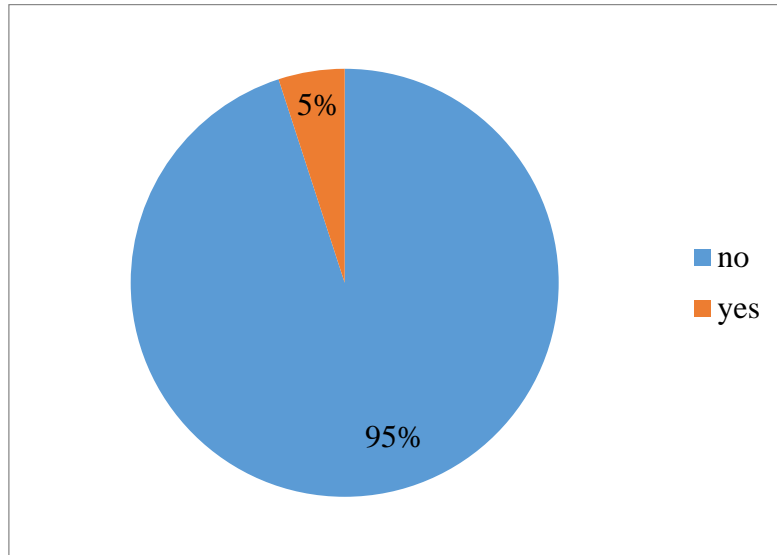


Chart 10. Attitude towards people with disabilities on the part of people working in tourist facilities.

Source: Own

Only 5% of respondents answered in the affirmative. The others (95%) claim that they are properly treated by the staff members of these touristic facilities.

The most crucial aim of this research was to obtain knowledge about the travel opportunities of disabled people. To do so it was essential to answer the questions: what are the possibilities of disabled people having the desire to travel and what is their interest in trips, tours, events organized by travel agencies.

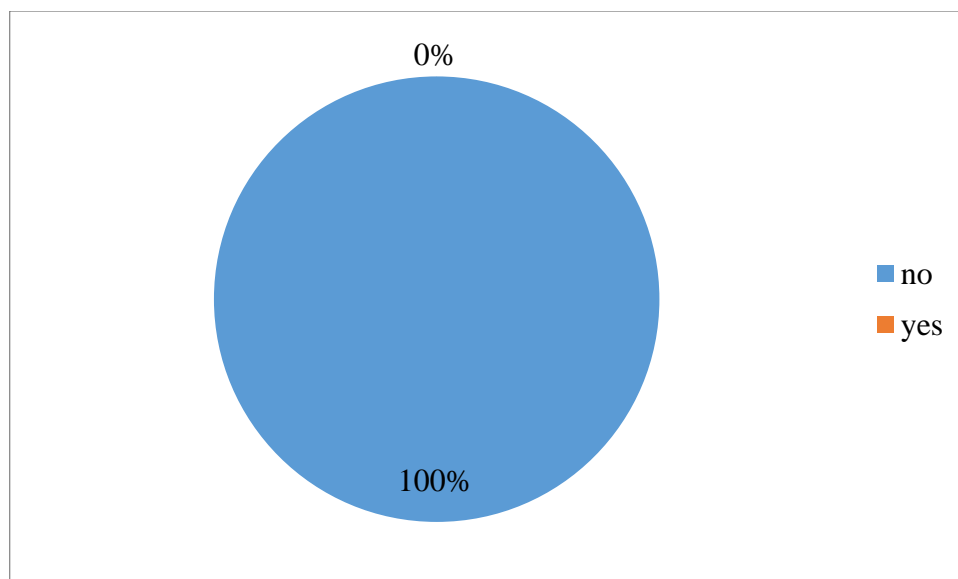


Chart 11. Familiarity of travel agencies with offers for people with disabilities.

Source: Own

The results are surprising - 100% of respondents replied that they were not familiar with any offers of travel agencies for people with disabilities.

To the question "Would you be interested in organizing team building events for people with disabilities, (as well as non-disabled)?" 22% of respondents replied - no. However, as much as 78% replied in the affirmative, among the forms they propose there are: camps, trips, tours, meetings, conventions, concerts, trainings raising public awareness about the needs of the disabled, etc.

