

Tourism as an engine for sustainable development in the Euroregion. Insights from the Tatra Euroregion

O turismo como motor do desenvolvemento sostible na Eurorrexión.
Perspectivas da Eurorrexión de Tatra

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Abstract

The significance of tourism in the development of regions has become of interest to academics in recent decades and its contribution is evident. The rapid tourism development is creating pressure on the destination's competitiveness, as well as on its sustainable development. The Tatra Euroregion has been connecting two nationalities for decades via joint activities that develop the region by strengthening tourism. However, little attention is given to developing the Euroregion by way of tourism. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify whether the development of tourism in this Euroregion will be sustainable in the future, which can be fulfilled by answering two research questions, RQ1: What is the current state of tourism development in the Tatra Euroregion? and RQ2: Is the further development of tourism in the Tatra Euroregion subject to the principle of sustainability? We will answer the questions by analysing statistical data and documents that describe the cooperation activities within the Euroregion. The paper contributes to the analysis of cross-border cooperation within the Euroregion, as well as to research in the field of regional development with sustainable tourism, which is determined by the life cycle of the destination.

Keywords: Destination life cycle; Tatra Euroregion; regional development; sustainable tourism development.

Resumo

A importancia do turismo no desenvolvemento das rexións cobrou interese para os académicos nas últimas décadas e a súa contribución é evidente. O rápido desenvolvemento do turismo está a crear unha presión sobre a competitividade do destino, así como sobre o seu desenvolvemento sostible. A Eurorrexión dos Tatras leva décadas conectando dúas nacionalidades a través de actividades conxuntas que desenvolven a rexión mediante o fortalecemento do turismo. Con todo, préstase pouca atención ao desenvolvemento da eurorrexión a través do turismo. Por tanto, o obxectivo deste traballo é identificar se o desenvolvemento do turismo nesta eurorrexión será sostible no futuro, o que se pode cumprir respondendo a dúas preguntas de investigación, RQ1: Cal é o estado actual do desenvolvemento do turismo na eurorrexión de Tatra? e RQ2: Está o desenvolvemento futuro do turismo na eurorrexión de Tatra suxeito ao principio de sustentabilidade? Responderemos as preguntas analizando datos estatísticos e documentos que describen as actividades de cooperación dentro da Eurorrexión. O documento contribúe á análise da cooperación transfronteiriza dentro da Eurorrexión, así como á investigación no ámbito do desenvolvemento rexional co turismo sostible, que vén determinado polo ciclo de vida do destino.

Palabras chave: Ciclo de vida do destino; Eurorrexión de Tatra; Desenvolvemento rexional; Desenvolvemento turístico sostible.

JEL Codes: L83; Z30.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has a multidisciplinary character and its development brings economic and social benefits to several areas of the regions in which it develops. The importance of tourism in regional development has been studied since the 1990s, although some authors consider this research to be incomplete. The growing development of international tourism is associated with the negative externalities of tourism in the area where it is in development, so sustainable tourism is an important aspect of regional development research. One important tool for building sustainable tourism is the destination life cycle. The Tatra and Sub-Tatra Basin are culturally two of the richest areas in Poland and Slovakia. They are mountainous area that have never divided the multicultural communities living there but they have, rather, integrated them. Cultural and linguistic proximity and a common historical heritage have influenced the development of relations between border residents (Lewkowicz, 2020).

We therefore consider it important to monitor how tourism evolves in order to analyse how the Euroregion develops, with the intention of ensuring its sustainability. With this in mind, the aim of the paper is to identify whether the development of tourism in the Euroregion is sustainable for the future. The paper tackles two research questions, RQ1, what is the current state of tourism development in the Tatra Euroregion? and RQ2, is the further development of tourism in the Tatra Euroregion subject to the principle of sustainability? The research questions will be dealt with by analysing secondary data available from the Statistics institutes of both countries and as well as the cooperation of stakeholders in terms of developing tourism in the Euroregion. In terms of theory, this paper contributes to research on the impact of tourism on the development of Euroregions, as well as to the study of sustainable tourism development with the destination life cycle. The practical contribution of this article is the application of the destination life cycle in planning the future development of the Euroregion so as to ensure its sustainable development.

In order to be able to incorporate the Euroregion in the destination life cycle stage and thus answer RQ1, it is necessary to analyse data on the number of accommodation facilities, number of beds available, number of visitors and number of overnight stays and the utilization of accommodation capacity is also analysed. Data in both Euroregion countries were obtained from the statistical offices in Slovakia and Poland. In order to be able to answer the RQ2, and thus determine whether the Euroregion can be developed sustainably, it is necessary to analyse sustainable development indicators. These indicators are the ratio of overnight stays and accommodation capacity, the ratio between accommodation capacity and residents, and tourism intensity expressed as the number of overnight stays compared to the number of residents. In addition, we will analyse the actions and cooperation activities in the Euroregion, as they contribute to the sustainable development of the Euroregion.

The paper initially characterizes the relationship between tourism and regional development, as well as sustainable regional development and the Tatra Euroregion. Research results are presented as answers to research questions, the Euroregion's development via cross-border cooperation and the Euroregion's development via sustainable tourism development.

1.1 Tourism and regional development

Tourism is a sector that overlaps with others, which are directly involved in the way it is run, including culture, transport, construction, healthcare, industry and agriculture, among

others. It is a service sector that, in the economies of developed countries, represents significantly more than half to two-thirds of the economy. Tourism is a sector of effective participation in international exchange, as it obtains foreign exchange without credit or insurance risks. In addition, other active non-exportable services are sold within the framework of active foreign tourism (Združenie Región „Tatry”, 2007). The relationship between tourism and regional development has been in the interest of academic debate for some time and the importance of effective tourism planning for ensuring the economic benefits and sustainability of the region's development is now widely recognized. Tourism is a sector that is often seen as an opportunity for regional development. This is especially true in areas with attractive landscapes and interesting cultural and historical aspects, as well as for the residents who are making the most of the situation (Klepers and Rozite, 2009). Academics have generally acknowledged that tourism contributes to regional development and job creation, leading case studies to focus on funding in the tourism sector (Brankov et al., 2019). It is essential that potential investors know the real opportunities for providing finance in this area as a means of creating financial incentives, reducing regional disparities in development and guaranteeing future community involvement in the sector (Vukovic et al., 2017; Brankov et al., 2019).

Although the role of tourism in regional development has been important and recognized by scientists and policy makers for several decades, this issue has only been explored since the early 1990s. Some literature reviews (Calero and Turner, 2020) have discovered that research in the field of regional economy and tourism as a factor of regional economic development is insufficient, which mostly deals with regional economic development and tourism, using descriptive analysis. According to Rahman and Salahudin (2021), the main topics examined in relation to tourism and regional development nowadays are sustainable development (Candia et al., 2020; Eyisi et al., 2020; Hengky and Kikvidze, 2020; Saneinia et al., 2020; Ivars-Baidal et al., 2021; Tanaka et al., 2021), innovation (Kalvet et al., 2020; Ratnasari et al., 2020; Syapsan and Diartho, 2020; Casanova Enault et al., 2021) local governments (Brillo, 2020; Caamaño-Franco and Suárez, 2020; Nel and Connelly, 2020; Prathama et al., 2020; Almeida and Silveira, 2021) and the local communities, residents (Anandhyta and Kinseng, 2020; Hui et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020). Although there are numerous empirical research papers that have attempted to measure the effects of various factors influencing tourism development and regional development in general, very few of them have followed a formal theoretical framework. On the other hand, there are many studies which have used empirical research based on statistical and econometric methods (Polenske and Hewings, 2004; Watson et al., 2008; Sun and Pratt, 2014; Inchausti-Sintes, 2015; Lamonica and Mattioli, 2015; Pratt, 2015; Smeral, 2015; Van Wyk et al., 2015; Cao et al., 2016; Dwyer et al., 2016; Williams, 2016; Allan et al., 2017; Li et al., 2017; Mahadevan et al., 2017; Dong et al., 2018).

