

# PREFERENCE FOR DOMESTIC OFFER IN TOURISM AMONG STUDENTS IN CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

**Michał Żemła**

Katowice School of Economics, Poland

**Adam R. Szromek**

Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice, Poland

**ABSTRACT:** Domestic tourism remains a very interesting and big part of tourism global phenomenon being at the same time rather unknown and not often researched. The research note presents the attitude of two European Union member countries inhabitants – Poland and the Czech Republic and the aim is to present the scale of the preference for domestic tourism observed also in such countries. The main research question was if tourists are eager to evaluate domestic offer more preferably than the ones from abroad. The verification was made on the basis of simple research conducted among students from the Czech Republic and Poland. The results of the study revealed that in each case Czech respondents valued their country higher than the Polish ones. Also Poland scored higher when evaluated by the Polish respondents than by the Czech ones in four kinds of tourism. Additionally, evaluations made by Polish and Czech respondents regarding other countries are very similar. Most of detected differences were statistically important. Potential reasons for the detected situation are discussed. These are, among the others, knowledge of domestic offer, language barrier and tradition. **Keywords:** domestic tourism, Poland, Czech Republic.

## INTRODUCTION

Domestic tourism remains a very interesting and big part of tourism global phenomenon-being at the same time rather unknown and not often researched (Cater, 2004, p. 489). Our knowledge on domestic tourism worldwide is limited also due to the organization

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**Michał Żemła PhD** is an Associate Professor of Marketing and the Head of Tourism Department, Katowice School of Economics, Faculty of Tourism and Health Promotion. Author's email: [michalzemla@gazeta.pl](mailto:michalzemla@gazeta.pl). **Adam R. Szromek**, PhD Eng, is an Associate Professor of Tourism Economy in Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organisation and Management in Zabrze (Poland). Author's email: [szromek@polsl.pl](mailto:szromek@polsl.pl)

of international tourism statistics (Jansen-Verbeke and Spee, 1995). The most cited statistical data compendium on tourism presented by UNWTO deals only with international tourism which is justified by the technical possibility as well as by economic importance of international tourism movement (Pearce, 1989). Also international tourism is often perceived as having much bigger economic importance, which might lead in several cases to the situation in which the importance of domestic tourism is ignored (Wang and Qu, 2004). Another effect of this focus on international tourism is an existence of a big gap in the scientific knowledge on domestic tourism. This knowledge is often anecdotal and based on common observations. According to Page, domestic tourism remains the dominant form of activity in terms of the volume of traffic (Page, 2004, p. 149). Common observation allows to state that there are numerous destinations worldwide depending much more on domestic tourism demand than on the international one. This refers mainly to remote areas, but also to many big resorts and cities. Also, the situation is different in different countries. The bigger country and the more isolated from the outside, the bigger is importance of domestic tourism. This situation was mirrored in Bigano et al (2007) research which revealed that the top four destinations for domestic tourism are in the USA (California, Florida, Texas and New York), followed by Sichuan and Beijing in China and Madhya Pradesh in India and the rest of the top 25 is mostly China, India and the USA. This could be the reason why scientific research on domestic tourism is mostly concentrated on countries like China (Wen, 1997; Wu, Zhu and Xu, 2000), USA (Witt, Newbould and Watkins, 1992), Japan (Ehrentraut, 1992) or Australia (Huybers, 2003; Athanasopoulos and Hyndman, 2008). European Union combined of many, usually not big countries with extremely low barriers for travelling abroad could be treated as the opposite case (Jansen-Verbeke and Spee, 1995). But also in Europe situation is differentiated in different places. According to Bigano et al. (2007) the west of England and Wales, the Atlantic coast of France, northern Germany and Bavaria are the most important destinations for domestic tourists in Europe, while Krete, Mallorca and North Netherlands attract much more international tourists than domestic ones.

The paper presents the attitude of two European Union member countries inhabitants – Poland and the Czech Republic and the aim is to present the scale of the preference for domestic tourism observed also in such countries.