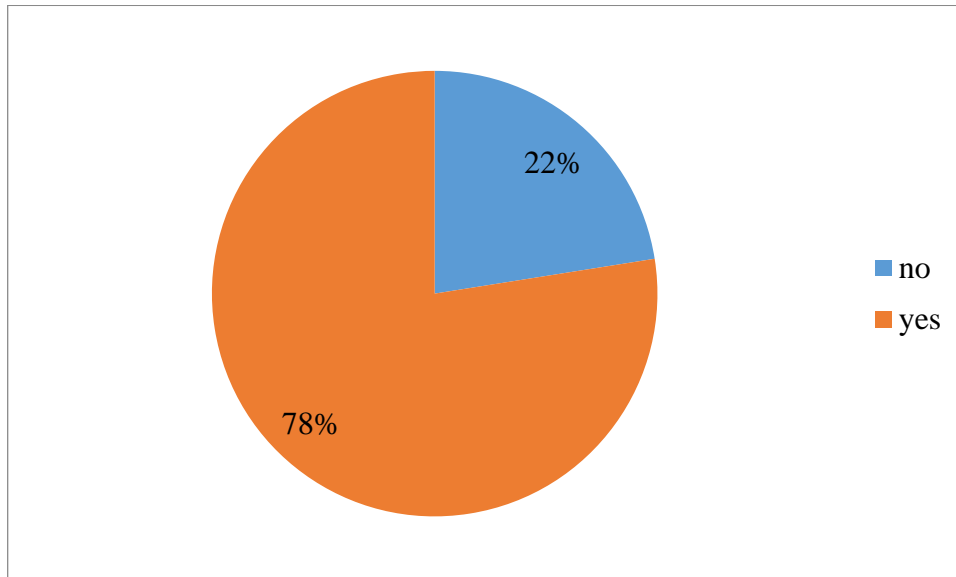


Chart 12. Interest in the organization of tourist events designed for the disabled.

Source: Own

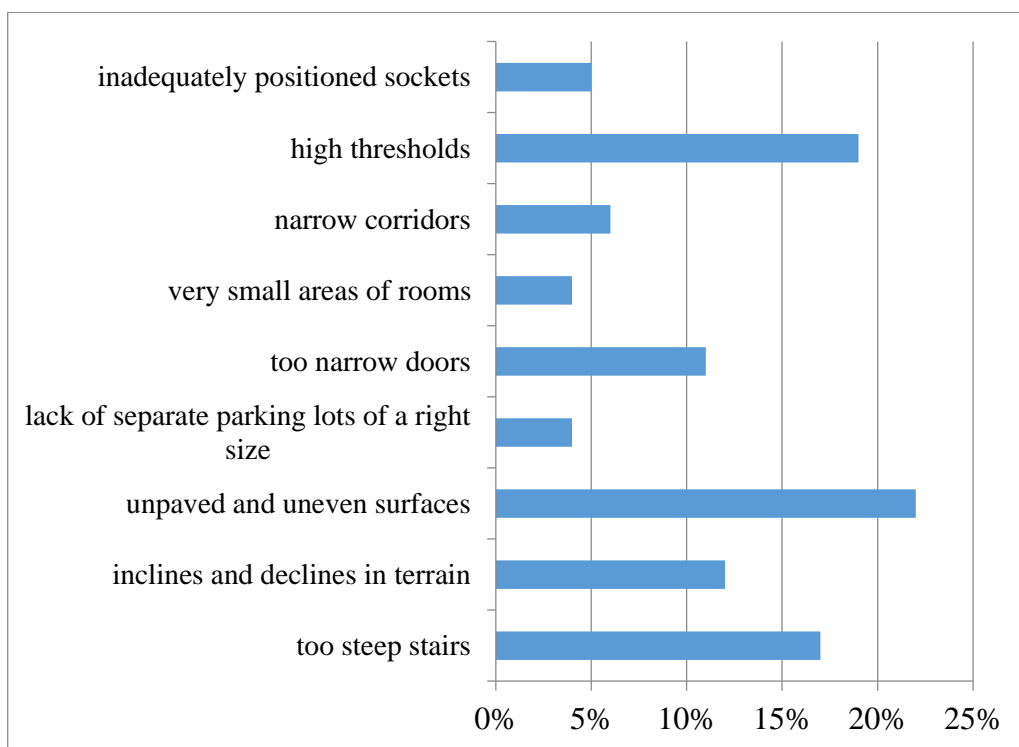


Chart 13. Difficulties for the disabled, travelling/ taking an active part in tourism.

