

171 Monitoring of tourist traffic during the SARS-CoV-19 pandemic in the Tatra National Park, Poland

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Introduction

The Tatra National Park is the fifth largest national park in Poland with the area of 211 km². Any kind of human activities is limited to the 275 km of tourist trails and specially designed areas for hiking, skiing or climbing. Over the years the total number of tourist visiting the park has been gradually growing. However in 2020 with the outbreak of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic it might seemed that the total number of tourists could decrease due to the temporary restrictions of traveling to the other cities and closure of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants. The borders were also temporary closed. For short period of time even the Tatra National Park was closed, at the beginning only for tourists outside Zakopane and surrounding villages but later also for local residents. The aim of this research is to present the observation of tourist traffic in 2020 during the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic and comparison to the year 2019.

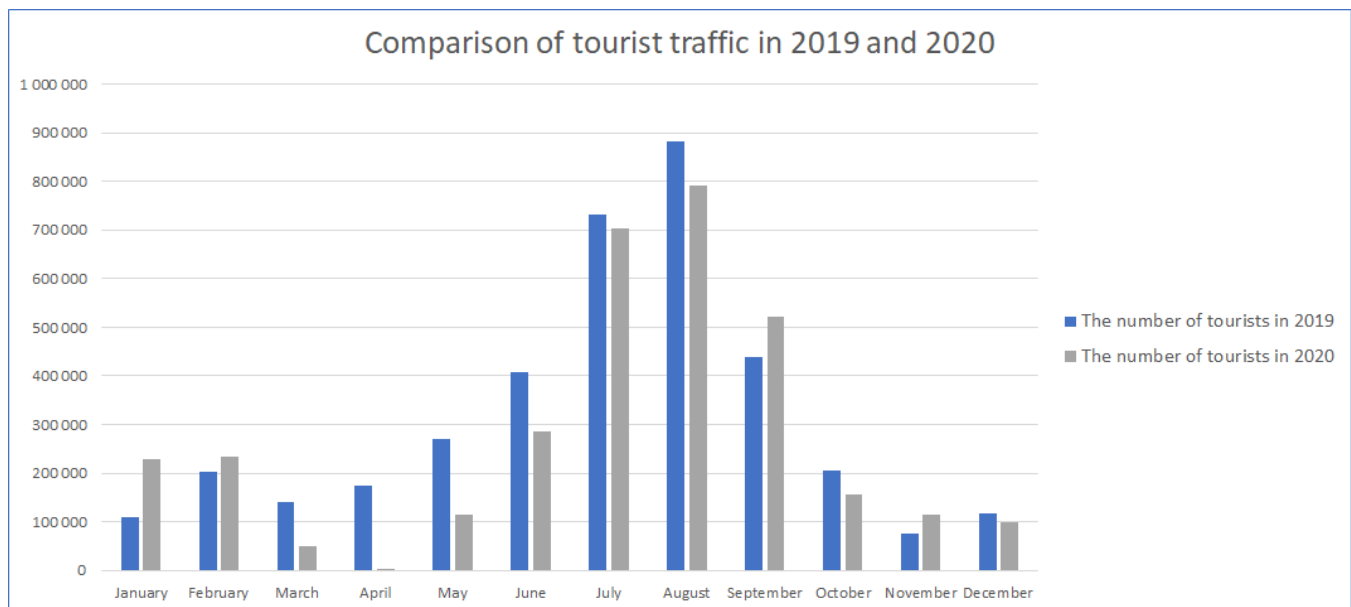
Methods

In the Tatra National Park information about the tourist traffic are mainly obtain both from tickets sold in ticket selling points situated at the entrance

to the valleys and tickets sold online. However during the lockdown in March and April of 2020 tickets were not sold because park was open just for the citizens of Zakopane and the surrounding villages who are exempt from park entrance fees. This is why for that period the amount of local residents visiting Tatra National Park was assumed by the park rangers. For short period of time the area of TNP was closed also for local residents without exceptions and tourist traffic has been entirely ceased. When the restrictions were eased, four small valleys have been opened for both tourists and locals. In two of them (Białego and Strążyska Valleys) the number of tourists was obtained from ticket points, while from Ku Dziurze and Za Bramką Valley from installed camera traps. During the lockdown also information about the illegal human activities were monitored by means of camera traps. In addition to that, for the whole year camera traps were installed in different time and locations to assess the number of illegal human activities.

Results

Data obtained from sold tickets in 2020 showed that the total number of tourist was only a slightly lower



than in 2019 - 3 301 895 and 3 758 131, respectively. Closed ski slopes almost all winter have made ski touring an increasingly popular winter sport. This is why despite of the short winter season the total number of ski tourists in 2019 and 2020 was quite similar - 10545 and 9002, respectively. Significantly smaller amount of tourist was observed from 13 of March till 2 April of 2020 when TNP was open only for citizens of Zakopane and surrounding villages. The number of hikers was about 6280 and ski tourists - 2074. To compare, the number of tourists in 2019 was much higher 99 587, but the number of ski tourists was quite similar - 3 365. From 3 to 21 of April Tatra National Park was closed for all without exceptions.

Since 22 of April till 3 of May 2020, when the restrictions were eased four small valleys were opened for both local residents and tourists. The amount of tourists from two valleys was gathered from ticket points: Białego Valley - 1 592 (comparing to 3405 in 2019), Strążyska Valley – 2 839 (comparing to 9720 in 2019). In two valleys without ticket points, camera traps were installed and following numbers of tourists were observed: Ku Dziurze Valley – 2256, Za Bramką Valley – 1759. Additionally, 9 camera traps were installed from 3 of April to 3 of May to monitor the number of visitors on temporary closed tourist trails in different locations around the park. During that time 862 people were observed. In the spring months, the significant difference in visitor numbers was due to government restrictions on education. May and June are the months most often chosen for school trips. Morskie Oko Lake and Kościeliska Valley are then besieged by school groups every year. There were no school trips in 2020, which resulted in fewer number of tourists. In May 2019, 53 482 tourists visited Kościeliska Valley, and in 2020 four times less – 11 442. A similar situation took place at the ticket point at Palenica Białczańska (entrance point for trail leading to Morskie Oko Lake), where these numbers were as follows: May 2019 - 71 297, May 2020 - 22 643. In June 2020 in these two locations there were over 63 000 tourists less than in 2019.

The highest number of tourists in 2020 was observed in winter months - January and February - 462 585 and in summer months - from June to September - 2 303 331. In the 2019 at the same

periods of time the number of tourists was 312 216 and 2 460 867, respectively. Not only the total number of visitors in 2020 was high but also the number of illegal human activities was enormous and reached 4833 people (which was almost three times more than in 2019).

Conclusions

Despite the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic outbreak in 2020, the total number of tourist was only 456 236 less than in 2019. The reason for this situation might be temporary closure of borders which encouraged tourist to more willingly choosing Tatra National Park as a holiday destination. In 2020 only in those months when restrictions were announced and the area of TNP was temporary closed, the number of tourist was much smaller than in 2019. When it comes to other months, this number was quite similar, especially in the summer months. An extremely negative phenomena observed in 2020 was the number of illegal human activities almost three times higher than in 2019. It was especially noticeable in the winter, when ski tourists activities were observed in many places out of the marked trails. To sum up, despite the outbreak of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic in 2020, Tatra National Park was eagerly visited by tourist.