

Article

Tourist Attractiveness of Rural Areas as a Determinant of the Implementation of Social Tourism of Disadvantaged Groups: Evidence from Poland and the Czech Republic

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to present the tourist attractiveness of rural areas as a factor of social tourism in Poland and the Czech Republic. The systematic literature review (SLR) research method was used to verify the aim. An extensive review of the literature has been made which has made it possible to present the importance of tourist attractiveness in the implementation of social tourism on the examples of Poland and the Czech Republic. This article presents a literature review and systematizes the terminology of social tourism. In addition, it shows the expectations and behavior of different groups of customers in the types and forms of social tourism. In the final part of the article the authors presented the opportunities and barriers to the development of social tourism in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Keywords: tourism attractiveness; determinants; tourism; social tourism; rural areas; region



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1. Introduction

Social tourism, also called tourism for all, has recently become very popular, and its essence is understood differently in different countries [1,2]. The beginnings of social tourism as a new phenomenon on the tourist market can be found in organizations established at the beginning of the 20th century in France and Switzerland. These entities specialized in organizing sports camps in the mountains and holiday camps for children from underprivileged families [3]. In the second half of the twentieth century, social tourism was an important segment of the tourism economy in many countries of the world, especially in European countries belonging to the so-called Eastern Bloc, which had had a socialist system imposed since the end of World War II. In those countries, social tourism was very widespread until the fall of communism and consisted in subsidizing tourist trips not only for socially excluded, poor and disabled people, but also for adults and healthy people. Thus, this type of tourism was practically related to the whole society. The indicated historical conditions related to the long tradition of social tourism development make the Eastern Bloc countries desirable objects of research. These countries include Poland and the Czech Republic, which is why the authors decided to discuss them.

Apart from historical determinants, the condition and need for development of social tourism is determined by such sociodemographic factors as: aging of societies, changes in the family model (from multigenerational to single-generational and incomplete), deteriorating living conditions of some social groups leading to their marginalization and

exclusion, progressing polarization of society (visible, among other areas, in income and lifestyle diversification), disappearance of the sense of solidarity and weakening of social integration. Among the cultural determinants, we can point to propensity for volunteering [4].

The aim of this study was to present the tourist attractiveness of rural areas as a factor favoring the implementation of social tourism in Poland and the Czech Republic. The article analyzes different perceptions and definitions of social tourism. The authors paid special attention to the importance of rural tourism attractiveness as a destination of social tourism practitioners. In the literature, the concept of tourist attractiveness is defined differently by researchers, and thus ambiguous. Therefore, the authors decided to compare various explanations of this formulation. The article also discusses the factors that determine it and the indicators used in its calculation. The authors explained the difference between the notion of “tourist attractiveness” and “tourist potential”. The attractiveness of rural tourism and the development of social tourism during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland and the Czech Republic were also characterized.

2. Materials and Methods

The current state of the research area is insufficient. Social and rural tourism research shows several deficits. Comparative studies of several Central and Eastern European countries have not been published in this area. In the last decade, case studies of social tourism in selected countries have not been presented in the literature. The presented papers did not comprehensively examine the area of social tourism. Most of them were partial studies focused on selected segments and regions. This article also extends the current state of knowledge by the relationship between social and rural tourism. In terms of time frame, the authors follow the current period of the COVID pandemic.

The authors analyze published articles and strategic documents at the national and European level. The SLR method (systematic literature review) was used to verify the objective. Presentation of the importance of tourism attractiveness in the development of social tourism on the example of the mentioned countries was possible thanks to an extensive literature review. The systematic literature review is structured to respond to the specific objectives of the article. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To compare approaches to the definition and research of social tourism in the Czech Republic and Poland.
- Define determinants and barriers to social tourism in the analyzed countries and present recommendations for the implementation of policy instruments.
- Analyze the tourist attractiveness of rural areas and the development of social tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The authors deepen the results and recommendations with personal experience and information obtained from interviews and consultations with representatives of public administration, travel agencies, accommodation facilities, and nonprofit organizations for the disabled (with managers of the travel agency Bezbatour, the LeHotels Group, the Czech Tourist Authority, the Ministry for Regional Development, the nonprofit organization Pestra, the representative of the capital city of Prague, etc.).