Even though there are some differences in the size of the country and natural conditions between Poland and the Czech Republic, domestic tourism plays an important role in both countries. According to the data gathered by Polish Main Statistical Office ([www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl))

and Institute of Tourism in Warsaw ([www.intur.com.pl](http://www.intur.com.pl)) the level of participation in tourism of Poles is about 50% while only about 15% participate in outbound trips. The difference between those numbers presents the scale of domestic tourism. Similarly, according to the Czech Statistical Office ([www.czso.cz](http://www.czso.cz)) the number of domestic tourist trips is almost four times bigger than the number of outbound trips of citizens of the Czech Republic.

## DOMESTIC TOURISM AND CONDITIONS OF ITS DEVELOPMENT

Tourist's decision on participating in domestic or international tourism is influenced by many different factors which might be different in different countries. In islanders countries like Australia, New Zealand or Ireland there are natural constraints to travel abroad. In other countries like China there might be political inhibitors of international tourism demand. Also smaller countries have more international departures (Bigano et al., 2007). People living in big countries with differentiated landscape have fewer reasons to travel abroad, as they can find tourism attractions of many kinds inside their country. This is definitely true regarding USA or Canada, but also France or Italy. According to Bigano et al. (2007) countries with larger and richer populations have more domestic tourists. Another factor is connected with national policy. The perfect example can be found in France where within social policy domestic holiday trips are supported.

Apart from more general factors connected with all or many inhabitants of the country, an important role is also played by an individual, mostly psychological and sociological factors. The language barrier, attitude to foreigners and national heritage, lack of knowledge about attractions located abroad might additionally stimulate domestic demand. Usually, also perception of personal safety is connected with domestic tourism. However Israeli tourists might be pointed out as the opposite example. Because of low level of safety in their country they much more easily accept risk during their holidays than tourists from Western countries and visit much more often places perceived by other tourists as unsafe (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011).

Finding the proper balance between domestic and international tourism movement is important for tourist destinations. The difference between them is visible not only from the demand side point of view. Simple substitution of one of them by the other one is not possible as their preferences are differentiated (Bigano et al., 2007). International tourism tends to concentrate in the most

important and most famous tourist sites like big cities (Bigano et al., 2007), well-known mass resorts while domestic tourists much more often visit remote destinations with attractions of moderate importance (Athanasopoulos and Hyndman, 2008). The same situation can be observed regarding tourism facilities. Tourists from abroad usually look for high standard hotels while domestic ones more often chose not categorized and smaller facilities. However, the situation remains changeable between particular countries.

## THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The main research question was if tourists are eager to evaluate domestic offer more preferably than the ones from abroad. The verification was made on the basis of simple research conducted among students from the Czech Republic and Poland. In both countries about 100 of students were questioned – in Poland it was 119 students of Katowice School of Economics ([www.gwsh.pl/kse](http://www.gwsh.pl/kse)) and in the Czech Republic 100 students of Mendel University in Brno ([www.mendelu.cz](http://www.mendelu.cz)). Statistical error of study sample is equal to 6.5% at a confidence level of 0.95. In the questionnaire students were provided with a short list of chosen countries from Central Europe, namely: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Their task was to point and put in order five best countries from the list to spend five kinds of holidays: water relaxation (typical 3S tourism), summer mountain holidays, winter mountain holidays, rural and wine tourism and SPA and wellness stays.

The authors used the tests of significance to research the difference between means from two separate groups of subjects (nations). In the paper the non-parametric test Mann-Whitney (Wilcoxon, 1945) is used, because the sample data is not normally distributed (Shapiro and Wilk, 1965; Corder and Foreman, 2009), and it cannot be transformed to a normal distribution by means of a logarithmic transformation. The significance level for using hypothesis tests is a value for which a P-value less than or equal to is considered statistically significant. P-values in this research is 0.05.

Results of the survey are presented in figures 1-5. It is easy to observe that evaluations made by Polish and Czech respondents are very similar and Poland and the Czech Republic are exceptions. In each case Czech respondents valued their country higher than the Polish ones. Also Poland scored higher when evaluated by the Polish respondents than by the Czech ones in four kinds of tourism. Almost in all cases p is significant for Poland and for the Czech Re-

public and is not significant for other countries. However, the difference in the evaluation of rural tourism and enotourism offers in Poland between the Poles and the Czechs is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.8044$ ). *It is worth noticing that* even in few examples in which  $p$  is statistically significant for countries other than Poland and the Czech Republic, the difference is not important for the general interpretation of the results. This is the case of summer mountain tourism in Austria. Even though Polish respondents evaluated it lower than the Czech ones, still Austria holds its position of destination number one also regarding Polish evaluations. Similarly, significant  $p$  can be found in the evaluation of Croatia as a summer mountain destination. Still when evaluated both by Polish and Czech respondents its score was very low.