Source: Own

Ubiquitously existing barriers play a huge role on tourism of disabled people.. Studies show which from various social, architectural and communicational barriers in the opinion of respondents have the greatest impact on willingness to participate in proposed forms of touristic activities.

In the survey mainly the communicational barriers were taken into account. Previously prepared list of possible answers were shown to the respondents specifying: too steep stairs, inclines and declines in terrain, unpaved and uneven surfaces, lack of separate parking lots of a right size, too narrow doors, very small areas of rooms, narrow corridors, high thresholds, inadequately positioned sockets, switches, door handles. The following graph represents this phenomenon.

Analysis of the results showed that the most important communicational barriers which must be overcome by disabled people are: unpaved and uneven rough surfaces (22%), high thresholds (19%) and too steep stairs (17%). Less significant obstacles proved to be: inadequately positioned sockets, lack of separate parking lots as well as small areas of rooms.

The questionnaire also included a question about the possibility of participation of disabled people in various forms of active tourism. Majority of respondents (70%) does not see obstacles to full participation in tourism such as cycling, skiing, sailing, etc. The group of respondents (30%) assume that their disability is a barrier to full participation in tourism. The data are presented in the graph 14.

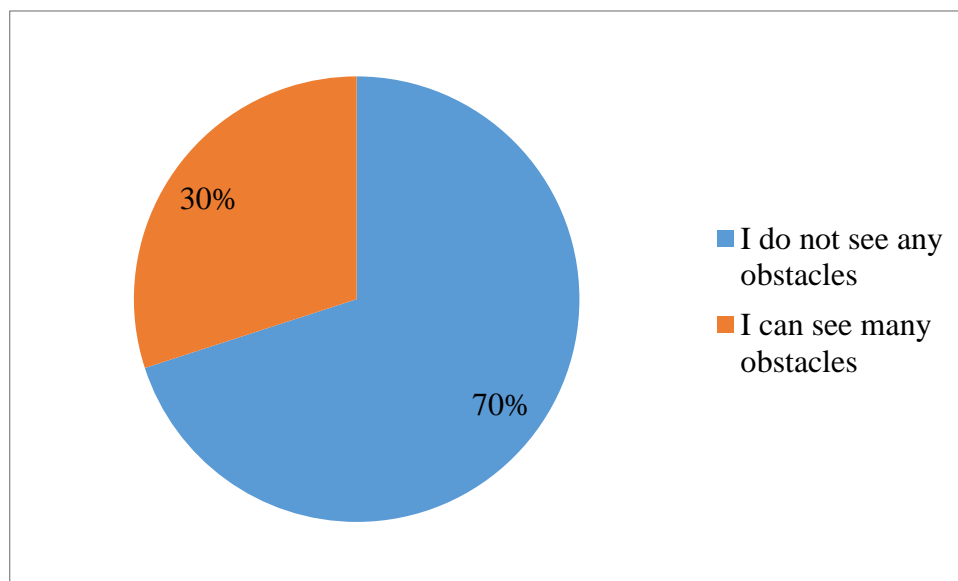


Chart 14. Assessment of the possibility for disabled people of active participation in various forms of tourism.

Source: Own

The next question concerns social and architectural barriers preventing a disabled person from participating in tours, trips and other forms of tourism.

The focus of this research has also been obstacles that do not allow people with disabilities to fully participate in tourism. The most important factor was a poor offer of tour agencies suitable for disabled travellers, what was indicated by 32% of respondents. The respondents (18%) stated that the lack of proper adaptation of surfaces at: the airports, railway stations, etc. is also of great importance. A small percentage of people with disabilities considered other obstacles – including large requirement of stamina (2%) as a

barrier not allowing them to take part in touristic activities. There was not even one person for whom the lack of appropriately marked trails has an impact on participation in tourism.