The performed analysis of the literature also organizes the terminology related to the research topic of social tourism, which has recently been gaining more and more practical importance and is gaining the attention of many scholars. This method is often used in social sciences [5–12]. It allowed the authors to collect and then present in a systematic and ordering way definitions of tourism attractiveness functioning in the literature, existing factors and indicators conditioning of tourist attractiveness, as well as to indicate important differences between tourist attractiveness and tourist potential. An attempt was also made to identify and synthetically organize the barriers and directions of social tourism development indicated by other researchers.

3. The Importance of Tourist Attractiveness in the Subject Literature

Tourist attractiveness as a concept cannot be defined unambiguously. The literature on the subject points out that tourist attractiveness is a relative idea because the variety of forms and types of tourism must be taken into account. When using this term, it is therefore necessary to define the specific form of tourism to which it refers [13].

It should also be emphasized that the tourist attractiveness of a particular place may be experienced differently by tourists than by entrepreneurs in the tourism industry. It also depends on the previous development and development potential of tourism in a specific place [14,15].

Tourist attractiveness can have three different meanings, which can be specified as follows [16]:

- Tourist attractiveness seen as a result of standardization and categorization;
- Tourist attractiveness seen as a valorization, using a specific research technique;
- Tourist attractiveness considered subjectively—a place can be assessed in terms of tourist attractiveness based on one's own worldview and experiences.

Due to the above-mentioned diversity of perceptions of tourist attractiveness, the authors decided to juxtapose several definitions of this concept from the literature. The aim is to examine the similarities and differences in how the concept of tourist attractiveness is perceived by different authors. The definitions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of tourism attractiveness according to selected authors.

Author and Year	Definition of Tourism Attractiveness
R. Seweryn, 2002 [17]	"[. . .] tourist attractiveness is manifested by the existence of a certain characteristic that attracts tourists to certain areas".
Z. Kruczek, 2011 [18]	"[. . .] tourist attractiveness is a subjective feeling of the importance of a given value by particular tourists. In this sense the same value can be attractive for one tourist, for another indifferent, and for another negative, discouraging. A tourist attraction should be treated as a carrier of tourist attractiveness".
W. Kurek, 2007 [19]	"Whether a specific fragment of space is attractive for tourism is determined, on the one hand, by objective natural or socio-cultural conditions existing within its area, and on the other hand, by its subjective perception and evaluation by participants of tourist traffic. Tourist attractiveness can be understood as the property of an area or locality resulting from a set of natural or non-natural features which arouse interest and attract tourists".
K. Mazurski, 2009 [20]	"criterion of tourist attractiveness of an area—quantitative saturation with tourist attractions [...] and their relative value, which include both sightseeing qualities and qualities in terms of complementary infrastructure".
I. Batyk, 2010 [21]	"Tourist attractiveness manifests itself in the presence of a unique feature, attracting to a given extent a particular kind of tourism, which should be considered comprehensively. This feature can be both natural and cultural landscape values".
I. Bąk, M. Matlegiewicz, 2010 [22]	"Tourist attractiveness of a region is understood as the property of an area characterized by a specific set of natural or non-natural features that are of interest to tourists. Tourist attractiveness is a subjective feeling. The geographical, social or cultural environment is not always an attraction for a tourist".
Z. Kruczek, 2005 [23]	"Tourist attractiveness is a multifaceted concept and should be considered comprehensively. It is determined by tourist attractions, transport accessibility and supply of services connected with development of visited areas. It is a concept integrating the elements that constitute the basis of tourism development, i.e., tourist attractions with the conditions of satisfying the needs of this traffic in the form of properly developed tourist infrastructure".
A. Rapacz, D. Jaremen, 2011 [24]	"Tourist attractiveness is a complex concept, not always unambiguous. An area, region, tourist destination or a specific object can be attractive to tourists. On the one hand, the tourist attractiveness of regions and tourist objects is determined by objective factors, such as the presence of natural and anthropogenic values or appropriate elements of tourist and paratourist infrastructure. On the other hand, the attractiveness of a given place is determined by the subjective perception of all these factors by tourists, investors and residents".
A. Nitkiewicz-Janowska, 2011 [25]	"Tourist attractiveness therefore means a set of features and tourist values of a given space that attract tourists and is a subjective value that is difficult to assess unequivocally".

Source: [17–25].