Analyzing summer mountain holidays significant similarity in evaluation of particular countries and big differences in perception of Polish offer might be pointed out. Poles evaluated the Polish offer much higher than Czechs (fig. 1).

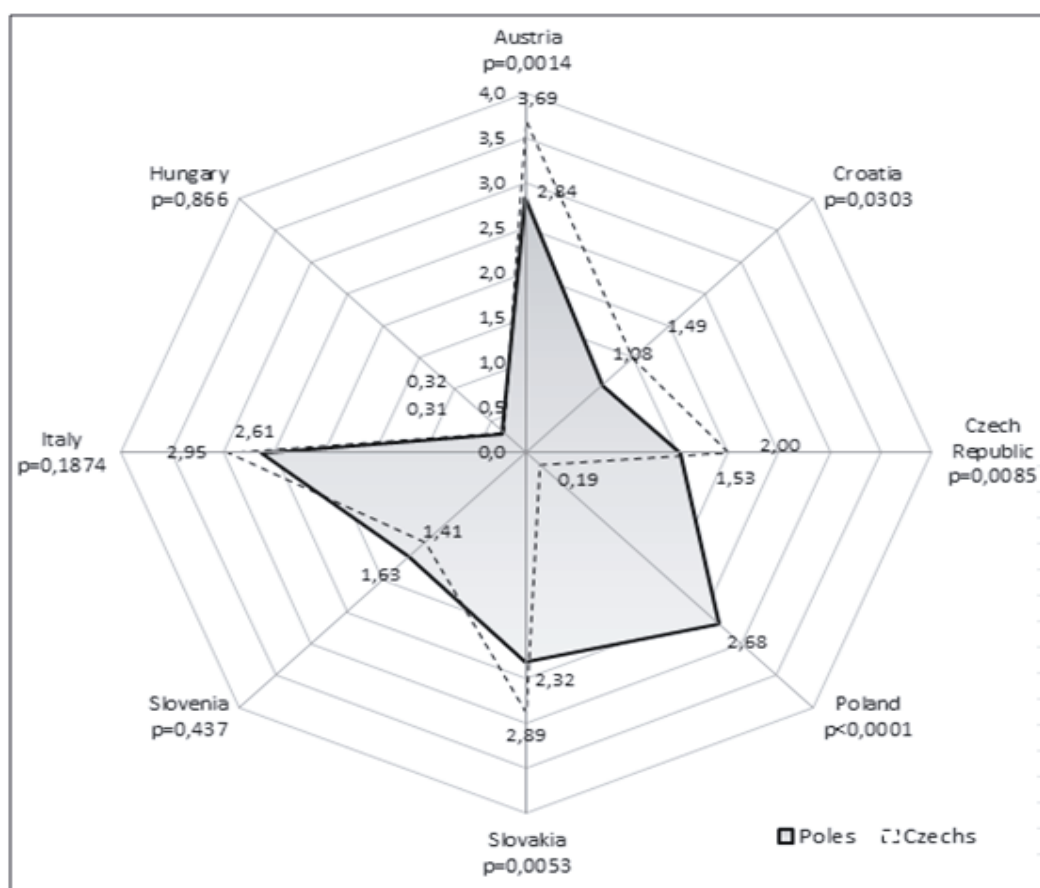
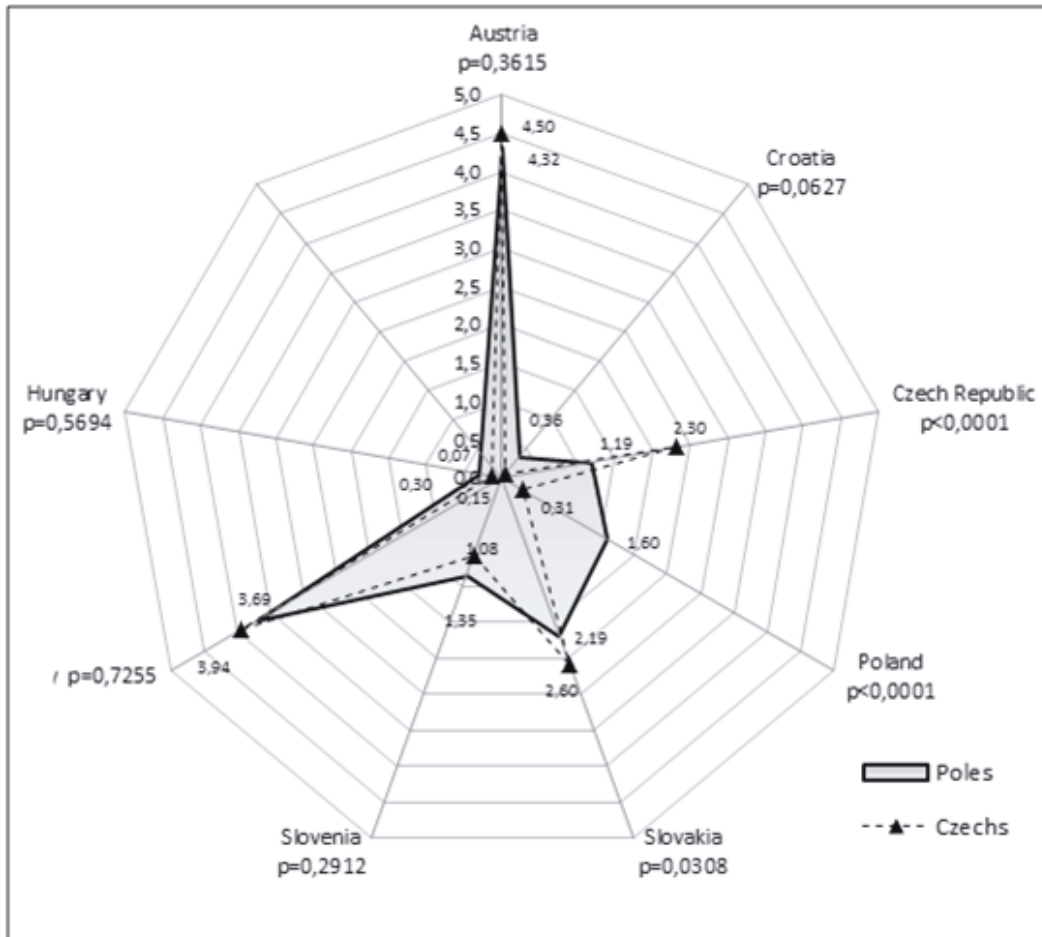


