

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN THE REGION OF BIESZCZADY

Patrycja ŻEGLĘŃ

Faculty of Physical Education, University of Rzeszow, Rzeszow, Poland

Keywords:

- ecotourism,
- tourists,
- Bieszczady.

Abstract:

The aim of the study is to evaluate the awareness of prospective tourists in the scope of ecotourism and to evaluate the opportunities for the development of tourism in the region of Bieszczady. The study shows research conducted among tourists from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship and owners of ecotourism farms in Bieszczady. The aim of the research was to evaluate the level of ecological awareness and environmental sensitivity among tourists and to examine the familiarity with the term 'ecotourism' and its most important characteristics. The second aim was to determine the most important ways of promoting ecotourism and the main limitations for its growth. According to the research, it may be stated that the potential for the development of ecotourism in the region of Bieszczady is not fully utilised.

INTRODUCTION

In relation to the observable negative changes in the natural environment of man and the resultant threats, it is possible to notice changes in the lifestyle, attitudes and mindset of tourists. Conscious tourists more and more often want to travel and relax in clean, uncluttered and environmentally attractive destinations. The demand for tourism in protected areas is growing and, as a result, so is the demand for ecotourism, which is the most eco-friendly and fastest developing form of travelling. Therefore, the development of ecotourism can positively contribute to improving the environment, raising the tourists' ecological awareness and decreasing the popularity of mass tourism.

The aim of the study is to evaluate the awareness of prospective tourists in the scope of ecotourism and to evaluate the opportunities for the development of tourism in the region of Bieszczady. All over the world, there has been a marked tendency toward eco-friendly tourism; however, the aim of this study is to examine whether tourists in Poland, more specifically in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, have awareness in the scope of ecotourism and whether the region of Bieszczady itself has prospects for the development of ecotourism.

TOURISM AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Undoubtedly, tourism is currently one of the most important factors of economic growth, which is caused by e.g. the higher and higher level of life and the bigger and bigger amount of free time in the macro scale. The primary consequence of these phenomena is the large scale of the tourist traffic, which is also the main tendency in the development of tourism. The number of people who travel grows year by year. The popularity and large scale of tourism makes it a social phenomenon. Mass tourism has an immense influence on the natural environment and, what follows, on many aspects of human life. The impact of tourism on the natural environment is twofold. On the one hand, the intake of a huge number of tourists leads to the improvement or deterioration of the quality of the natural environment.

On the other hand, the quality of the offered touristic products is closely linked to the quality i.e. the state of the natural environment [Krauz, Mroczka 2001:129]. One of the most serious threats posed by tourism are: overcrowding and pollution, landscape deformation, destruction of environmental assets, which may lead to the loss of ecological balance, overproduction of waste, noise, overexploitation of the historic sites, an important element of the landscape. The most noticeable effect of tourism, influencing the natural environment, is landscape deformation. It occurs when the development of tourism depends on huge investments, in particular, when the economic benefits outweigh other criteria. This leads to irreparable destruction of biotic and aesthetic values, being an attractive tourist asset of a given region. Such changes are usually irreversible and permanent, which contributes to the deterioration of the quality of the tourist product. Another factor which endangers the environment is the excessively intensive tourist traffic, especially during seasonal tourism. It occurs when the tourist traffic exceeds the capacity of the natural environment or the infrastructure. Excessive traffic leads to the negative perception of a given destination by tourists, which is contrary to their expectations regarding its quality and character. Another threat is noise pollution, which is always accompanied by the excessive exploitation of the environment. Sources of noise may be any means of transport and the lifestyle of visitors. The ever growing intensity of tourist traffic also contributes to the increase in the volume of sewage and solid waste. Seemingly, it is not a huge problem as the infrastructure (dumping grounds, waste collectors, waste treatment plants) is properly secured, which, however, increases the expenses of the public sector. If in a tourist destination there is no infrastructure which provides waste and sewage disposal, this constitutes a major predicament that restricts the proper functioning of such a destination. The construction of proper infrastructure entails considerably higher costs of tourist investment, which is why frequently it is never implemented or its costs are shifted to the public sector, which, unfortunately, leads to the destruction of environmental assets. Last but not least, another major problem is the pollution of areas such as mountain routes or forests, which are not easily accessible but frequently used by tourists. In order to decrease this type of pollution, it is necessary to properly manage the availability of such areas [Krauz, Mroczka 2001: 130].

The development of tourist traffic can also bring positive changes for the environment e.g. the motivation for the maintenance of natural environmental areas as the primary tourist asset. As a result, development which is harmful for the environment becomes thwarted. Moreover, this leads to changes in the local employment structures, increasing the number of employees in pro-ecological occupations (ecological farming, tourist guides, sports equipment rental, local craftsmanship, organisation of local events). Therefore, financial means obtained from tourism should be to a large extent dedicated to the preservation of the assets of the natural environment [Krauz, Mroczka 2001: 131].

To conclude, tourism has an enormous influence on the natural environment of man. First and foremost, it depends on people whether they will manage tourism properly or travel in a way which will not excessively interfere in the natural environment of the visited location.

ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND TOURISM

In the 21st century, many changes in people's lifestyles can be noticed. People are overworked and detached from nature, however much they would more and more frequently like to return to it. Many people take care of the natural resources in order to preserve them for future generations but also need peace and quiet to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and to commune with nature. A new philosophy of life has emerged, one which is favourable towards nature and human values. Here man is the guardian of the Earth, responsible for life on it. It is not the number of produced and consumed goods that defines

well-being and happiness but the quality of life. It is the close contact with nature and the admiration of its beauty that allows people to find themselves. A responsible and environmentally-conscious man is actively involved in the protection of the natural environment and human values. The condition of human life has paradoxically deteriorated due to technological advancement, the detachment from nature and the consumerist lifestyle. What is more, economic growth does not bring evenly distributed benefits for everyone: only 10-15% of the population from the richest countries in the world have become wealthier [Zaręba 2010: 31]. Rich countries live at the cost of the population of poor countries. In addition, economic growth does not necessarily mean a high quality of life, quite the contrary. Nowadays humankind has entered a new stage of development where ecological awareness has become increasingly important [Zaręba 2010: 31]. Both ecological awareness and ecological education are essential for sustainable growth [Walosik 2013: 115]. The prerequisite for a fully shaped ecological awareness of an individual is ecological culture, which consists of: knowledge about the natural environment, the ability to perceive the character of natural phenomena, their interrelations, their complexity and harmony, the willingness to undertake actions for the sake of the natural environment, openness and ingenuity in the implementation of modern technologies improving ecological safety. Shaping the ecological awareness is a dynamic process, influenced by skills, knowledge and a system of values i.e. worldviews, beliefs, activities and attitudes supporting the preservation of the natural, social and cultural environment [Walosik 2013: 115].