Based on the presented literature review on the impact of tourism on regional development, we have conducted a brief SWOT (which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the research available to date concerning this topic (table 1).

Table 1. SWOT analysis of literature on the impact of tourism on regional development

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research carried out since the 1990s • numerous empirical research papers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most of the analyses conducted so far have not followed a formal theoretical framework |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very few authors have presented testable hypotheses in their research |
| <p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growing importance of the use of indicators as a technique for evaluating the development of tourism, especially in the field of smart and sustainable tourism | <p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demanding verification of hypotheses using statistical methods • difficult to measure the development of tourism due to its multidisciplinary |

Source: Own elaboration.

The strength of the papers published so far is due to the fact that the research has been compiled for several decades. We consider another strong point to be that there is a lot of empirical research on the link between tourism and regional development, although it does not offer many testable hypotheses. Additionally, only a few analyses were accompanied by a formal theoretical framework, meaning that we have spotted an opportunity to use indicators as a research method, bearing in mind that they have become more popular in recent years. These can be used to examine the impact of tourism on regional development, especially in connection with sustainable and smart tourism, which are becoming increasingly important in regional development. In our opinion, one threat to further research in this field is the statistical verifiability of hypotheses and research questions. Secondly, the fact that tourism has a multidisciplinary character and therefore extends its benefits to several sectors, makes it difficult for its impact on regional development to be measured.

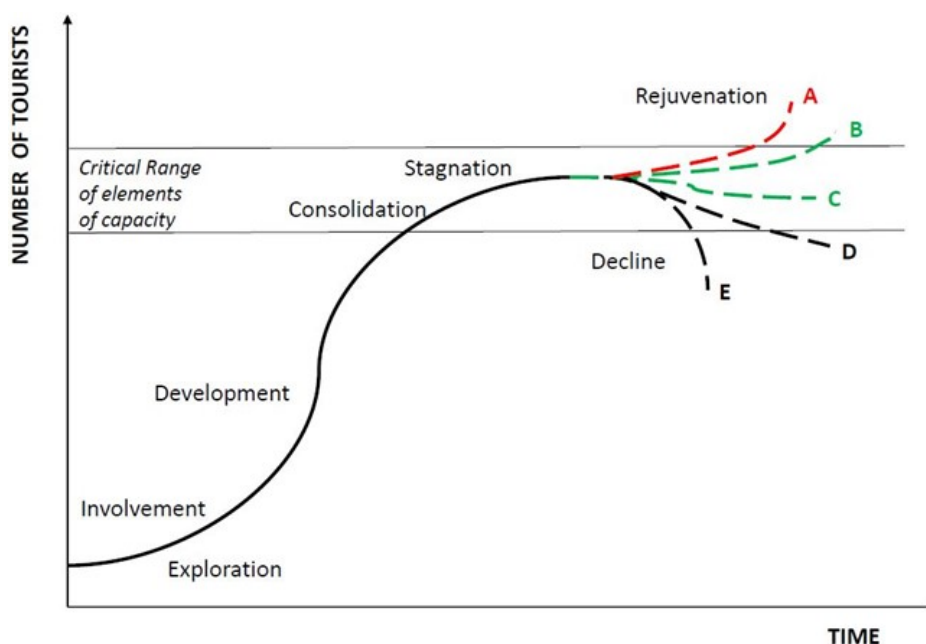
1.2 Sustainable regional development

With increasing demographic, environmental and energy pressure (especially in big cities), it is desirable to create smarter and more sustainable ecosystems and development strategies (Guerra et al., 2017). The rapid development of tourism is associated not only with positive, but also with negative impacts on the environmental conditions of the area. Harm to the ecology of tourism development mainly affects the atmosphere, landscapes, geological features, animals, water, soil, plants, microbes, and so on. (Zhao and Li, 2018). Physical pollution in the most-visited destinations has posed a major threat to tourism development. Perhaps the most common example of such pollution can be seen in coastal resorts, where there are visible signs of it in the water and on the beaches. Tourism has also contributed significantly to environmental pollution due to air transport. In the 2020s, after several years of international negotiations, an agreement was reached aiming for carbon-neutral air traffic growth. Sea and road transport also significantly contribute mainly to air and visual pollution, whereas tourist transport does so to noise pollution and a great number of visitors cause littering (Holloway and Humphreys, 2019). Sustainable tourism development has thus been a frequent subject of tourism research since the late 1980s. The problem of negative environmental impacts in tourist regions has become the trigger for sustainable development to be considered as a directive for tourism development (Luo, 2018; Mustapha et al., 2020). UNWTO [The World Tourism Organization] (2013) defines sustainable tourism as a type of tourism that takes full account of its present and future economic, social, and environmental impacts and addresses the needs of visitors, industry, the environment, and the local

population. Thus, sustainable tourism development must ensure not only income from tourism (economic principle), but also respect for natural resources (environmental principle) and improvements in residents' quality of life (social principle) in the place under study (Maráková et al., 2017). One of the most important tools of sustainable tourism is the planning of tourism development at the destination (UNWTO, 2019). Sustainable tourism management guidelines and procedures are applicable in all types of tourism, in all destinations, including mass tourism and various segments of specialized tourism (UNWTO, 2013). Sustainable tourism development has become an increasingly important strategic goal for world-class destinations. Properly managed, sustainable tourism provides an economic incentive to preserve native areas, with a minimal negative impact on the environment where it is carried out (Mustapha et al., 2020). One of the possibilities for a region's sustainable development could be, for example, creating cultural tourism, which in the last few years has gained great importance. This type of tourism indicates a qualitative change in the approach to the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage (Trono and Castronuovo, 2021).

One important tool for predicting tourism development, specifically in the area of sustainability, is the destination life cycle (Maráková et al., 2017). Like private sector companies, destination evolves dynamically and goes through several phases of the life cycle, which many foreign authors have addressed (Cohen, 1972; Plog, 1974; Butler, 2006). Cohen (1972) and Plog (1974) have characterized the destination life cycle based on the typology of visitors, while Butler (2006) has divided the tool into six phases based on the work of geographers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Hypothetical evolution of a tourist area



Source: Butler (2006).

According to Gajdošík and Šebová (2020) and Gúčík (2020), the principle of the destination life cycle can be explained by the fact that in the beginning it is visited by few holidaymakers, as it is still relatively unknown. As the number of visitors grows, so does the tourism infrastructure and awareness of the destination. With a high number of tourists at the destination, we can observe the negative effects of tourism, which ultimately result in lower visitor numbers. Using the asymptotic life cycle curve, the effects of tourism can be predicted,

which helps the destination develop sustainably. Sustainable destination development is an issue especially in the stagnation and rejuvenation stages, where making the right decision is crucial (Maráková et al., 2017).

1.3 The Tatra Euroregion

Poland and Slovakia have been actively involved in strengthening cooperation between Euroregions at their respective borders, resulting in the creation of 16 Euroregions in Poland and 13 in Slovakia. There are currently 3 Euroregions which overlap both of the countries. One of them is the Tatra Euroregion (Lewkowicz, 2020). Rapprochement and cooperation between Poland and Slovakia in the Tatras were ideas that arose in November 1991. On 31st October 1993, the Declaration of Self-Governing Bodies of the Territorial Parts of the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the project of establishing a cross-border association (official title of the document in the Slovak language: Deklarácia samosprávnych orgánov územných častí Poľskej republiky a Slovenskej republiky o projekte vytvorenia cezhraničného združenia Euroregión "Tatry"), was signed in Zakopane (Euroregión "Tatry", 2010). The Tatra Euroregion was created in 1994 by several municipalities in Poland and Slovakia, by signing an agreement at the founding Congress in Nowy Targ. The Euroregion's founders were representatives of local governments in towns and villages on the Polish-Slovak border. The symbol of the Euroregion is the Tatras (Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej Tatry, 2016).