From the above definitions, we can see that their authors agree that tourist attractiveness cannot be clearly defined and that each tourist coming to a destination may perceive it differently. A place may be attractive for one tourist and not for another because it depends on what the tourist expects from the destination. These definitions also include information that tourist attractiveness consists of certain factors that determine it.

The above quoted explanations of the notion of tourist attractiveness show the variety in defining it, but the authors considered the key aspect to be the different feelings of each person, i.e., the subjectivity of tourist attractiveness. For one tourist, the tourist attractions offered by a given region may be attractive and make them decide to come to the destination, while for another, they may seem completely unattractive. The tourist's perspective—that is, the perception of those tourist values—is different and determines tourist attractiveness, which can be defined as a set of objectively characteristic features of the given area causing positive, negative or indifferent reception in the tourist.

3.1. Factors Conditioning Tourist Attractiveness

Tourist attractiveness describes the degree to which a destination, object or phenomenon attracts tourists to come to the area. Tourist attractiveness consists of several factors, more specifically [26]:

- Tourist values, which are one of the most important factors of a region's attractiveness for tourists. This notion consists of such elements as a set of goods given by nature, shaped by history and created by contemporaneity. Among tourist values, we can distinguish:
 - Recreational values;
 - Natural values;
 - Cultural values;
 - Specialized values.
- Tourist facilities (tourist infrastructure), which include tourist equipment that enables tourists to enjoy the benefits of their chosen destination. Tourism infrastructure can be divided into two groups:
 - Technical infrastructure (among others: catering facilities, accommodation base);
 - Social infrastructure (e.g., service offices, tourist information points) [26];
- Transport accessibility, which stimulates tourism development. This is a very important aspect of tourist attractiveness, since insufficient growth of means of transport prevents or limits the development of tourism [26].

Increasingly, among the above-mentioned tourist attractiveness factors, one more is pointed out—environmental pollution [26,27]. Tourists are much more attracted to places that offer a clean environment and access to nature [26].

In order to further clarify the concept, the authors have taken to discussing the factors that determine tourist attractiveness. The foundations of increasing the scale of participation in tourism and satisfying tourists' needs are tourist values, tourist facilities and communication accessibility, which constitute tourist attractiveness [19].

The first of the decisive elements influencing the attractiveness of an area of tourist reception discussed by the authors will be tourist values, which are defined as all features characterizing a given area that are the basis for encouragement and may be an impulse for a tourist to decide to visit that area. They are usually divided into natural, which refer to the natural environment, and anthropogenic (non-natural) [23].

Due to the classification criterion, however, they can be grouped in different ways, not only due to the origin of the values, distinguishing between natural and cultural, which were cited by the authors. Divisions have also been created which take into account the way values are used (i.e., functionality) and the dimension of the value [25].

Tourist resources are often identified with tourist values, but A. Kowalczyk considers resources to be a more extensive concept. The author points to the existence of potential tourism values, i.e., already existing natural and social features without a subjective point

of view, which only after being positively perceived by a tourist can be called a tourism value. Therefore, the subjective approach and reaction of the individual are emphasized at this stage [28].

According to the criterion of the origin of values, the object of a tourist's attention can be a natural or anthropogenic value. The first is counted among the parts of natural environment—that is, the surrounding nature. In the case of mass tourism, it will more often be the landscape itself, or rather its attractiveness; the mountains or the sea, while the participant of qualified tourism will focus on the possibility of practicing its forms in a given area. The uniqueness of the visited ecosystem, boulders, cave and grotto formations and landforms such as valleys are a group of examples of natural values which have been formed autonomously, i.e., without the influence of man. However, human interference is not a disqualifying factor from the group of natural values. With the help of human beings, botanical and zoological gardens, parks and museums gathering relics of biological nature have been created [19].

The sphere of non-natural values, in turn, usually includes all sociocultural values which would never exist without people and which are directly connected with human activity and creativity. They include, among others, archeological, ethnographic, art and biographical museums as well as places of religious worship, historical buildings and tradition centers. As the dominant form of anthropogenic values, monuments of architectural nature as well as construction techniques are considered because they arouse the greatest interest among tourists, thus distinguishing themselves by the largest number of visits. While discussing nonagricultural values, it is necessary to highlight the role of cultural and sport events. During them, an impressive number of tourists accumulates, resulting in a significant stimulation of tourist traffic [19].