In conclusion, ecological awareness is one of the most important elements in sustainable growth. It is not only knowledge, the understanding of the interdependence between man and nature and the realisation of the threats to nature posed by man and of the need to protect the environment but, first of all, the expression of respect and the experience of being a part of it [Zaręba 2010: 31]. A very high level of ecological awareness, culture and knowledge followed by ecological lifestyle seem to be very important since they determine the proper and efficient protection of biodiversity of the natural environment.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE CONDUCTED RESEARCH

The aim of the article is to evaluate the awareness of prospective tourist in the scope of ecotourism and to evaluate the opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the region of Bieszczady according to the owners of ecotourism farms.

The study utilises the diagnostic poll method in the form of a questionnaire. The answers were given by tourists from the Podkarpackie Voivodeship and the owners of ecotourism farms in the region of Bieszczady, especially from Polańczyk. The survey was conducted within two summer months, i.e. high season (July and August). Two questionnaires were prepared for the purpose of the research. The first questionnaire was aimed at the prospective tourists; the second - at the ecotourism farm owners. The questionnaires for tourists was entitled: 'Ecological awareness of prospective tourists' and consisted of 23 questions. The first part verified the level of ecological awareness and environmental sensitivity. The respondents gave answers regarding the degree and the subject of the concern for the state of the natural environment and the activities undertaken to protect it. The second part of the questionnaire verified whether the respondents know the term 'ecotourism' and its most prominent characteristics. The questionnaire included questions regarding travelling style, preferred forms of tourism and types of activities undertaken in the natural environment.

The second questionnaire aimed at ecotourism farm owners was entitled: 'the opportunities and barriers of ecotourism development' and determined the most important ways of promoting ecotourism and the biggest limitations of its growth. Both questionnaires consisted of single and multiple choice questions.

The first questionnaire aimed at tourists was completed by a total of 80 persons. The second questionnaire aimed at ecotourism farm owners was completed by 4 owners.

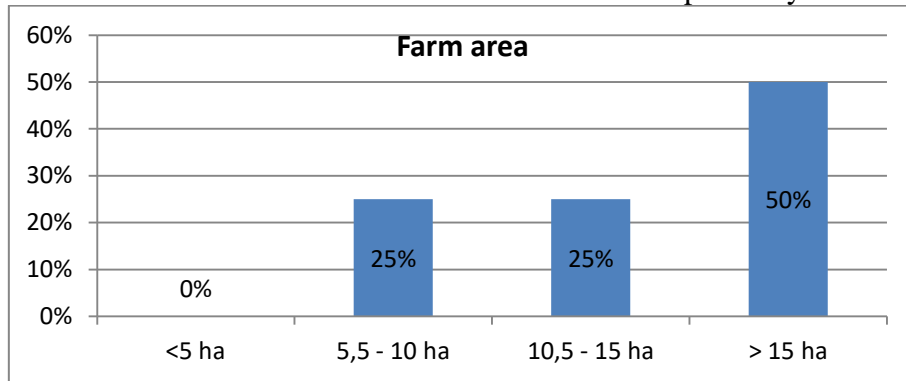


Figure 1. The structure of the respondents according to farm area
Source: own elaboration based on research

Half of the farms have an area above 50 hectares (50%). Two of the remaining farms have an area between 10,5 and 15 hectares (25%) and between 5,5 and 10 hectares.

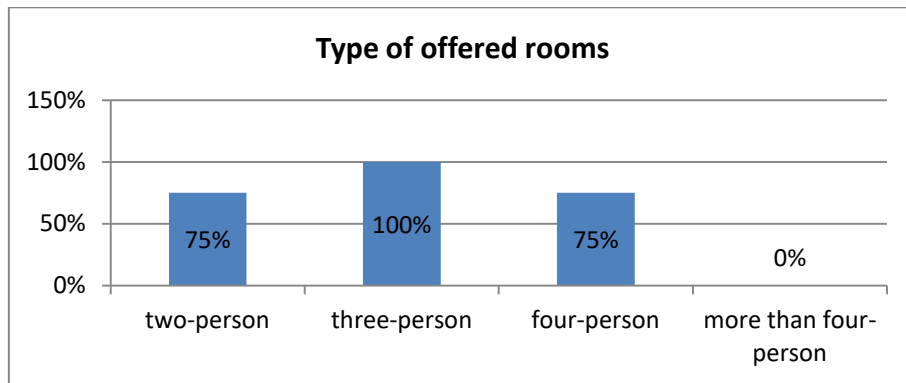


Figure 2. The structure of the respondents according to the type of offered rooms
Source: own elaboration based on research.

All farms offer three-person rooms (100%). Two-person rooms and four-person rooms are offered by three farms (75%).

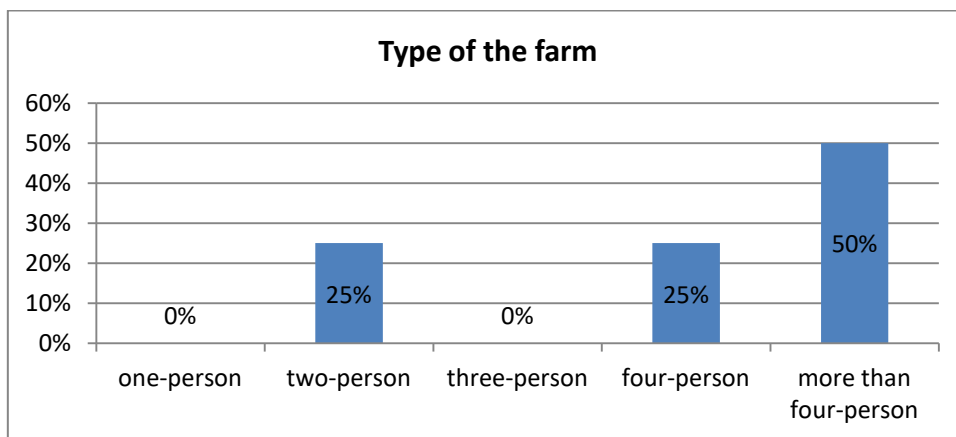


Figure 3. The structure of the respondents according to the type of the farm.
Source: own elaboration based on research.

Half of the respondents are farms of more than four persons (50%). Two-person and four-person farms both constitute 25%.