A large part of the Tatra Euroregion is covered by the Tatra National Park. Taking a brief look at its history, it was previously unheard of to protect places such as the High Tatras as nature reserves in Austria-Hungary. However, there were a significant number of incidents documented on the Polish side compared to Slovakia during the First World War, when the area suffered considerable damage. The forests were neglected and it was common for wood to be stolen. The status of "National Park" was declared in 1949, which makes it the oldest in Slovakia, covering 73,800 hectares, while the protected area is 30,703 hectares in size. Together with the Tatra National Park in Poland, the High Tatras have been a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) Biosphere Reserve since 1993. The Tatra National Park is subject to strict zoning, which prevents development companies from making any significant interventions (Maráková et al., 2017). In Poland, the Tatra National Park is the most famous tourist destination out of all the Polish national parks. In the nineteenth century, the Tatras were attractive to famous painters, writers and poets. Already during this period, the influx of visitors had resulted in the development of nature protection projects. In 1873, the first tourist organization in Poland was established - the Tatra Association. This group came up with the idea to create the Tatra National Park (1954), which has an area of 211,000 square kilometres, while almost 12.3 thousand hectares of land are strictly protected, meaning that economic activity and interference with this area are forbidden. Due to the attractiveness and history of the tourist route, the Tatra National Park is one of the most popular protected areas in Poland (Niezgoda and Nowacki, 2020). Even though much of the territory is strictly protected, there has been a surge in tourist activities and attractions in other parts of the park.

The Euroregion is spread over a large area on the western side of the Polish-Slovak border and covers the Podhalie, Spiš, Orava and Liptov regions. The boundaries of the Euroregion were determined on the basis of administrative division: the Tatras Euroregion has a total area of more than 11,000 km² and a population of around 900,000; on the Polish side, the Euroregion includes 25 communes from the Lesser Poland Voivodeship and the Slovak side

comprises 112 towns and villages in eleven districts ([Euroregión "Tatry", 2007](#)). For several centuries, local communities shared similar languages and traditions, as well as unusual geographical and natural treasures. Many local institutions (municipalities, regions and communities) are currently involved in Euroregion cooperation, with the aim of cooperating in sectors such as culture, science, tourism, economy and environmental protection ([Durà et al., 2018](#)).

Since its commencement, the Euroregion has worked on maintaining balanced and sustainable development and cooperation between people, local governments and institutions on both sides of the Polish-Slovak border; it has been involved in the process of European integration and transformation that has taken place since the early 1990s. Projects related to overcoming barriers, creating and developing formal legal structures for cross-border cooperation, carried out by local authorities and cooperation enthusiasts on both sides of the border, prepared Poles and Slovaks for membership in the European Union and entry into the Schengen area. Since its foundation and thanks to its actions, the Euroregion has become a well-known institution of good neighbourly cooperation and mutual understanding between Poles and Slovaks; it is the initiator, participant and coordinator of many important cross-border events, which confirms that the mountains of the Tatras do not divide but instead unite the border's inhabitants ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej Tatry, 2016](#)).

Euro-regional governance is based on a well-developed structure: first, there are two parallel regional structures in place (the Polish Tatras Euroregion and the Slovak Tatras Association), both of which share a set of joint bodies with equal representation - the highest one is the Congress (70 members of the European Parliament [MEPs]), the executive represented by the Council (14 MEPs and 2 Secretaries) and the thematic commissions (Economic, Environmental, Culture Information, Tourism, Sport and Youth). Finally, the Audit Committee controls all Euro-regional bodies and activities. In 2013, the statute of the EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) was adopted ([Durà et al., 2018](#)). EGTC TATRY was established by transforming the cross-border structure of the Tatra Euroregion into an independent Polish-Slovak entity, which has its own legal identity and is able to perform acts of law in Poland, where the EGTC has its registered office. EGTC TATRY is thus the next stage of the ongoing Polish-Slovak partnership. Cross-border experience, the joint implementation of projects and intentions and knowledge gained from over 20 years of cooperation between local governments within the Tatra Euroregion have greatly contributed to establishing the EGTC ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej Tatry, 2016](#)).

The impact of tourism on the job market is also significant in the Tatra Euroregion. This sector is of great value for mountainous and foothill areas with underdeveloped industries, where it is often the only option or the most appropriate one for their development and prevents an unwanted migration from these areas to larger municipalities. The local connection of tourism to attractive areas with adequate facilities is also one of the characteristics that distinguishes it from industrial sectors. Tourism represents one possible form of employment for the rural population in Slovakia in the future. The cultural attractiveness of the territory on the Polish side of the Euroregion means that it attracts visitors throughout the year. Cultural diversity, diverse folklore, and the region's many sights make it a perfect base for tourism development while increasing its beauty is driven by economic and infrastructural development ([Združenie Región "Tatry", 2007](#)).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the paper is to investigate whether the development of tourism in the Euroregion will be sustainable in the future. In order to be able to meet RQ1, we collected data from statistical offices in both countries, which will provide us with the necessary data to place the destination in the life cycle stage. The information relates to the Euroregion and represents data for the years 2001-2021, which provides us with a detailed overview of the tourism development in the studied area. To identify the stage of the destination life cycle, we will use life cycle stage indicators, which we have determined by a synthesis of the views of domestic and foreign authors (Buhalis, 2000; Butler, 2006; Gajdošík, 2019; Gúčík, 2020). For the purposes of the paper, we have determined the following as quantitative criteria for defining the stages of the destination life cycle: the number of accommodation facilities, beds available, visitors and overnight stays and the utilization of accommodation capacity (table 2).

Table 2. Destination life cycle criteria and their characteristics

| Criteria / Life cycle stage | Involvement | Development | Consolidation | Stagnation | Decline |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Nº of accommodation facilities | Low | Low | High | Very high | High |
| Nº of beds available | Very low | Low | High | Very high | Very high |
| Nº of visitors | Low | High | Very high | Very high | High |
| Nº of overnight stays | Low | Many | Very high | Many | Many |
| Utilization of accommodation capacity (%) | Low | High | Very high | High | Low |

Source: Processed according to Buhalis, 2000; Butler, 2006; Gajdošík, 2019; Gúčík, 2020.

In order to address RQ2, it is necessary to identify and determine the values of sustainable development indicators. In order to sustainably manage the destination, it is important to analyse sustainable development indicators (Maráková et al., 2017). Miller (2001) deals with indicators of employment, finance, visitor satisfaction and environmental impact. UNWTO (2004) focuses on mountain resorts in its indicators, more specifically on the environment. The indicators proposed by Buhalis (2000) represent the greatest added value in terms of the life cycle stages of the destination. The indicators discuss the marketing response and economic, social, and environmental impacts, among which we have found suitable indicators for further research. Regarding the objective of our paper, we will analyse the following indicators: the ratio of overnight stays and accommodation capacity, the ratio between accommodation capacity and residents and tourism intensity expressed as the number of overnight stays compared to the number of residents. In addition, the actions and cooperation activities in the Euroregion, which serve to support the development of the Euroregion and which develop the Euroregion in a sustainable way through tourism, will be analysed.