Another criterion discussed by the authors for classifying values is their functionality. The following three groups can be distinguished [23]:

- Recreational values offering natural environment, contact with nature, favorable climate and limited presence of urban agglomerations;
- Sightseeing values relating to the sphere of culture and achievements related to social, material and spiritual culture;
- Specialized values allowing the realization of more advanced and targeted forms of tourism.

The second basic segment defining the attractiveness of an area, besides tourism values, is tourism infrastructure. According to the definition, it includes activities which are undertaken in order to guarantee the possibility of reaching the established destination or points of its travel, proper care of tourist values and their adaptation, and moreover, providing the tourist with conditions required for living and functioning. It is also characterized as the material base of tourism or its resources, and its main task is to bring about a situation in which the conditions to fulfill the tourist's needs are met. It includes such elements as accommodation, food and accompanying facilities [19].

The foundation of tourism infrastructure is its accommodation facilities. It provides the traveler with a place to stay in the area he is visiting. Within the framework of the accommodation part, we can encounter accommodation facilities for a greater number of tourists, but also separate, private accommodation [19]. Before expanding accommodation, location factors must be analyzed so that its development increases profits and does not disturb the existing spatial order. Proper planning of accommodation facilities results in benefits, providing new jobs for people living in the area, as well as escalation of the economy in its district [19].

In turn, the catering industry gathers points which are responsible for providing food to the tourist. It includes restaurants, cafes, bars and other eating places, but also all facilities where a tourist may purchase food products, i.e., stores [19]. Catering outlets may be located individually, but there are also situations in which the tourist has the opportunity to use them when using an accommodation facility [19]. According to O. Rogalewski, the

part responsible for supplying catering facilities, namely production, storage and transport resources, is also important [29].

Thanks to communication infrastructure, a tourist can move freely from A to B, reach their destination or change location within their range. Its main purpose is therefore to provide adequate communication accessibility, which includes, for example, railroad lines, various routes, appropriate road networks and even stops [19].

The accompanying facilities include all amenities for practicing various forms of recreation in a given area. It means that a tourist who wants to satisfy their needs for leisure and entertainment will use the offer of these facilities. Some of the facilities are built for the residents of the area, but at the same time, they are an important part of tourist life [29].

Z. Kruczek points out the different approaches to tourist values. In many countries, the term is rather equated with “tourist attraction”, which is not so easy and unambiguous to define, given that it includes a wide range of cultural and natural components. The interdependence between the tourist and site-specific information (such as signs or labels) can be considered a tourist attraction. Human perception plays an important role here (as in the case of tourist attractiveness), so tourist attractions have a subjective dimension in contrast to tourist values, which are a group of objective features that offer potential ground for increasing tourist traffic [23].

Tourist attractions are divided into four segments [23]:

- Natural tourist attractions, surroundings and nature;
- Human creations;
- Places designed and built as attractions;
- Cultural and sporting events.

The literature review shows that there is a division of urban tourism into primary and secondary values. In this case, the spatial arrangement of the inner city is seen as a product offered to tourists, so it is a supply of different facilities and is developed accordingly. The primary qualities will be the main characteristics of the area as an activity area. Their core consists of cultural objects (cinemas, theaters, museums, art galleries) and special events organized in the city. The diversity of leisure activities in a given place depends to a large extent on the presence of a set of amenities, which include physical development (buildings, green spaces, among others) as well as sociocultural characteristics (lifestyle, language, local customs). Secondary amenities include recreational development, which is dependent on primary values and is expected to contribute to increased tourism. This group includes catering facilities, transport, stores and accommodation, so it is tourist infrastructure [30].

The already partially discussed term of communication accessibility is the third of the basic elements defining tourist attractiveness. It refers directly to transport infrastructure, which can be divided into internal—which includes the whole complex of transport network offered on the spot, i.e., through the area of the tourist reception—and external—consisting of connections facilitating getting to the destination, from the initial moment to the end of the journey [19].

The stage of development of communication accessibility depends on [29]:

- The connections between communication facilities;
- The technical level of these facilities;
- The condition of the facilities they offer;
- Dynamics of transport traffic;
- Level and technical service resources.

All these components—tourist values, tourist facilities and transport accessibility—are crucial in determining and evaluating tourist attractiveness. According to A. Nitkiewicz-Janowska, the environmental aspect also has its impact on tourist attractiveness due to its direct and inseparable participation in the perception of tourist values which, as we know, are supposed to arouse as many tourists as possible and, consequently, stimulate tourist traffic. Therefore, implementation of nature protection and maintaining its state at the highest possible level will positively influence tourist attractiveness [19].