THE ANALYSIS OF OWN RESEARCH

In the questionnaire ‘Ecological awareness of prospective tourists’, the research results show that most respondents are concerned with the condition of the natural environment to a large extent (48,75 %), a slightly lower number (46,25%) are concerned only to a small extent, while 5% are not concerned with the condition of the environment at all (Fig 4).

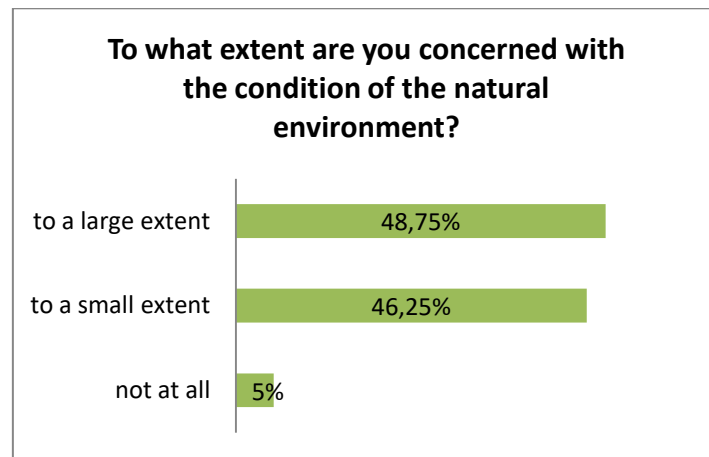


Figure 1 ‘To what extent are you concerned with the condition of the natural environment?’
Source: own elaboration based on research.

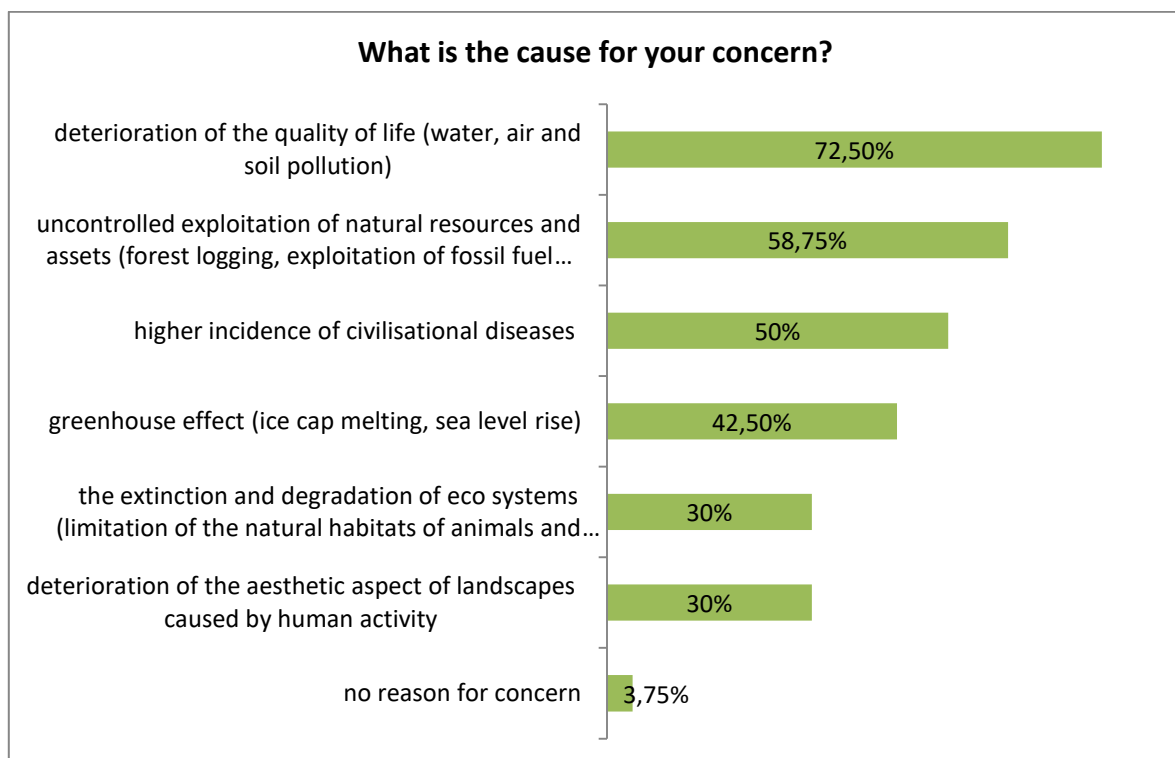


Figure 2. ‘What is the cause for your concern?’
Source: own elaboration based on research.

The biggest cause for concern is the deteriorating quality of life (water, air and soil pollution) (72,50%); uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and assets (forest logging,

exploitation of fossil fuel resources, exploitation of fishing grounds, excessive fertilisation) (58,75%); the increase in the incidence of civilisation diseases (50%). A smaller cause for concern is the greenhouse effect (icecap melting, sea level rise) (42,50%); the extinction and degradation of eco systems (limitation of the natural habitats of animals and plants) (30%) and the deterioration of the aesthetic aspect of landscapes caused by human activity (30%). Only 3,75% of the respondents have no reason for concern (Fig 5).