Figure 1. Comparison of country assessments by respondents in Poland and Czech Republic in the offer of summer mountain hiking



Similar situation might be observed in the case of winter sports – Czechs evaluated the offer of their country higher than Poles as well as Poles appreciated more the Polish offer than Czechs did (fig. 2).



**Figure 2: Comparison of country assessments by respondents in Poland and Czech Republic in the offer of winter sports**

Water relaxation offer has bigger differentiation of evaluations that it was observed above. The highest ranks were given to Italy and Croatia. Differentiation is observed in the case of Polish, Czech and Austrian offer: Czechs evaluated higher Czech and Austrian offer while Poles evaluated Polish offer several times better than it was perceived by Czechs (fig. 3).

The biggest differences in evaluations might be noticed in the case of SPA tourism. Czechs appreciated much the offer of Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic, while Poles gave the priority to the offer of Italy, Croatia and Poland (fig. 4).

Rural tourism was evaluated in the two countries quite differently and in different way than it was observed in the other forms of tour-

ism. Poles appreciated more the offer of Hungary, Italy, Croatia and Slovenia. The Czechs evaluated higher the offer of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Austria. Interesting aspects here is almost identical evaluation of Polish offer (fig. 5).

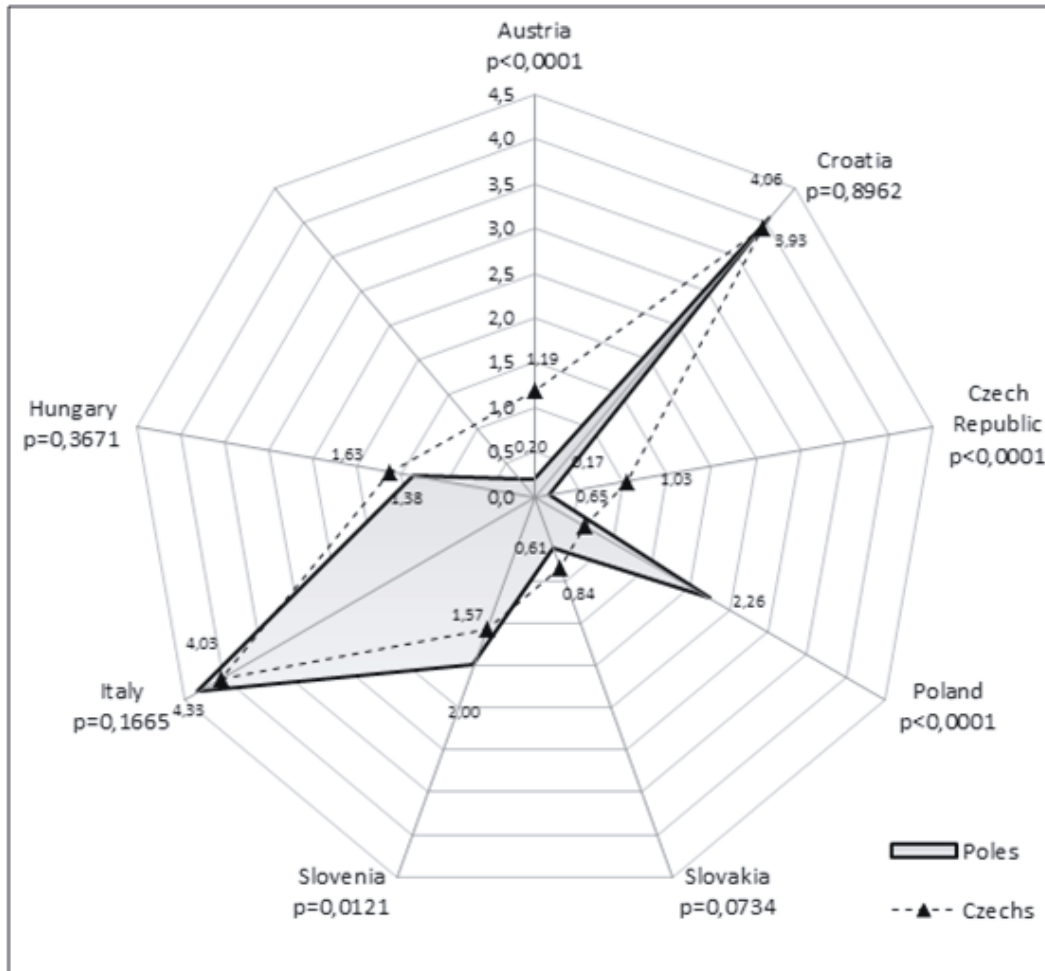
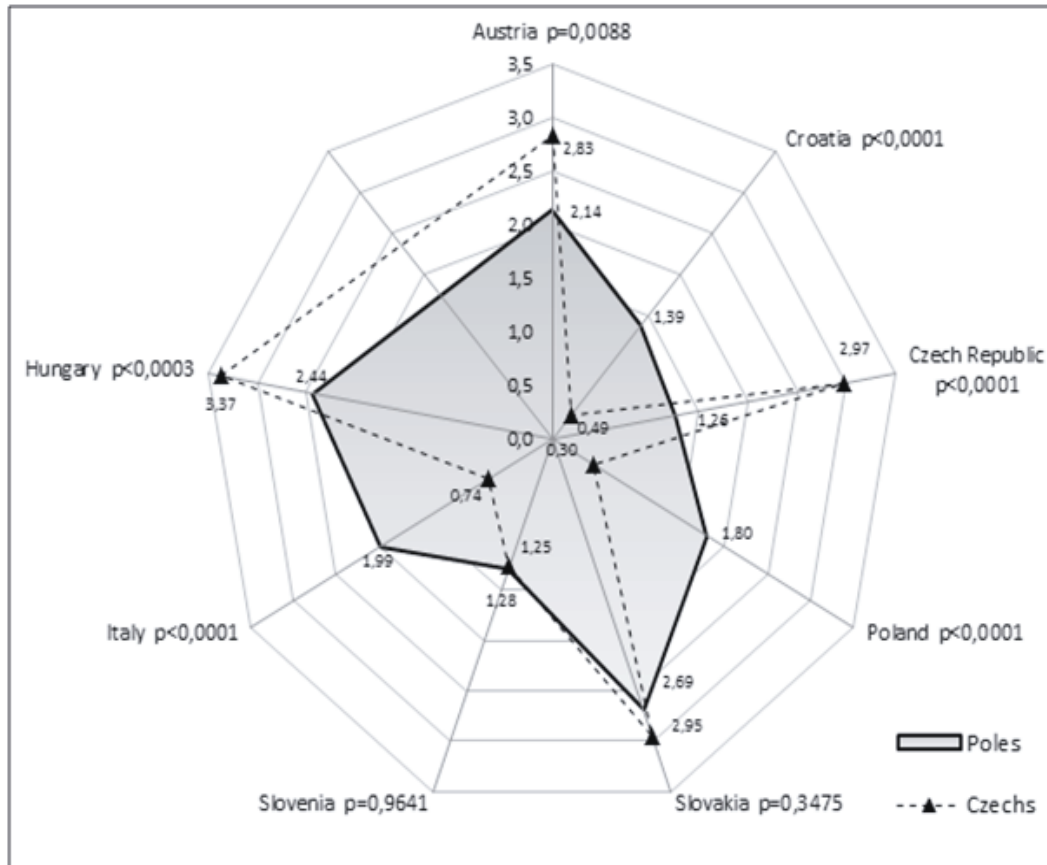