3.2. Indicators of Tourist Attractiveness

Due to the broad perception of the concept of tourist attractiveness, there are several indicators that define it in tourism. They play an important role in the statistical description of tourism phenomena. Intensity measures—of particular importance—show the degree of development of the tourist function of a particular area, intensity of tourist traffic and tourist infrastructure. All the socioeconomic activities aimed at accommodating tourists and their needs are called tourism functions [31].

The most commonly used and fundamental indicators of tourism function development are [32]:

- Size of the accommodation base, defined as the number of guest beds per 100 permanent residents (Defert–Baretje’s tourist function index);
- Tourist traffic intensity, determined by the number of tourists accommodated per 100 permanent inhabitants (Schneider’s index) or the number of overnight stays per 100 inhabitants (Charvat’s index);
- Level of employment in the tourism sector.

For the purposes of spatial analysis, different measures of tourism function development are also used. For example, the calculation of the number of guest beds falling per 1 km² or the number of tourists per 1 km². I. Bąk points out that a relatively low Defert–Baretje’s tourist function index is 1–100, which refers to areas with low tourism development; therefore, the tourism function is created with an index value of 100, which indicates that the capacity of accommodation base is at the same level as the number of permanent residents’ accommodation. When the index reaches a value between 100 and 500, it means that the tourism function is strongly developed [31].

A. Kowalczyk describes Defert’s index with the following formula (assuming that if its value is above 100, it means a developed tourist function) [28]:

$$Tf(t) = \frac{L * 100}{P}$$

where:

L —number of guest beds in the area;

P —number of inhabitants in the area.

Defert’s index can also be found in a slightly modified version, where it is presented with the formula [32]:

$$Tf(t) = \frac{L * 100}{P_o + kL}$$

where:

L —number of guest beds in the area;

P_o —number of people in the area not employed in tourism services sector;

K —indicator of population working in the tourism services sector, depending on the number of guest beds and hotel category, ranging from 0 to 1.

The level of development of the tourism function can also be determined by the following ratio [32]:

$$\frac{\text{tourism revenue}}{\text{number of local inhabitants}}$$

Another group of indicators is those that determine the level of tourist traffic [32]:

- Schneider’s index: $\frac{\text{number of visitors} * 100}{\text{number of permanent inhabitants}}$
- Charvat’s index: $\frac{\text{number of overnight stays} * 100}{\text{number of permanent inhabitants}}$

Also used to measure traffic intensity, but in terms of exploitation of accommodation capacity, is the ratio [32]:

$$\frac{\text{number of overnight stays (at time } t)}{\text{number of bed places (at time } t)}$$

The ratio of the intensity of a particular phenomenon to an area is expressed by the following measures [32]:

- Traffic density: $\frac{\text{number of tourists}}{\text{area (km}^2)}$
- Density of accommodation: $\frac{\text{number of guest beds}}{\text{area (km}^2)}$.

The development of accommodation is calculated using the following ratio [32]:

$$\frac{\text{number of tourists}}{\text{number of bed places}}$$

Another element belonging to the tourism base measures is the food service development index, which is calculated as follows [32]:

$$\frac{\text{number of tourists} + \text{number of local inhabitants}}{\text{number of eating places}}$$

3.3. Differences between Tourist Attractiveness and Tourist Potential

In order to show the differences between tourism attractiveness and tourism potential, the authors have presented in Table 2 the definitions of tourism potential according to various authors due to the ambiguity of defining the term in the literature, analogous to the explanations of tourism attractiveness presented earlier.

Table 2. Definitions of tourism potential according to different authors.

Author and Year	Definition of Tourism Potential
M. Kistowski, 1993 [33]	"[. . .] is the ability of the natural environment to satisfy human needs related to recreation, restoration of biopsychophysical forces and aesthetic experiences".
J. Wyrzykowski, 2010 [34]	"In the geographical (spatial) aspect, tourism potential can be identified with the tourism attractiveness of the geographical environment, expanded by tourism capacity and optimum periods for using tourism assets".
B. Marciszewska, 2010 [35]	"Tourism potential is a broad concept covering all elements enabling the development of tourism in a given area. Among them we can distinguish structural elements, connected with spatial factors and functional elements, connected with activities of entities directly and indirectly involved in tourism activities".
A. Nitkiewicz-Janowska, 2011 [25]	"[. . .] will therefore consist of existing tourism assets and all forms of economic, political and social development and functioning of the area. [. . .] Tourism potential provides opportunities to shape tourism products, the specificity of which depends on it".