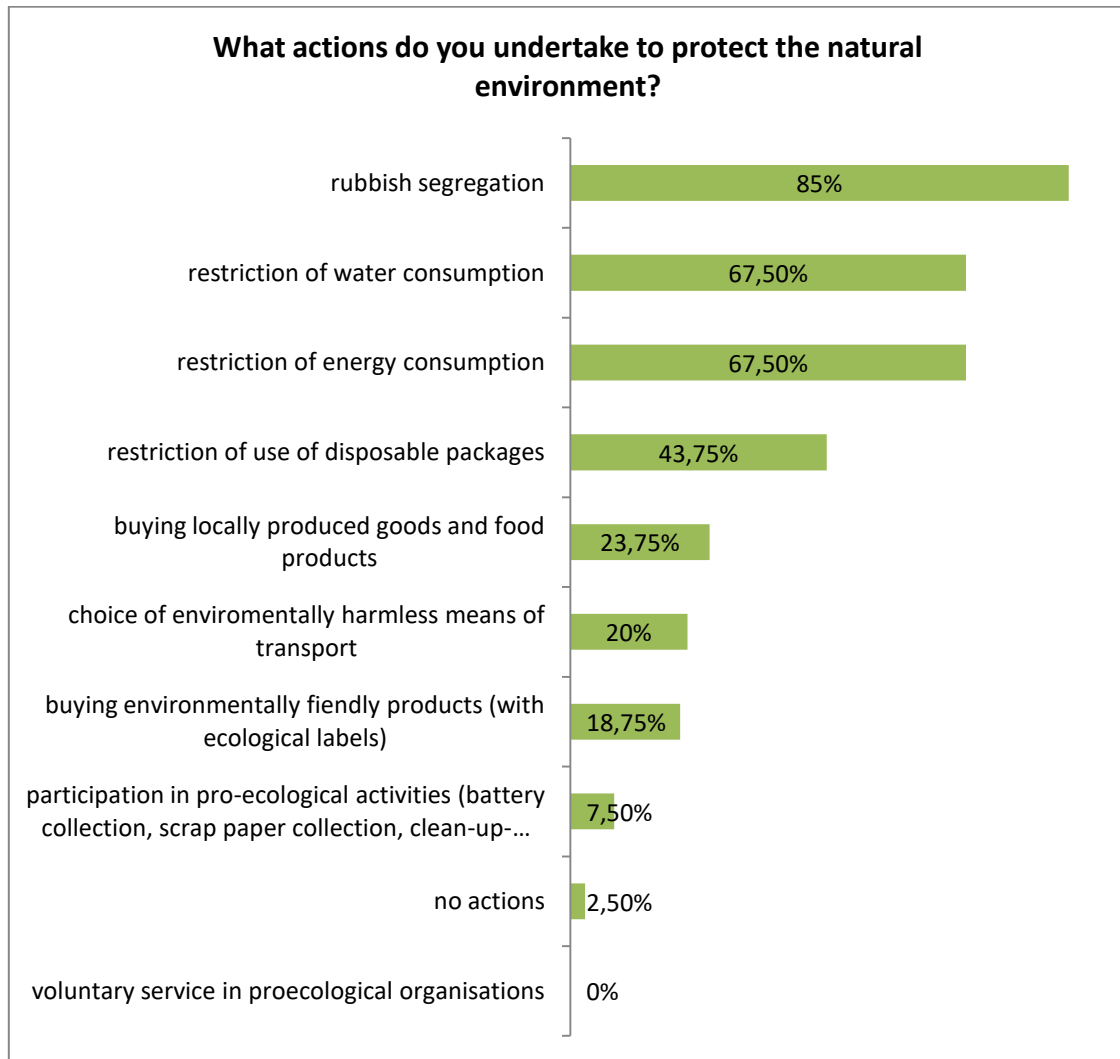


Figure 6. ‘What actions do you undertake to protect the natural environment?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

The most popular actions undertaken in order to protect the natural environment include: rubbish segregation (85%), restriction in water and energy consumption (67,5%), restriction of the use of disposable packages (43,75%). Less popular activities include: buying locally produced goods and food products (23,75%), choice of environmentally harmless means of transport (20%) and buying environmentally friendly products (with ecological labels) (18,75%). A very small number of respondents take part in pro-ecological actions (battery collection, scrap paper collection, clean-up-the-world campaigns) (7,5%), while 2,5% of the respondents do not take any action (Fig 6).

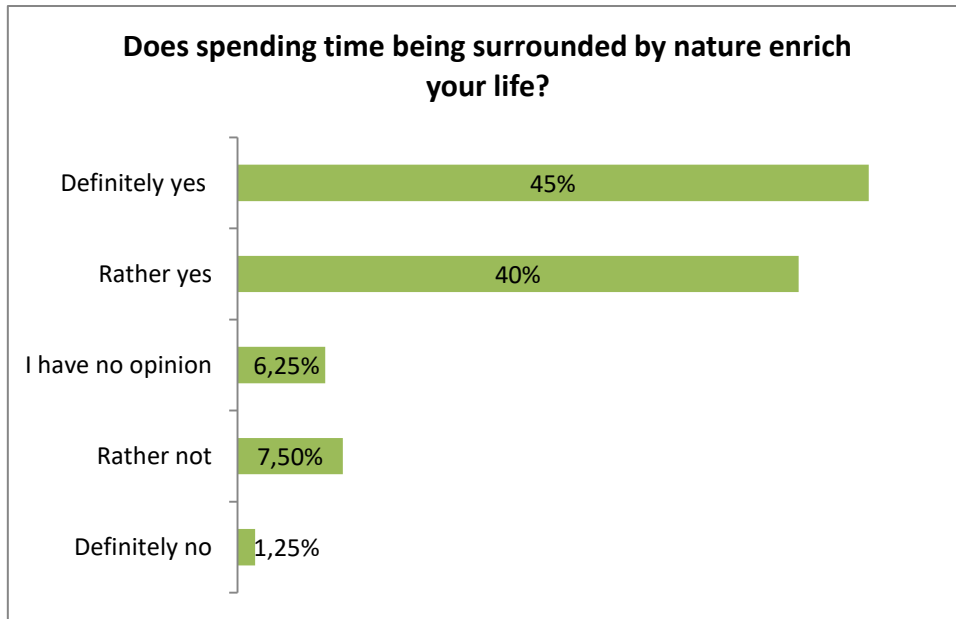


Figure 3 'Does spending time being surrounded by nature enrich your life?'
Source: own elaboration based on research.

Most respondents stated that spending time being surrounded by nature enriches their life (45% - answer 'definitely yes', 40% - answer 'rather yes') (Fig 7).

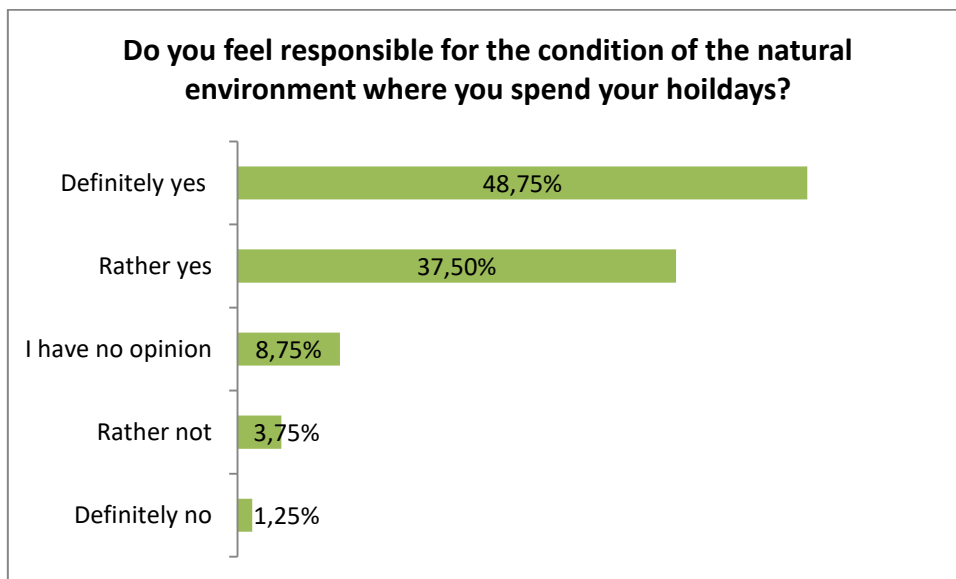


Figure 8. 'Do you feel responsible for the condition of the natural environment where you spend your holidays?'
Source: own elaboration based on research.