Figure 3: Comparison of country assessments by respondents in Poland and Czech Republic in offer of holidays on the water



**Figure 4: Comparison of country assessments by respondents in Poland and Czech Republic in the offer of health resorts and spas**

Summing up, it is possible to state that the differences in the evaluations made by Poles and Czechs are especially visible regarding summer and winter mountain holidays and water relaxation. Somehow different are evaluations of countries regarding rural tourism and SPA and wellness tourism. In these two examples, almost all countries are evaluated differently by Polish and Czech respondents and the p coefficient usually has very low values. Still, the preference for the domestic offer is visible, and the only exception is the score given by Czech respondents to Polish rural tourism offer, which is almost the same like a similar mark given by Poles. Very probable explanation of this part of results might be found in the nature of the research sample. Young people answering questions probably had much more experience in mass forms of tourism and less knowledge about kinds of tourism connected often with families with children (rural tourism) or with elderly people (SPA and Wellness). This could lead to more accidental answers. This remark is partially justified by the standard deviation which is much higher for the evaluation of rural tourism and SPA and wellness than for winter sports and water relaxation (table 1).



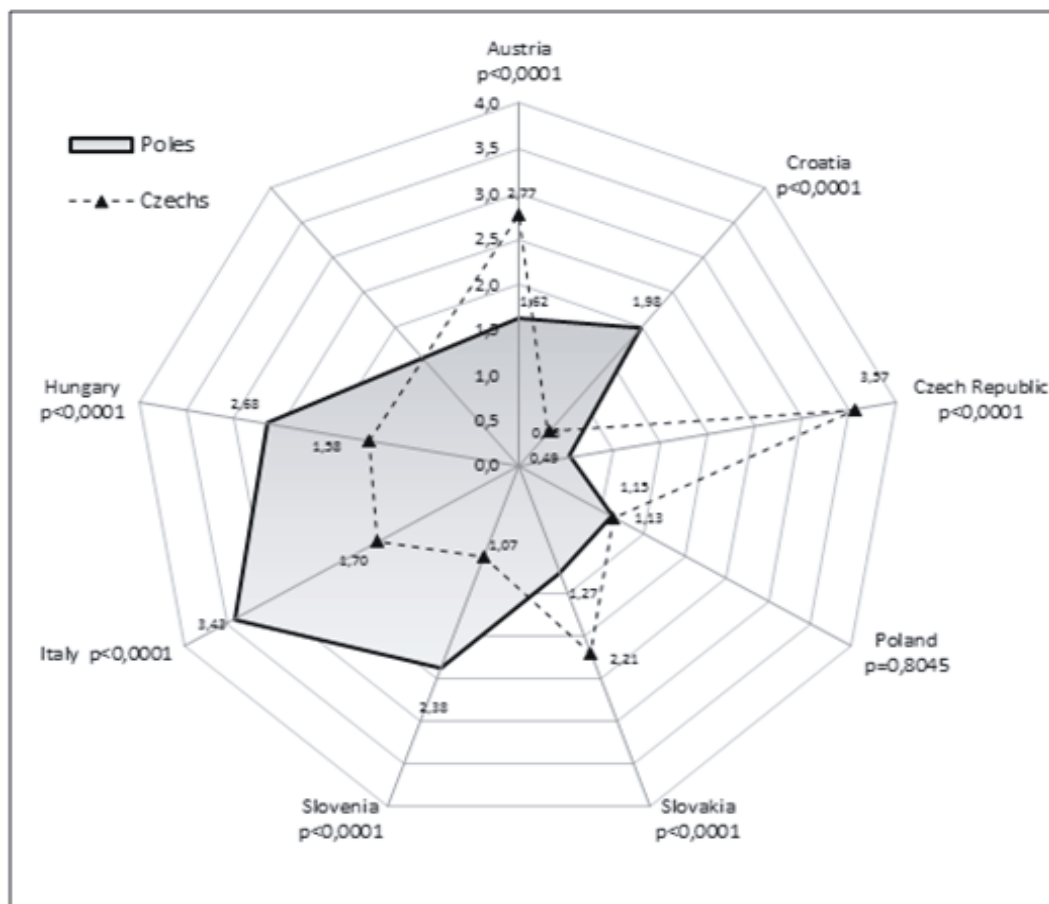


Figure 5: Comparison of country assessments by respondents in Poland and Czech Republic in the offer of rural tourism and enotourism

Table 1. Standard deviations for the evaluation of domestic offers

	Summer mountains	Winter mountains	Water relaxation	Spa	Rural and wine tourism
Austria	1,89	1,12	0,86	2,04	1,71
Croatia	1,70	0,94	1,10	1,78	1,60
Czech Republic	1,66	1,32	0,73	1,54	1,14
Poland	1,70	1,31	1,07	1,71	1,61
Slovakia	1,61	1,27	1,07	1,75	1,45
Slovenia	1,66	1,39	1,20	1,48	1,72
Italy	1,80	1,47	1,01	1,85	1,85
Hungary	0,90	0,84	1,09	1,94	1,75