Source: [25,33–35].

Despite the inconsistencies in the scope of what is covered by tourism potential according to different writers, the authors decided to describe the concept of tourism potential as a set of components that constitute the basis for the development of tourism in a particular area; these will be all the elements aimed at satisfying tourists' needs, the nature of which will depend on the specificities of a specific place.

Tourism potential is classified in different ways and can be distinguished as [25]:

- Environmental potential, which refers to the ability of the environment to meet the requirements of the community and cope with anthropogenic overload;
- Ecological potential, created by natural resources and their predisposition, efficiency and durability to meet human needs;
- Recreational potential, consisting of the attractiveness and usability of the environment for tourism purposes.

Potential, by its very nature, is the basis for undertaking some kind of activity. From the point of view of tourism, the characteristics of the area must be taken into account: the already defined tourist attractiveness, but also tourism capacity and absorptiveness. However, too much exploitation of the area may result in violating the limits of durability and resilience and, in consequence, destroying the values which characterized it previously [25].

Tourism carrying capacity defines the moment when the number of tourists visiting the same area at the same time reaches its maximum without destroying the natural environment or affecting the conditions of the area [36]. In simpler terms, it is the resistance of the natural environment to damage caused by tourist traffic within a given area. When describing tourist absorptivity, the type of vegetation characterizing the area should be taken into account, and more precisely its nonsusceptibility to trampling, mechanical features and also the degree of slope. Analysis of the terrain allows one to determine the individual resistance of different species representing the natural ground surface [34].

The maximum number of people who can stay at a particular area adapted to this at the same time, assuming that the conditions offered meet the needs of these people and at the same time do not cause degradation of the tourist values of the natural environment, is called the tourist capacity. It is related to the established orders for the protection of nature and the maintenance of natural values, the specificity and degree of tourist values, the desire to maintain the good psychophysical condition of tourists and the limits of growth of other market sectors [34].

A more comprehensive understanding of the term “tourist potential” makes it broader than the limits of the definition of tourist attractiveness, while at the same time exhaustively describing the opportunities for tourism development and the assets of a given area that will enable its adaptation in terms of tourism. The set of elements which can result in quantitative as well as qualitative progress in tourism can be called tourist potential, which includes natural and non-natural values; all kinds of tourist attractions, but also tourist infrastructure offered by a particular area; distribution of accommodation base and possibilities of using services or products influencing satisfaction of tourists. Thus, an exceptionally important component of tourism potential is tourist attractiveness of a region along with tourism products, which are interpreted in terms of brand, function and competitiveness, and consequently possible importance in socioeconomic progress and creation of a tourist destination showcase. The basic difference between tourism potential and tourism product is the fact that the potential can be called the base, while the product is the result of a deliberate formation of sources of tourist traffic increase based on natural and anthropogenic factors [35].

“Geographic space is characterized by a certain potential of environmental values that will influence the perception of an area’s attractiveness” [25]. In the case of the already discussed tourist attractiveness, it is stated that its essential nature is subjective and perceptive, while tourism potential is the objective foundation for the development of tourism in a specific area.

4. The Essence of Social Tourism and Its Determinants in Poland

There is no consensus on the definition of social tourism in the literature. The first definitions appeared in the 1950s, while the turn of the 21st century resulted in an abundance of scholarly articles and documents addressing this issue [37].

One of the first definitions of social tourism was proposed by W. Hunziker in 1952, defining it as “the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from

participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements in society” [38]. Other definitions of social tourism appeared in the following decades of the 20th century. In 1959, Hunziker again presented his second definition of it at the Second Congress of Social Tourism at Vienna and Salzburg, claiming that it is “a type of tourism practiced by low income groups, and which is rendered possible and facilitated by entirely separate and therefore easily recognizable services” [39].

Until the end of the 20th century there were numerous definitions of social tourism, interchangeably referred to as tourism for all. They were presented not only by individual authors, but also by various organizations such as the European Commission in 1993. Selected definitions of social tourism from the second half of the 20th century are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Definitions of social tourism in the 20th century according to various authors and organizations.