The respondents feel responsible for the condition of the natural environment where they spend their holidays (48,75% - answer 'definitely yes').

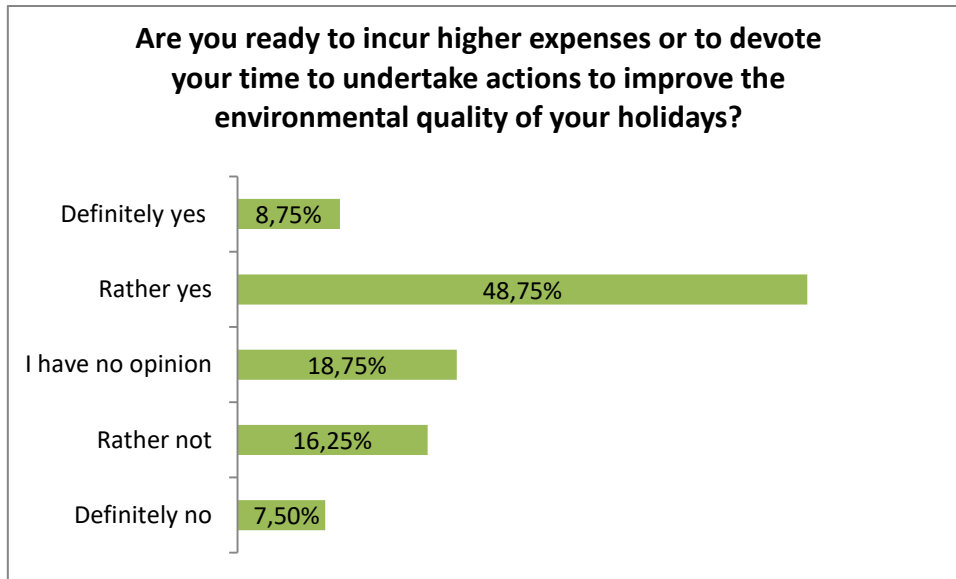


Figure 4 ‘Are you ready to incur higher expenses or to devote your time to undertake actions to improve the environmental quality of your holidays?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

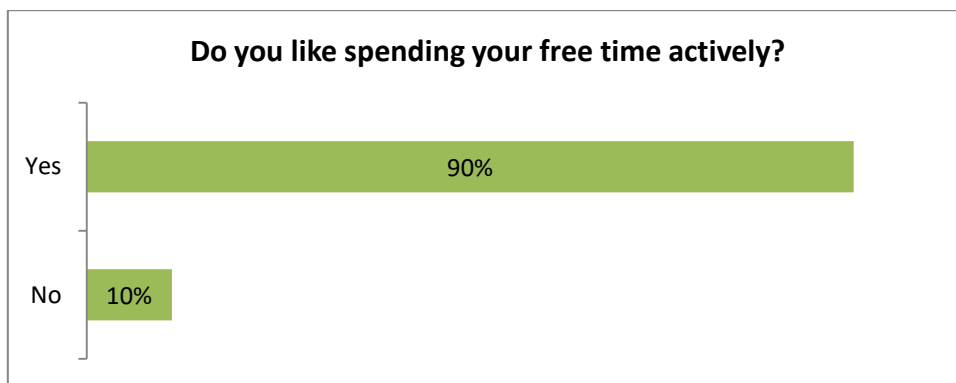


Figure 10. ‘Do you like spending your free time actively (e.g. cycling, running, hiking)?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

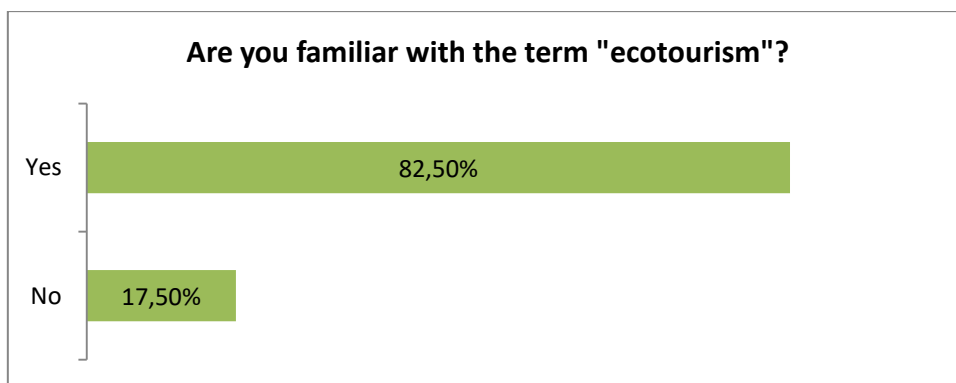


Figure 11. ‘Are you familiar with the term “ecotourism”?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

Almost half of the respondents (48,75%) is rather ready to incur higher expenses or to devote their time to undertake actions to improve the environmental quality of their holidays (Fig 9). The majority of the respondents (90%) like spending their free time actively (Fig 10).

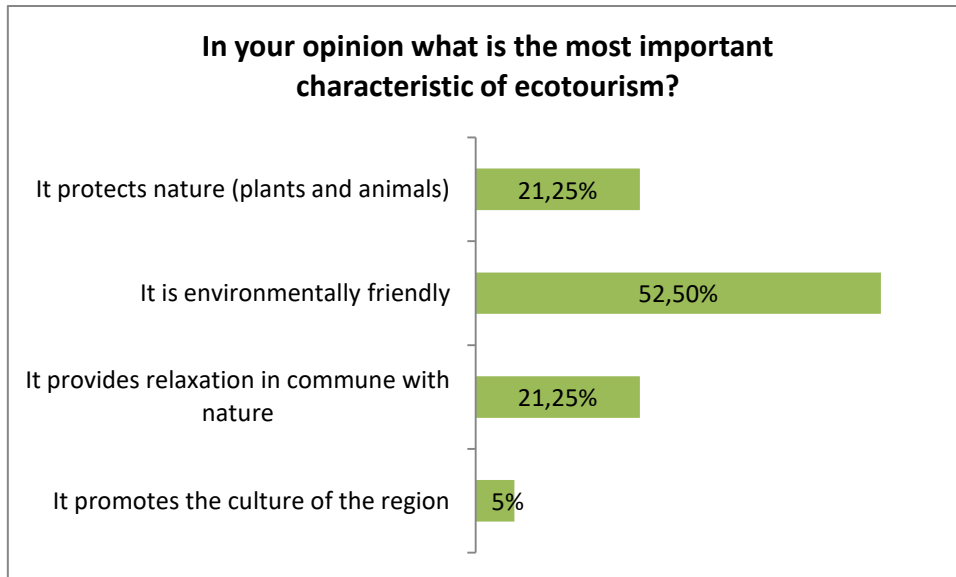


Figure 5. ‘In your opinion what is the most important characteristic of ecotourism?’
Source: own elaboration based on research.