Mean	1,61	1,21	1,01	1,76	1,60

Presented results justify statements that, at least in case of Polish and Czech tourists, preferable treatment of the domestic tourism offer is very probable. An interesting question is though, what the reason is for such a situation. Looking for only emotional attachment to the do-

mestic products and that kind of “market patriotism” seems to be not satisfactory. Quite probably, there is no the single reason, but searching for a pack of them is necessary. Analyzing particular answers of respondents it is visible that offers which are known and often chosen by the citizens of the country were estimated very high. In the presented research, this could be the case of Croatia, very often visited by Czech tourists, which was, regarding its real tourism potential, overestimated by the Czech students. Most visits in Croatia by Czech tourists are connected with the sea relaxation, and high evaluation of Croatian attractiveness in regards of this product is obvious. Still, also other forms of tourism in Croatia were estimated highly, even surprisingly highly regarding winter sports. Oppositely, Slovenia visited rather rarely by both Polish and Czech tourists remains unknown and was probably the most underestimated country in the research when compared to the existing tourism potential. Definitely, domestic offer is one of, and probably, the best known offer for tourists. This is in accordance to the previous research which proved that tourists’ knowledge is a factor enhancing destination’s image (Milman and Pizam, 1989; Prebesen, 2007). The links between knowledge, image and market preference for domestic and other well-known offer might be also used for the interpretation of Slovak results in the presented research. Slovakia is a country commonly visited and relatively well known by Polish tourists. This was confirmed in the results. Still, in all cases results achieved by the Slovak offer were higher in the Czech Republic. This could be explained by the common Czechoslovak heritage and for the Czech citizens Slovakia is not “totally foreign” country.