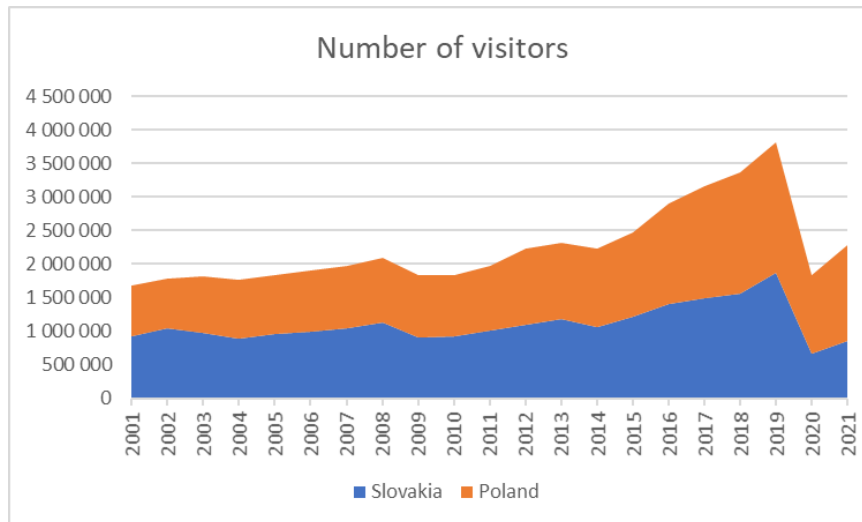
3. RESULTS

In order to address RQ1, we have analysed the number of visitors (Figure 2), the number of overnight stays (Figure 3), the number of accommodation facilities (Figure 4) and the number of beds (Figure 5) in the Euroregion in both countries for the years 2001-2021.

During this period, the highest number of visitors arrived in the Tatra Euroregion in 2019, a year before the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). Due to the health crisis, both countries experienced a sharp drop in the number of visitors in 2020, Slovakia by 63% and Poland by

40%. The number of visitors began to rise again in 2021, when more than 850,000 went to the Slovak part of the Euroregion, while almost 1,430,000 explored the Polish part of the Euroregion. The crisis has reduced the purchasing power of the local population, as well as the number of the visitors who travel to the Euroregion the most. This figure also affects the number of overnight stays, so here we can see a similar development of data over time (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Number of visitors in the Tatra Euroregion from 2001-2021



Source: Own elaboration based on Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022 and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

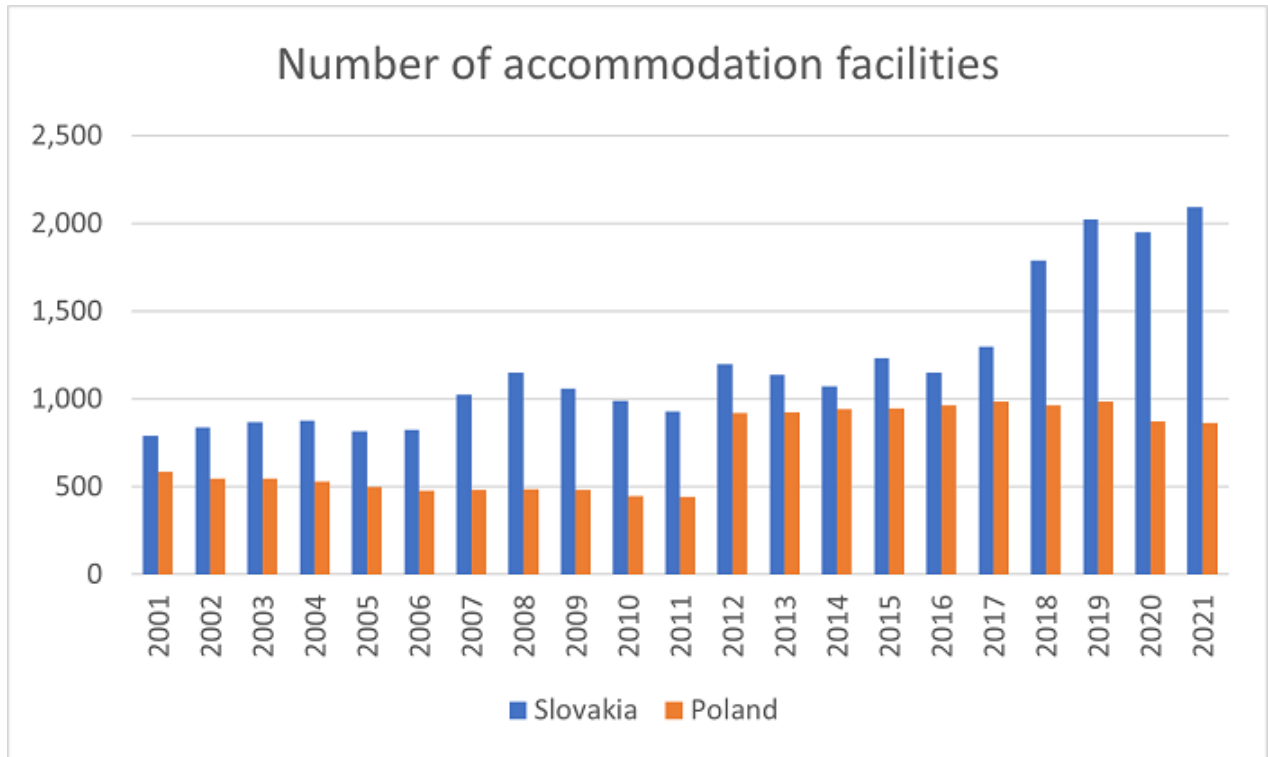
Figure 3. Number of overnight stays in the Tatra Euroregion from 2001-2021



Source: Own elaboration based on Statistical office of the Slovak Republic, 2022 and Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

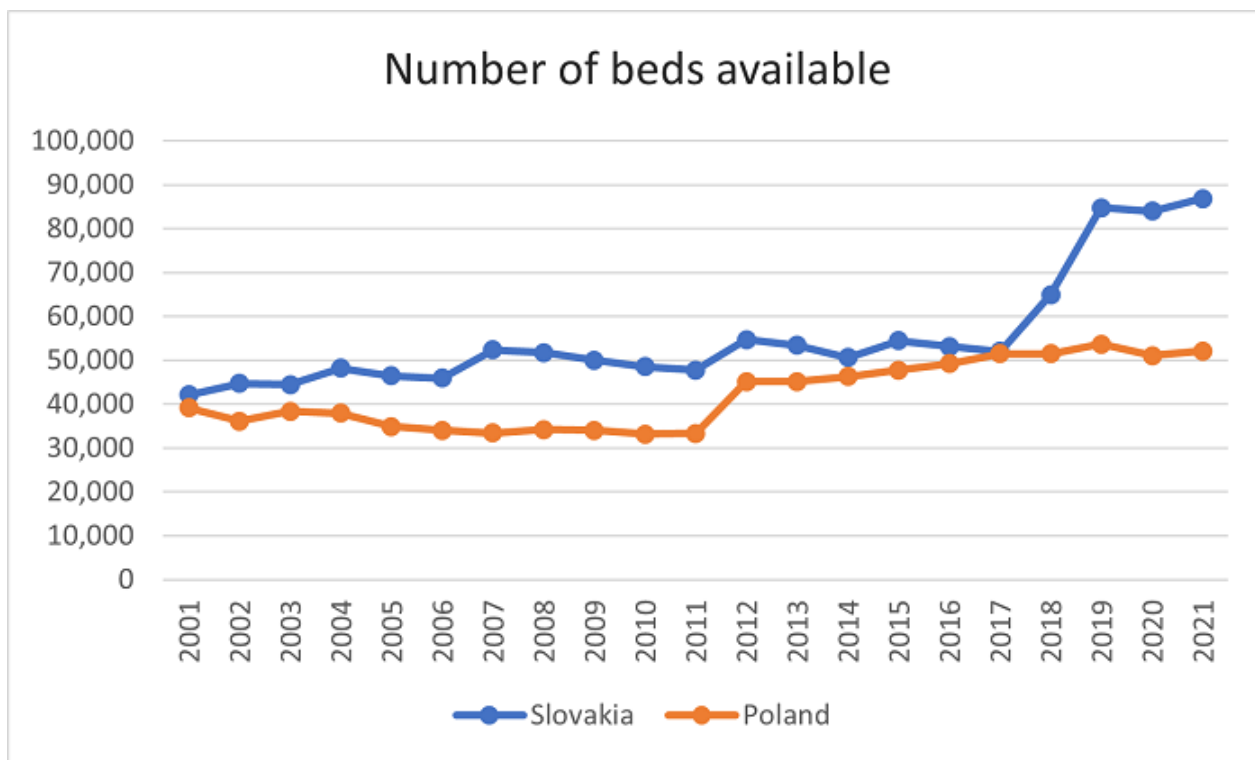
Even though in the Slovak part of the Euroregion a smaller number of visitors has been recorded, the number of accommodation facilities and beds available in Slovakia throughout the period began to increase in the second half of the 1990s; this was due to categorization based on the Decree of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic and its amendments in 2001 and 2008, as well as the privatization of hotels in the High Tatras in 1996. It is interesting to point out that while in the Polish region, the number of accommodation facilities decreased in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the Slovak region, it increased in 2021 compared to 2019, i.e., the year before the pandemic.