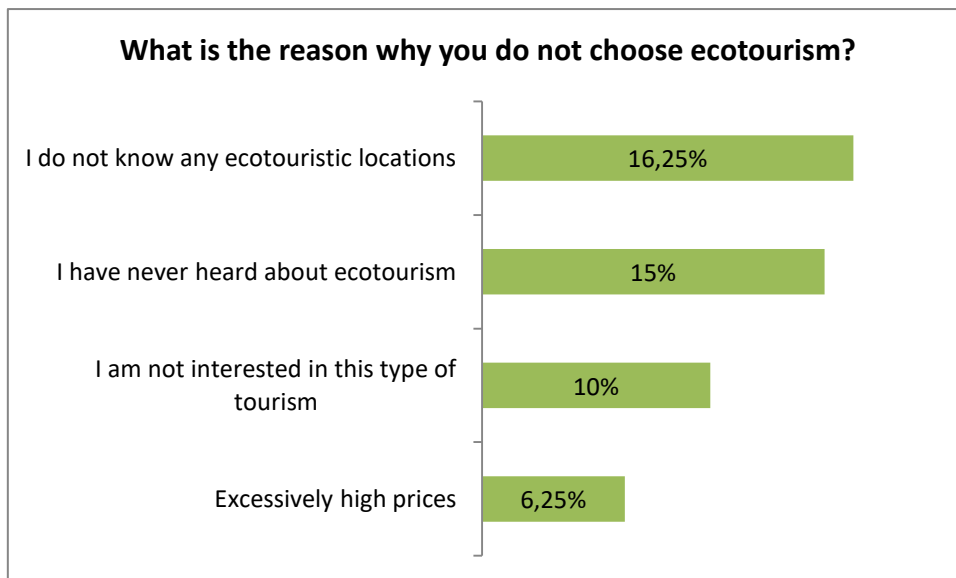


Figure 13. ‘What is the reason why you do not choose ecotourism?’
Source: own elaboration based on research.

Most respondents (82,50%) are familiar with the term ‘ecotourism’ (Fig 11). According to them, the most important characteristic of ecotourism is its eco-friendliness (52.50%) (Fig 12).

The main reason why the respondents do not choose ecotourism is the lack of knowledge where it can be found (16,25%) or that they have never heard about it (15%) (Fig 13). Most respondents prefer relaxation in the boson of nature as a form of activity in the natural environment (60%). Also a considerable number of respondents like walking (57,50%), hiking in the mountains (53,75%) and hiking (48,75%). 41,25 % of the respondents prefer collecting the gifts of nature, and 38,75% choose outdoor social meetings. As far as nature watching is concerned (photography, recording the sounds of nature), this form of activity is popular among 33,75 % of the respondents. 30% of the respondents like visiting national wildlife parks and reserves; 21,25% choose diving; 15% - sailing, kayaking, rowing and rafting. Less popular activities include cross-country cycling (13,75%), water trips along

rivers and lakes combined with camping (11,25%), skiing trips in the mountains (10%), horse-riding (10%), hobbies (collecting, artistic activities) (8,75%), solitary and family trips with a tent (7,50%). The least popular activities are voluntary actions for the benefit of nature (e.g. tree planting, cleaning rubbish left by tourists) (3,75%) (Fig 14).