Another interesting explanation of the preferable attitude to the domestic offer might be the language barrier. People might tend to stay in their own country as they are afraid of going abroad and being not understood. In the earlier research language barrier was detected to be one of the most important factors why Polish skiers do not ski abroad (Żemła, 2005). Looking from this perspective to the results, the presented research is interested because of two reasons. First, both questionnaires were distributed in post-communist countries where general knowledge of foreign languages is not very high. In this context we might treat the language barrier as an important factor explaining achieved results. Still when considering that the respondents were students whose knowledge of languages is supposed to be high, the importance of this factor seems to be much lower. Lack of a language barrier might be also used to explain the high results of Slovakia in research conducted in the Czech Republic.

Finally, the reason to spend holidays in own country might be an unspecified tradition or habit. It was also detected in the earlier cited research as an important reason for 35% of Polish skiers to ski in Po-

land (Żemła, 2005). Similar phenomenon might be observed also in the presented research, especially in the context of forms of mass tourism, namely water relaxation, winter and summer mountain holidays.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The topic of preference for domestic offer needs to be more researched in the future. Presented results were achieved somehow accidentally. The questionnaire was developed for a very different purpose which was the students' exercise in the field of international tourism marketing and the task was to promote Slovenia as a tourism destination in Poland and the Czech Republic. The choice of Slovenia as a researched destination influenced the list of researched forms of tourism and compared countries. The five chosen forms of tourism were stated as the most typical for Slovenian offer and might not be necessarily perceived as the most important ones for Poland and the Czech Republic. For example, for these two countries sightseeing trips and city breaks are very important and were not considered in the questionnaire. Also, the list of compared countries was developed as a list of potential competitors of Slovenia on Polish and Czech market. Besides these statements, one should notice that results achieved in the chosen researched countries and forms of tourism, especially summer and winter mountain holidays and water relaxation, which are very typical also for Poland and the Czech Republic, are so clear that there is no reason to assume that adding another form of tourism to the list would change the view radically.

Another direction of future research over this topic is its repetition on the bigger and more differentiated sample. A relatively small sample was projected mainly for the educational purpose, but still the level of statistical significance of the results is satisfactory. Also, the question is whether the population of students might be representative for the whole society. However, potential inconsistency between those two groups seems to be rather the point strengthening the conclusions presented in the paper, as students, especially students dealing with tourism, are supposed to be one of the most open and mobile groups in the society, which means that if students present such a strong preference for the domestic offer, this preference observed in the whole society would be even much stronger.

However, the main area of future research of the topic should be extending the survey into other, at least European, countries. Are Polish and Czech tourists different than those from other European countries? So far, no signs of the amplified preference for domestic tourism were found neither in scientific nor statistical research in those coun-

tries which indicates that similar conclusions like the presented ones in the paper, might regard many other countries.

SPA and wellness and rural tourism turned to be kinds of tourism difficult to estimate and rather unknown for students. It is easy to assume that many respondents have never participated in tourism of these kinds and their answers are to some extent accidental.

## CONCLUSION

Presented results proved that surveyed Polish and Czech students tend to evaluate the domestic offer preferably high. Both Polish and Czech students evaluated much higher the offer of their own country in comparison with students from the neighboring country. Important is the fact that small differences were observed in the examples of rural tourism and SPA tourism which are not very popular, especially among students, while huge differences and visible over-estimation of attractiveness of domestic offer appeared in the case of all mass forms of tourism popular also among young people like winter sports, summer holidays in mountains and water relaxation. Additionally, worth noticing is the fact that tourism offer of other countries, like Austria, Croatia or Slovenia were estimated by Polish and Czech students in a very similar way.

The nature of the sample and the small scale of research are important obstacles to build definite statement that tourists treat the domestic offer preferably in comparison to the one from foreign countries, still clearness of presented results and the fact that the survey was conducted among students who are supposed to be the most open, mobile and internationalized group in the society, indicates that similar phenomenon might be observed also in regard to other groups. Further research might also justify similar attitudes among other nationalities in Europe and worldwide as inhabitants of European Union might be rather supposed to be even less involved in domestic tourism than people from other continents. This assumption is even more probable considering results of Bigane et al (2007) research showing that Poland and the Czech Republic are rather similar to many other European Union countries (especially Germany, Great Britain or Italy) in proportion of domestic and outbound tourism while in other countries like USA, Brazil, India or China the share of domestic tourism traffic is even much higher.

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