Figure 4. Number of accommodation facilities in the Tatra Euroregion in 2001-2021



Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022 and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

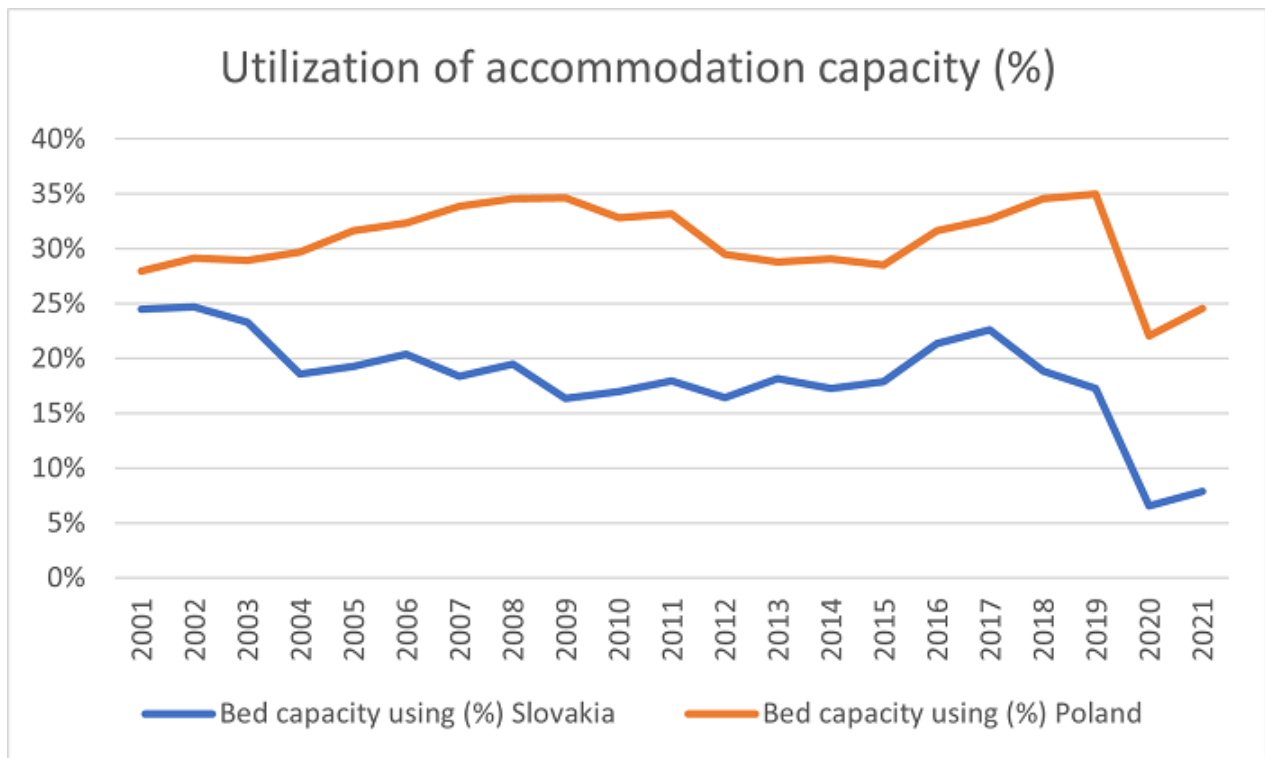
Figure 5. Number of beds available in the Tatra Euroregion from 2001-2021



Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical office of the Slovak Republic, 2022 and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

In order to characterize the current state of tourism development in the Tatra Euroregion, we also analysed the utilization of accommodation capacity, which in the Slovak part of the Euroregion in the observed period was only 18% on average, while in the Polish part it was 31% (Figure 6).

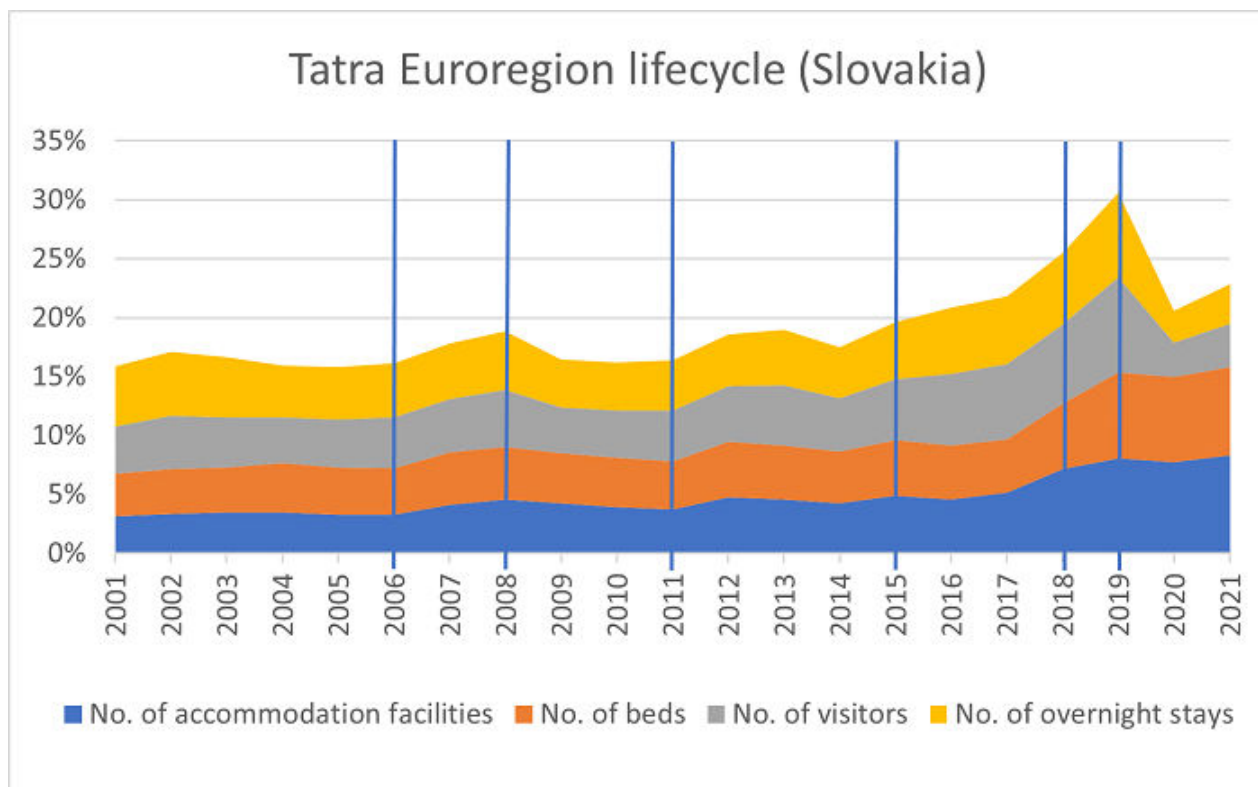
Figure 6. Utilization of accommodation capacity in the Tatra Euroregion from 2001-2021



Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022 and the Statistical office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

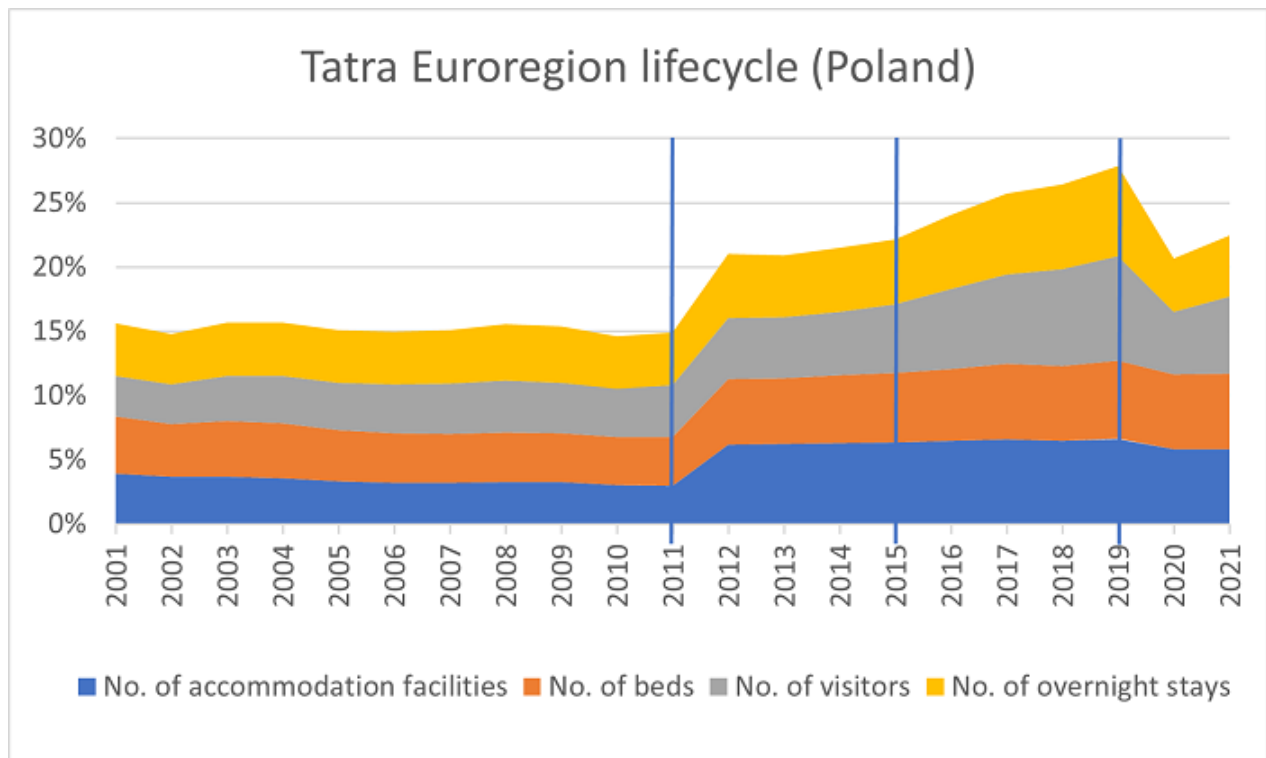
According to the available data and destination life cycle theories (Buhalis, 2000; Butler, 2006; Gajdošík, 2019; Gúčík, 2020), we can say that the destination Tatra Euroregion in Slovakia is currently in the development stage (Figure 7), whereas in Poland it is in the consolidation stage (Figure 8). This means that the Slovak part of the Euroregion is in a stage in which the area is becoming generally recognized as a tourist attraction, partly due to promoting it well. The more popular and well-known it becomes, the more opportunities for financial gains will be seen by investors and tourism companies. As a result, more tourism facilities are being developed. It is at this stage, however, when residents are most likely to lose control of their territory's development. As mentioned above, the Polish part of the Euroregion is in the consolidation stage, which is when the number of visitors is higher than that of permanent residents, meaning that the local economy is dominated by tourism at this point. Businesses in the tourism sector push for further development in the sector. Some residents, especially those not involved in tourism development, may be dissatisfied and oppose tourism activities because of their impact on the socio-cultural environment (Todorovic, 2019; Karamustafa and Yilmaz, 2020).

Figure 7. Tatra Euroregion lifecycle (Slovakia)



Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022.

Figure 8. Tatra Euroregion lifecycle (Poland)



Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2022.

In order to address RQ2, we have analysed the sustainable development indicators proposed by a team of authors, namely [Bošković et al., \(2019\)](#). We chose the study because it deals with mountainous destinations and it is one of the most recent on this area. For the purposes of our contribution, we have decided to examine the following indicators: the ratio of overnight stays and accommodation capacity, the ratio between accommodation capacity and residents, and tourism intensity expressed as the number of overnight stays compared to the number of residents ([table 3](#), [table 4](#)). Regarding sustainable development, it is also important to determine the density of accommodation facilities, which is expressed as *beds available per 100km²* ([Maráková et al., 2017](#)). In addition to economic and cultural indicators, we have also considered it important to examine how the Euroregion treats residents and the environment throughout its development. We will do this through an analysis of the Euroregion's cooperative activities.

The application of the indicators (ratio of overnight stays and accommodation capacity, ratio between accommodation capacity and residents, and tourism intensity) is based on a coding system that defines three areas, each of which describes the current state of the environment in places where tourism is growing. The areas are divided by colour: red, yellow and green. The red area indicates a critical situation due to the inappropriate use of destination resources. This calls for the right implementation of appropriate corrective action to ensure sustainable development via monitoring and control. The second, the yellow area, shows that the situation regarding the use of the destination's resources is acceptable, but the progressive tourism growth in the coming period may cause complications, so it is recommended to take preventive measures to ensure sustainable development. Last of all, the green area implies that the current state of tourism development is assessed as sustainable

and it is a result of quality management and of implementing relevant measures and activities in the previous period.

Table 3. Sustainable development indicators of the Euroregion (Slovakia)

| Year/indicator | the ratio of overnight stays to accommodation capacity (beds available) | the ratio of accommodation capacity (beds available) to residents | tourism intensity | the density of accommodation facilities |
|----------------|---|---|-------------------|---|
| 2001 | 89.14 | 0.06 | 5.70 | 548.68 |
| 2002 | 89.96 | 0.07 | 6.07 | 582.41 |
| 2003 | 84.84 | 0.07 | 5.68 | 579.88 |
| 2004 | 67.62 | 0.07 | 4.89 | 628.05 |
| 2005 | 70.12 | 0.07 | 4.87 | 605.50 |
| 2006 | 74.25 | 0.07 | 5.09 | 598.42 |
| 2007 | 66.86 | 0.08 | 5.20 | 682.01 |
| 2008 | 71.05 | 0.08 | 5.45 | 673.79 |
| 2009 | 59.68 | 0.07 | 4.41 | 651.13 |
| 2010 | 61.88 | 0.07 | 4.41 | 632.10 |
| 2011 | 65.48 | 0.07 | 4.59 | 621.80 |
| 2012 | 59.86 | 0.08 | 4.80 | 713.30 |
| 2013 | 66.02 | 0.08 | 5.15 | 696.07 |
| 2014 | 62.77 | 0.07 | 4.63 | 659.35 |
| 2015 | 65.07 | 0.08 | 5.15 | 709.75 |
| 2016 | 77.85 | 0.08 | 6.00 | 692.51 |
| 2017 | 82.41 | 0.08 | 6.20 | 677.52 |
| 2018 | 68.70 | 0.09 | 6.44 | 846.91 |
| 2019 | 62.81 | 0.12 | 7.67 | 1104.89 |
| 2020 | 23.85 | 0.12 | 2.88 | 1094.16 |
| 2021 | 28.61 | 0.13 | 3.61 | 1131.37 |

Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022

Table 4. Sustainable development indicators of the Euroregion (Poland)

| Year/indicator | The ratio of overnight stays to accommodation capacity (beds available) | The ratio of accommodation capacity (beds available) to residents | tourism intensity | the density of accommodation facilities |
|----------------|---|---|-------------------|---|
| 2001 | 101.76 | 0.07 | 6.93 | 804.21 |
| 2002 | 106.21 | 0.06 | 6.64 | 742.27 |
| 2003 | 105.27 | 0.07 | 6.95 | 788.29 |
| 2004 | 108.19 | 0.07 | 7.03 | 779.43 |
| 2005 | 115.28 | 0.06 | 6.86 | 716.54 |
| 2006 | 117.66 | 0.06 | 6.81 | 699.84 |

| Year/indicator | The ratio of overnight stays to accommodation capacity (beds available) | The ratio of accommodation capacity (beds available) to residents | tourism intensity | the density of accommodation facilities |
|----------------|---|---|-------------------|---|
| 2007 | 123.38 | 0.06 | 6.98 | 687.01 |
| 2008 | 125.93 | 0.06 | 7.24 | 702.75 |
| 2009 | 126.21 | 0.06 | 7.17 | 698.44 |
| 2010 | 119.46 | 0.05 | 6.49 | 681.67 |
| 2011 | 120.84 | 0.05 | 6.56 | 684.61 |
| 2012 | 107.39 | 0.07 | 7.86 | 927.09 |
| 2013 | 104.97 | 0.07 | 7.67 | 928.50 |
| 2014 | 105.82 | 0.07 | 7.90 | 951.40 |
| 2015 | 103.87 | 0.08 | 7.98 | 982.47 |
| 2016 | 115.15 | 0.08 | 9.07 | 1011.47 |
| 2017 | 119.01 | 0.08 | 9.77 | 1058.38 |
| 2018 | 125.94 | 0.08 | 10.30 | 1058.18 |
| 2019 | 127.43 | 0.09 | 10.86 | 1103.93 |
| 2020 | 80.29 | 0.08 | 6.50 | 1049.49 |
| 2021 | 89.38 | 0.08 | 7.38 | 1070.22 |

Source: Own elaboration based on the Statistical office of the Republic of Poland, 2022

The values for the ratio of overnight stays to accommodation capacity (beds available) are: >150 green zones, 120–150 yellow zones and <120 red zones. Based on this division, we can say that all the values in the Slovak part of the Euroregion are in the red area. In Poland, on the other hand, we can the values for the yellow area in the years 2007-2009, 2011, and 2018-2019. Interestingly, the ones corresponding with the ratio between accommodation capacity and residents are in the green area for both countries throughout the whole documented period while those for tourism intensity are alarming in both countries for all the years studied because they are all in the red area.

The recommended maximum density of accommodation facilities in the High Tatras is 1300 available beds per 100 km². This value has not been exceeded so far, either in Slovakia or in Poland. We consider there to be positive growth in terms of sustainable development, although the limit value for achieving the recommended maximum density in the Slovak part of the Euroregion is 115,125 beds available while in the Polish part, it is 72,990. In 2021, the Slovak part had 86,833 beds available, while the Polish part had 52,077, indicating that further tourism development should not be faster than in previous years if the Euroregion wants to stay on the path of sustainable development.

In order to analyse how sustainable the region is, in addition to statistical indicators, we have also analysed activities and projects that are a result of cooperation within the Euroregion and that contribute to its development.

3.1. The Euroregion development through cross-border cooperation

Since its birth, the Tatra Euroregion has achieved considerable success - it has initiated and participated in many cultural and sporting events, which used to be permanent annual

fixtures, such as “Euroregion Without Borders”, Slovak Culture Days in Poland, Polish Culture Days in Slovakia, the Feast of Shepherds in Upper Orava, the Border Culture Festival in Spišská Vatra, the O Euroregion Cup Table Tennis Tournament, the Slovak-Polish Economic Forum, the Slovak-Polish Environment Forum, the “Tatras” Euroregion Cities Forum and a mirror project for the construction of houses in Slovak-Polish meetings which take place in Kežmarok and Nowy Targ ([Euroregión “Tatry”, 2007](#)).

“Euroregion Without Borders” was a series of open-air events organized by the Euroregion from 1997 to 2003, which took place in border municipalities at a time when no one had imagined that both countries would be members of the European Union. The anticipating slogan and the idea of the Goral (the Gorals, also known as the Highlanders, are an indigenous ethnographic or ethnic group primarily found in their traditional area of southern Poland, northern Slovakia and in the region of Cieszyn Silesia) festivities, as well as many other Euroregion events, preceded the historic changes, which culminated in the symbolic sawing of the border barriers at midnight on 20th and 21st December 2007, when citizens of both countries celebrated the two countries' entry into the Schengen area (European Territorial Tatras Cooperation Group, 2016).

A pioneering project which has been held by the Euroregion since 2004 is the Meeting of Seven Cultures at the Polish-Slovak Border, which innovatively and comprehensively presents and rediscovers a common tangible and intangible multicultural heritage which has been renewed for centuries by Poles, Slovaks, Germans, Russians and the Roma (Roma are ethnic group originally from Northern India who travelled to and from many different places and eventually settled down in Europe and North America) ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej Tatry, 2016](#)).

Another important project has been the Forum of Cities in the Tatra Euroregion. The main goal of this joint project, which was initiated by the mayor of Zakopane, has been to show the eagerness and effort to create a space for cooperation so that international cooperation could be created and financed from an economic perspective for 2014-2020. It has also been a space for presenting good practices in the field of fundraising and project implementation on both the Polish and Slovak sides. The forum has been attended by representatives of Polish and Slovak municipalities as well as economic and environmental organizations. The conference launched a cooperation between Poland and Slovakia for joint activities related to ecology and spatial arrangement ([Mesto Vysoké Tatry, 2014](#)).

An important role in building cross-border cooperation takes place by implementing small projects under the motto “People for People”, based on direct relations between residents on either side of the border which is financed by European Union assistance programs intended for cross-border cooperation, thanks to the Union of the Tatra Euroregion in Nowy Targ. Thanks to these funds, 270 micro-projects have gone ahead since 1998, with the total amount exceeding 5,000,000 euros. Among the micro-projects, visitor and educational trails are being created, publications made and maps, music CDs, films, websites and mobile applications created. Their aim is to motivate the inhabitants of even the smallest municipalities, which are often far from city centres, by involving children, young people, the elderly and often the disabled. Hundreds of partners helped set up the projects and thousands of border residents and visitors took part in the events ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej Tatry, 2016](#)).