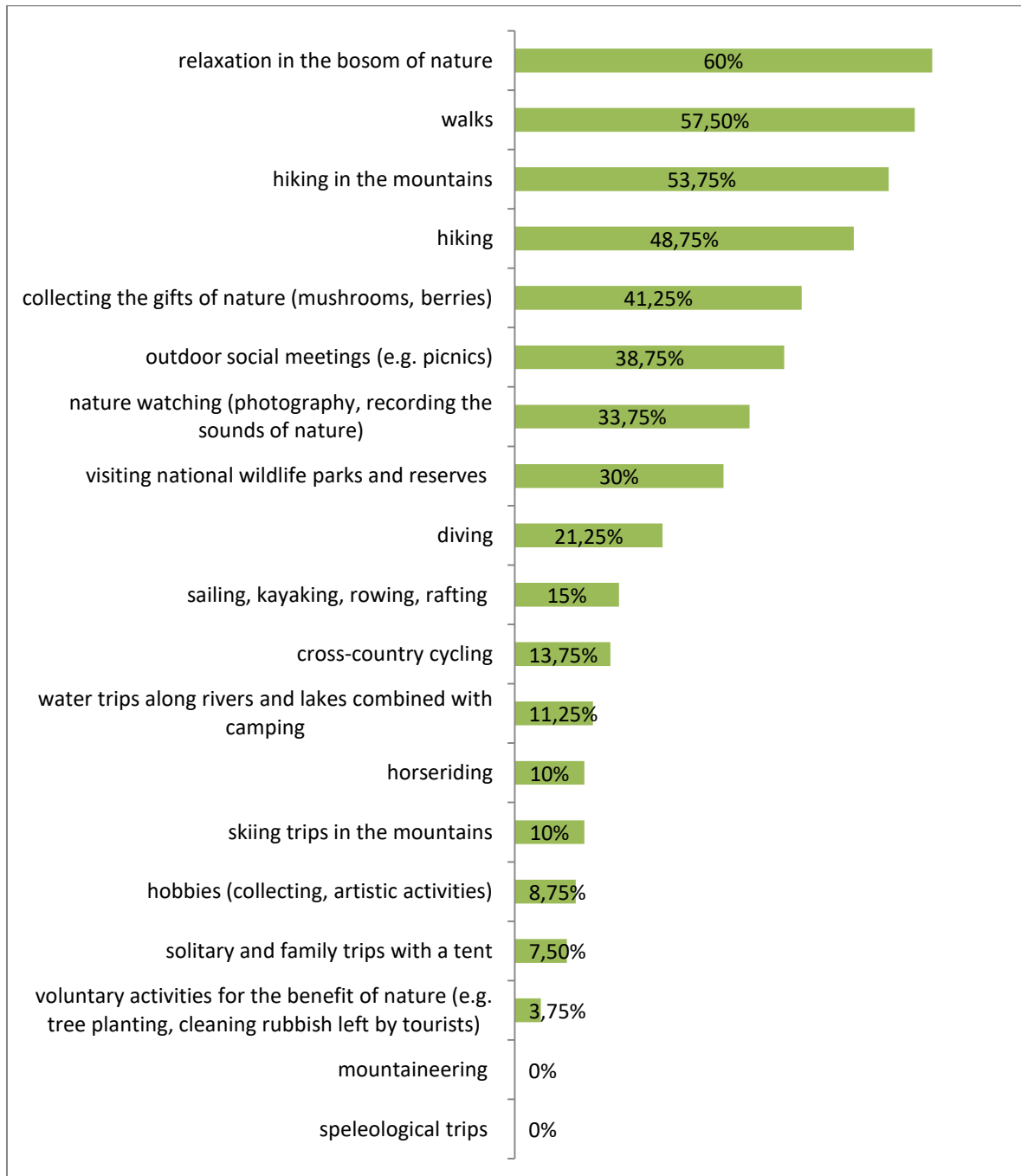


Figure 14. ‘What forms of activity do you prefer in the natural environment?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

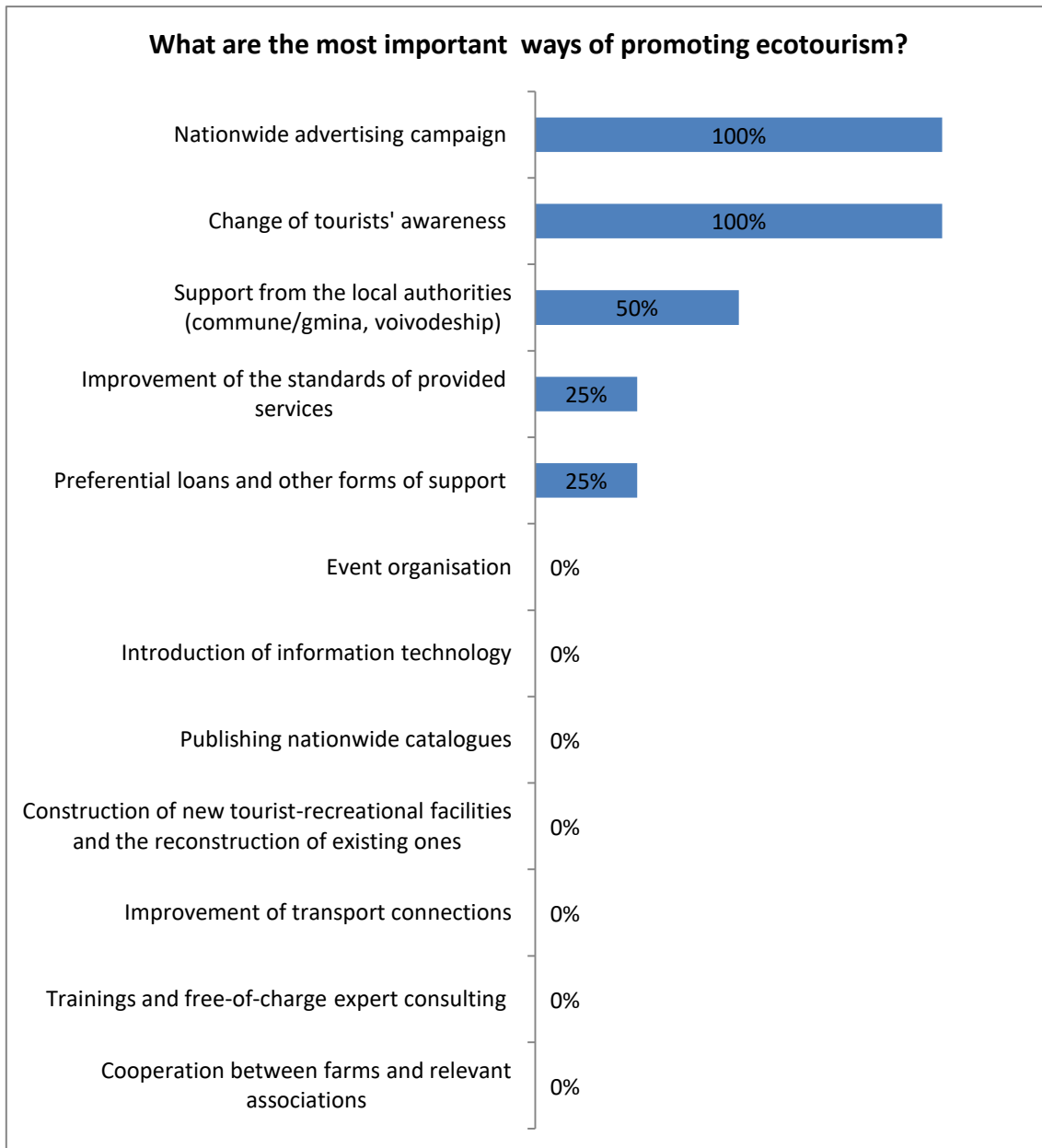


Figure 6. ‘In your opinion what are the most important ways of promoting ecotourism?’

Source: own elaboration based on research.

For farms owners the most important way of promoting ecotourism is the change of tourists’ awareness and a nationwide advertising campaign. Half of them think that it is necessary to have support from the local authorities (commune/gmina, voivodeship) for proper promotion of ecotourism. Preferential loans and other forms of financial support and the improvement of standards of provided services are of similar importance (25%) (Fig 15). All farms included in the research agree that the biggest limitation for the development of ecotourism is the low awareness among people and low activity of local governments and organisations. Another limitation is the lack of proper promotion and advertising (75%) and the lack of capital (50%) (Fig 16).