Author and Year	Definitions of Social Tourism
International Bureau of Social Tourism, 1963 [40]	“[. . .] all concepts and phenomena related to the participation in tourism of social strata with modest incomes made possible by precisely defined social instruments”.
A. Haulot, 1981 [41]	“The totality of relations and phenomena deriving from the participation of those social groups with modest incomes- participation which is made possible or facilitated by measures of a well-defined social character”.
T. Sajewski, 1984 [42]	“Social tourism in its broad sense is any tourism activity in which participation is subsidized by any social funds. It is tourism subsidized by social funds”.
European Commission, 1993 [43]	“[. . .] social tourism is organised in some countries by associations, cooperatives and trade unions and is designed to make travel accessible to the highest number of people, particularly the most underprivileged sectors of the population”.
M. Hall, 2000 [44]	“[. . .] the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements in society”.

Source: [40–44].

In the first and second decades of the 21st century, social tourism continued to occupy an important place in Polish and world tourism literature. Research problems oscillated around various issues related to it rather than the conditions of social tourism—its significance in the socioeconomic changes of tourism reception areas, the organizers of this type of trips, the ways of financing them and the various groups of social tourism participants. During this period, many definitions of social tourism can be found in the literature. Examples of these are presented in Table 4.

Analyzing exemplary definitions of social tourism presented in Tables 3 and 4, we can see that it is a tourist offer addressed to specific market segments. These are socially excluded people, i.e., people who are not able to organize trips on their own due to lack of financial resources. The participants of social tourism trips are mainly children and youth from poor and/or incomplete families or orphanages, people with disabilities or elderly people. It is also clear from these definitions that the aim of ensuring participation in tourism by underprivileged social groups requires the provision of support in organizing and financing such activities.

Table 4. Definitions of social tourism in the 21st century according to various authors and organizations.

Author and Year	Definitions of Social Tourism
International Bureau of Social Tourism, 2002 [40]	“All relationships and phenomena resulting from participation in tourism, and in particular from the participation of social strata with modest incomes”.
International Social Tourism Organisation, 2003 [43]	“all the concepts and phenomena resulting from the participation in tourism of low-income sectors of the population, made possible through well defined social measures”.
L. Minnaert, R. Maitland, G. Miller, 2006 [45]	“[. . .] tourism with an added moral value, which aims to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange”.
A. Włodarczyk, 2010 [1]	“A type of fully or partially externally financed or organized on a voluntary basis activity aimed at realizing the right of universal access to tourism, which at the same time is a tool for achieving other, from the point of view of its beneficiaries, important objectives of a social nature (patriotic, educational, educational, improving the quality of life, etc.)”.

Source: [1,40,43,45].

H. Zawistowska provides examples of four groups of definitions of social tourism [46]:

1. Definitions focusing on the demand side of the tourism market based on the assumption that the right to travel and practice tourism is a fundamental human right. The authors of these definitions focus mainly on the economic barriers of certain social groups and on actions aimed at removing these obstacles.
2. Definitions which pay attention to both the demand and supply side of the tourism market. This group of authors emphasizes in the definitions of social tourism not only its social importance in equalizing opportunities for socially excluded people, but also its economic role. The main profits of social tourism development are economic benefits for the tourism industry and tourist reception areas.
3. Definitions that focus on the sources of funding for participation in social tourism. The group of these definitions emphasizes the important role of the state budget, corporate budgets, and social associations and foundations in removing various barriers for given social groups that prevent them from going on tourist trips.
4. Definitions that focus on organizational issues. Their authors pay attention to the role of social sector in the organization of social tourism.

Nowadays, social tourism is developing all over the world [47]. Its growth is visible primarily in countries and regions of the world that are economically developed. Social tourism policy has appeared in many countries of Europe and the Americas since the introduction of paid vacations for employees [48]. In addition, activities aimed at supporting socially excluded people in organizing their tourism and leisure trips concern programs for specific target groups in different countries.

In Europe, the social aspects of tourism are supported by various entities and financing from various sources. In the European Union member states, a high percentage of society cannot afford tourist trips, especially abroad. This is mainly due to health, age, personal, family and professional reasons, as well as those of economic and financial nature. In connection with this, we can see a great interest of the European Union and the European Commission in the development of social tourism [37].