EGTC TATRY is behind the projects “Improving the quality of cross-border education” and “Strengthening the cross-border effectiveness of cooperation between local governments”. The result of the former was more than 200 people who improved their qualifications by doing a series of 10 courses, which included training for employees of Polish and Slovak

municipalities, Polish and Slovak language courses and an interactive e-business and e-marketing course. The micro-project went ahead between 2017 and 2018 thanks to funds from the Interreg V-A Poland - Slovakia Program and the state budget by way of the Tatra Euroregion. These activities enabled border residents to supplement the professional qualifications necessary so that cross-border events could happen and new competencies adapted to the labour market could be acquired. The result of the latter project "Strengthening the cross-border effectiveness of local government cooperation" was the development of mechanisms to strengthen the cross-border effectiveness of local governments on the Polish-Slovak borders and strengthen the role of EGTC TATRY, which contributed to expanding local government partnerships. The project also included creative workshops that made it possible for practical skills to be acquired due to high-quality international cooperation ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej TATRY, 2018](#)).

3.2. Euroregion development via sustainable tourism development

Thanks to its activities, the Tatra Euroregion contributes to preserving the common cultural and natural heritage of the border areas and creates conditions for exchanging experiences and information from all areas of Euroregion territorial development ([Ferenčák, 2018](#)).

In the program Interreg V-A Poland-Slovakia 2007-2013, a publication was created, which deals with a brief description of the history of individual towns and villages. It also pays attention to unique cultural and historical monuments, open-air museums, indoor museums and art galleries. It includes a number of monuments which are UNESCO-listed, national cultural ones, urban reserves and folk architecture reserves. The cultural-historical potential is extremely rich. Folklore traditions are preserved and maintained in the form of songs, costumes, dances and dialects. Traditional handicraft production and a number of regularly organized cultural and social events play an important role. The latest output of the microproject is a documentary film presenting folk crafts of the Slovak-Polish border within the territory of the Tatra Euroregion, called "Remeslá pod Tatrami", which is dedicated to the production of traditional Goral clothing, musical instruments and fabric production ([Euroregión "Tatry", 2013](#)).

One of the activities of the next program, V-A Poland-Slovakia 2014–2020, was the publication of the Euroregion yearbook. 24 Slovak and Polish cities presented little-known cultural and natural monuments in the form of papers at the Forum of Cities of the Tatras Euroregion in 2017. Subsequently, the papers were prepared for a special edition of the yearbook. This task achieved a specific goal: dissemination of knowledge among residents and tourists on the topic of the natural and cultural values of the Tatra Euroregion. The aim of the forum was to present the 24 Polish and Slovak member cities belonging to the Euroregion and their little-known cultural and natural values. Participants had the opportunity to get to know the natural and cultural attractions that were in the Euroregion. Another activity of sustainable tourism in the program was an exhibition entitled "Euroregion Tatry through the eyes of children", realized within the microproject "The role of Euroregion Tatry in spreading the cultural heritage of the Polish - Slovak border" ([Euroregion "Tatry", 2017](#)).

Protecting and developing the natural and cultural heritage of the cross-border area was also a priority of the project "High Tatras by the way", which ran from 2017 to 2018. It was aimed at promoting the Tatra region in a different way to merely publishing printed promotional materials, by instead using the tools of long-distance communication, namely the

Internet and mobile applications, to develop tourism on both sides of the High Tatras ([Mesto Vysoké Tatry, 2018](#)).

Another initiative supporting the protection and development of the natural and cultural heritage of the cross-border area was "Zakopane - City of the High Tatras - Tatra cycling routes", which was carried out between 2018 and 2022. This involved improving and extending the existing cross-border cycling route, a historical-cultural-natural route around the Tatras. After analysing the needs that exist on both sides of the border, the partners have recognized the need to bring the natural and cultural heritage of Zakopane and High Tatras (city) closer together by creating new opportunities for visitors and residents to be enticed into exploring other popular areas. The plan is to enable cyclists to ride to the most attractive sights of both countries, Zakopane with the cable car in Kuźnia and the ski jump at Wielkiej Krokwi in Poland and the Belianska Cave and the cable car to Lomnický štít on the Slovak side. This will also allow visitors to reach the Tatra National Park by bike from both sides of the border and the opportunity to use its trams and cable cars (after storing bicycles at the railway stations). The aim of both routes is to promote the natural and cultural heritage of all the Tatra National Park. The connection of this route with Velo Dunajec provides an ideal opportunity to complete the entire route around the Tatras and connect Zakopane with the High Tatras ([Mesto Vysoké Tatry, 2021](#)).

EGTC TATRY is behind the sustainable development of the region with the projects "Miracle World of Peatlands of the Polish-Slovak Border" and "Museums on Rails". Part of the first project was to create a multimedia map of peatlands, microscope sites for experiments and simulators as interactive exhibits that allow peatlands to be discovered using all the senses. The exhibitions are located in two cultural heritage sites restored as part of the initiative, in a more than 100-year-old wooden building in Chochołów, Poland (which is on the UNESCO list) and in a Renaissance parish at Orava Castle in Slovakia. In the second project, an exposition dedicated to the history of narrow-gauge railways and the use of natural raw materials in three reconstructed wagons of ancient narrow-gauge railways was organised ([Europejskie Ugrupowanie Współpracy Terytorialnej TATRY, 2018](#)).

The Historical-Cultural-Natural Trail in the Tatras project is an extensive cross-border project, which began in 2004 with the Tatra Euroregion as a result of long-term cooperation between Polish and Slovak border self-governments. As an overview, it includes the construction of a 250-km long loop around the Tatras with cycling, skiing, educational and cross-country trails. Its main idea is to make the area's unique cities, exceptional local landscapes and cultural, historical and natural distinctiveness on both sides of the border accessible, owing to the fact that it is currently slightly or extremely limited ([Euroregión "Tatry", 2020](#)).

Upon analysing the indicators of sustainable tourism development and cooperation, which serve as a driving tool for the Euroregion's development, we can argue that on both sides of said location, sustainable development is being striven for. In order for this trend to continue in the right direction, any new accommodation capacity that emerge must be strictly monitored as the ratio of overnight stays to accommodation capacity and tourism intensity is currently unsustainable. Accommodation capacity is not used enough, which means that there is a surplus. Despite this, even with the current use of accommodation capacity (number of overnight stays) there are negative consequences for the environment in these locations. As the values of the ratio between accommodation capacity (beds available) to residents and the density of accommodation facilities are currently optimal, we do not consider it necessary to reduce accommodation capacity; rather the focus should be on how to use them more efficiently and more frequently. Cooperation in the Euroregion contributes to its sustainable

development, as joint activities and projects ensure a better life for residents and employees working in public administration and tourism. Cooperation also helps the cultural and natural environment improve as projects focus on educating residents, employees, and visitors in this area, as well as on activities related to the sustainable development of the region.

4. CONCLUSION

Euroregions have grown in importance in recent decades and cooperation in them clearly ensures this. For the rising mobility of the population and the development of society, there should be a focus on sustainability. Undoubtedly, tourism is one of the most critical factors for improving the regions, but despite this, academics do not pay much attention to this. The aim of this paper has been to identify whether the development of tourism in the Euroregion will be sustainable in the future. With an analysis of the destination life cycle, we discovered that the Slovak part of the Euroregion is currently in the growth stage, while the Polish part is already in the consolidation stage. Along with the analysis of sustainable tourism development indicators, we have been able to propose recommendations for further development in the Euroregion in order for it to be sustainable. These measures include controlled construction of additional accommodation facilities and a greater focus on the use of existing capacities.

Given the success of the projects organized in the framework of cooperation between both countries in the Euroregion, we propose continuing to support and create more of them as they contribute to its sustainable development with regard to the local population and the environment. Jointly accepted initiatives and the exchange of experiences are also supported thanks to them, their implementation contributing to the social and economic development of the Euroregion and to building the foundations of the region's integration by establishing personal and institutional relations.

Limitations: This study examines the development of the selected Euroregion and its possibilities for future sustainable development in the conditions of tourism, based on secondary data. To discover more about the topic, empirical research will be necessary.

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