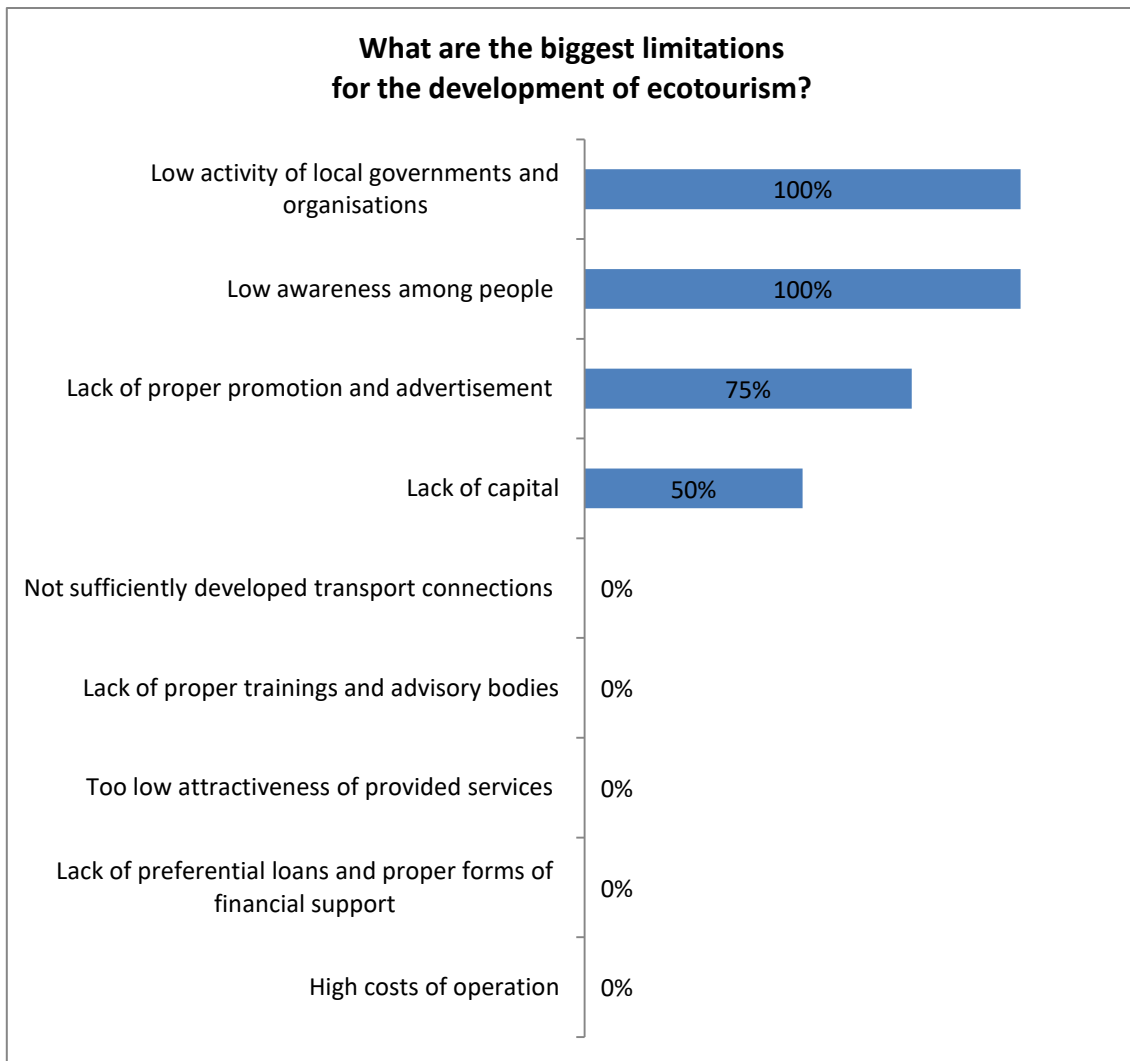


Figure 16. ‘In your opinion what are the biggest limitations for the development of ecotourism?’
Source: own elaboration based on research.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Tourists are ecologically conscious, also in the scope of ecotourism; however, its popularity is low. The potential for ecotourism development in the region of Bieszczady is not fully utilised. Tourists are ecologically conscious, notice certain environmental problems and threats; however, their actions are limited to basic activities such as rubbish segregation, restricting the consumption of water and energy and limited use of disposable packages. Few of them are involved in pro-environmental actions. Tourists are familiar with the term ‘ecotourism’. They appreciate spending free time surrounded by nature and choose ecotourism as a form of tourism. However, the most popular form of tourism is cognitive tourism. The most important characteristic of ecotourism is eco-friendliness. The main reason why tourists do not choose ecotourism is lack of knowledge where it can be found. It may be presumed that it is not well promoted.

Persons participating in tourism are conscious tourists. They have the potential to become ecotourists since they are sensitive to nature. They like spending time surrounded by nature. They try to plan their journey and become familiar with the culture, history and nature of the visited destination. When travelling they follow the rules of environmental protection. When staying at a specific destination, they pay attention to the aesthetic aspects of the landscape (e.g. littered landscape or improper spatial arrangement). They feel responsible for the condition of the natural environment where they spend their holidays. They are ready to

incur higher expenses or to devote their time to activities aiming at the improvement of environmental quality of their relaxation. They like spending their free time actively. Relaxation, walking, hiking in the mountains, collecting the gifts of nature, and social meetings are among the most popular activities in the natural environment. Activities which are typically related to ecotourism e.g. nature watching (photography, recording sounds of nature) and visiting national wildlife parks and reserves may also be seen as tourists' interests.

Taking into consideration the profile of tourists, the analysis of the region of Bieszczady and ecotourism farm owners' opinions, it can be stated that the potential for ecotourism development in the region of Bieszczady is not fully utilised. One solution might be the change in the tourists' awareness in order to encourage them to more frequently take advantage of ecotouristic offers. Furthermore, it is essential for the authorities to become involved and support the development of ecotourism as well as promotion and marketing activities. According to ecotourism farm owners, the most important way of promoting ecotourism is the change of the tourists' awareness and a nationwide advertising campaign. Half of them think that the support from the local authorities (commune/gmina, voivodeship) is needed to propagate ecotourism. All the researched farm owners agree that the biggest limitation in the development of ecotourism is the low awareness of people and low activity of local governments and organisations.

REFERENCES

1. Walosik A., 2013, *Przez Edukację do Zrównoważonego Rozwoju*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, Kraków.
2. Zaręba D., 2010, *Ekoturystyka*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.
3. Krauz K., Mroczka A., 2001, *Celowość kształcenia kadr dla turystyki w zakresie ekorozwoju* [in:] Kowalczyk A. (ed.), *Ekologia Krajobrazu i Ekorozwój*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz.
4. Szpara K., Pyzocha B., 2013, System certyfikacji GoToCarpathia. Badanie poziomu usług i produktów opartych o formy turystyki przyjaznej środowisku w Bieszczadach, [in:] B. Krakowiak, J. Latosińska (ed.), *Nowe-stare formy turystyki w przestrzeni*, Warsztaty z Geografii Turyzmu, Tom 3, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź, pp. 337-350.