Table 1. The obstacles to the full participation of disabled people in tourism

No.	Barriers:	Answers of the respondents:
1.	Insufficient number of rooms in hotels located on the ground floor	10%
2.	Lack of appropriately marked trails	0%
3.	Limited amount of seats intended for disabled e.g. at airplanes	12%
4.	Lack of proper adaptation of surfaces e.g. at the airports	18%
5.	Lack of tolerance from the fellow travellers	12%
6.	Inadequately trained staff: caregivers, tour guides etc.	14%
7.	Poor offer of tour agencies for disabled travellers	32%
8.	Other	2%

Source: Own

The last question in the survey related to , forms of support from travel agencies (tourism event organizers) anticipated by disabled people. Among many proposals, the most common examples were: detailed plan of trips, recruitment of additional people serving during the trip, proper adaptation of the required effort to the physical condition of the disabled, qualified staff, adaptation of means of transport and place of residence, providing relevant information about the event, the opportunity to take part in rehabilitation exercise in areas of tourism, etc. In the group of responders were also those who stated that they are properly treated and do not expect greater support from tour operators.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is one of the most enjoyable form of leisure activity. A wide range of possibilities coming from practice of tourism allows experiencing unforgettable moments. However, amusement is not the most important factor of this phenomenon. Tourism has a particularly beneficial effect on human health, as a form used in rehabilitation process. Essential part of it is the availability of various forms of tourism to all members of society, especially disabled people. Tourism has such a great amount of forms that every person with a disability can choose available one for each field of activity [1].

Over the years, disability was divided and categorized in many various aspects. Specific disabilities and disorders were grouped allowing for a deeper understanding of the anomalies of the human body. These categorizations helped to create different measures which may be useful in daily life of a person affected by a particular 'disease'. Thanks to those actions it is also possible to organize and properly adapt forms of tourism events for people with disabilities. Looking back in time, it can be seen as individual units, and later also specific group of tour operators, tried to help people with disabilities allowing them to travel freely and safely. With time, arose the concept of tourism for the blind and visually impaired people, tourism for people with musculoskeletal injuries, etc. Focusing on group of people with precise impairments, it is relatively easy to help them to enjoy their time participating in so popular nowadays tourism activities. The phenomenon of travelling of disabled people is not so easy to explore. Lack of adequate cooperation from the interdependent entities, inability to stay organized and so often found deficiencies in acquired qualifications, impede the tourism for the handicapped. All the obstacles which an impaired person has to face are called barriers and they reduce interest in tourism. Despite that, people with disabilities do not feel badly treated, or they do not significantly emphasize the existing barriers. To prove

the truth of this statement anonymous surveys among a group of disabled people from student community of Rzeszow University were conducted.

The study showed that Polish society treats individuals of a 'poor health' with due respect, what does not confirm chosen hypothesis. Non-disabled people involved in tourism are mostly open to relations and integration with the handicapped. Existing barriers do not hinder extensively the travelling of the disabled. Awareness of able-bodied tourists positively increases in terms of the needs and limitations of people with disabilities. A completely different situation is on the tourist market. Tourist events organizers do not show great initiative to encourage people with disabilities to travel. The offer of travel agencies is still very low in specialized and properly adapted trips, reunions, holidays or travels. There are not enough guides, folders, Web pages, which continually updated could present areas, objects, monuments, etc. adapted to the particular disability [1]. The data show that interest in tourism of a described social group is very large, and these people do not notice any major barriers to full participation in tourism. In their view, however, definite actions should be taken to improve the travel system.

Considering the above and the whole process summarizing analysis of the research contained in this article, it needs to be stated that the hypotheses posed here are not confirmed. They stated that the Polish society discriminates against people with disabilities, and the existing numerous barriers for disabled travelers have a significant and negative impact on their willingness to participate in various forms of tourism. Despite the existence of many difficulties, Polish community is tolerant and various obstacles do not significantly affect the desire and interest of the disabled in touristic activities. Many questions relating to tourism of disabled people remain unanswered. Undoubtedly, some progress is visible considering Polish society and its attitude to the phenomenon of disability. Unfortunately, many negative and harmful stereotypes still exist; which hinder people with disabilities from travelling. That is why it is so important to continue opposing all existing barriers.

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