In 1993, the European Commission approved that social tourism could be organized in some countries by associations, cooperatives and trade unions. However, according to

the Commission, the aim of social tourism is to enable as many people as possible, mainly those belonging to the most disadvantaged groups in society, to travel [43].

In the member states of the European Union, the social groups that are disadvantaged in tourism are considered in particular to be [43]:

- Preschool and school children;
- School pupils and students;
- Economically and socially disadvantaged people aged 18–30;
- Families struggling with financial and other difficulties;
- People with disabilities and health problems (often related to their careers);
- Older people, who, depending on the member state and the documents dealing with social tourism, are people aged over 50, 55, 60 or 65.

Adult tourists participating in social tourism differ from mainstream tourists in that they are either unemployed or have low earnings and therefore have limited access to consumption of material goods [49].

Social tourism became an accepted part of public policy in many European countries, not only among current formal members of the European Union, about three decades ago. During the period of economic transition in Central and Eastern European countries, i.e., in the early 1990s, financial support aimed at socially excluded people, regardless of the reason, was common. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the development of social tourism throughout Europe, especially in European Union countries, continues to be very buoyant. Different market segments and groups of tourists are supported, and funding for their tourism trips comes from a variety of sources [50,51].

The current planning period of the European Union policy in financing projects in various sectors of the economy is 2021–2027. This is currently and, in all likelihood, will be a period characterized by economic recession in the EU countries caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This unexpected problem appeared in the EU in the first quarter of 2020 and led to a huge regression of all economic branches, including the tourism, hotel, catering and transport industries. The co-financing plans for tourism development in 2021–2027 in the EU countries were originally not assumed to support social tourism. It was assumed then that the financing of tourism projects in this period would be primarily related to aspects of environmental protection, its promotion and the development of ecotourism [52]. However, it seems that social tourism in the European Union still has a chance to be supported by European funds in the mentioned period. Due to the pandemic, the number of socially excluded people who are unable to organize and finance their own tourist trips has increased, and the EU has been supporting such tourist groups for a long time.

Social tourism is often portrayed as the opposite of commercial tourism [53]. It was born out of the need for solidarity and enabling leisure and tourism activities for vulnerable groups as well [54]. It has long roots in Poland, as it was very popular during the period of socialism, i.e., from the end of World War II to the period of political transformation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the period of centrally planned economy in the People's Republic of Poland, the term "social tourism" was very popular. It was used to describe those forms of tourism which were subsidized from social funds. Among the many organizers of social tourism in those years, we can mention workers' committees, social employee services, municipal authorities, trade unions and cooperative associations [55]. Until 1990, this type of travel was definitely one of the most popular in the country and took the form of mass tourism [56]. However, this "limitless" availability of travel in Poland also had negative effects, as tourists often did not respect what was easy to obtain (devastation of nature, accommodation facilities and recreational and sports equipment) [56].

According to the authors of this article, social tourism in Poland today can be defined as follows: "Social tourism, also called tourism for all, is short- or long-term trips of various segments of tourists, constituting groups of socially excluded people. Such trips are organized by representatives of the social sector (associations, foundations), public sector (local authorities) and sometimes supported by the private sector".

The types of groups of tourists practicing social tourism in Poland, but also in other European Union countries and around the world, are generally the same. Many authors, including Diekmann and McCabe [57], Mikos v. Rohrscheidt [58] and McCabe i Quiao [59], in the last few years have listed among the most numerous groups of social tourism beneficiaries:

- People with modest incomes, both not working and employed;
- Single parents;
- Youth as a social group (youth tourism);
- Seniors, statistically usually with less than average income, facing deteriorating health;
- People with permanent disabilities or in the process of rehabilitation after an accident;
- Caretakers of people with disabilities,
- Immigrants, mainly from countries with low incomes and significant cultural differences from the host country;
- Various disadvantaged or discriminated groups in a specific society as long as this condition persists.

Minnaret, Diekmann and McCabe [60], in a very narrow division of social tourism participants, distinguish the two most important groups of tourists: people with disabilities and other tourists who simply cannot afford any tourist trips.

Numerous benefits for poor families of their practice of social tourism have been pointed out in studies by Hazel [61], McCabe [62], Quinn and Stacey [63], Sedgley, Pritchard and Morgan [64], among others. These authors emphasized the positive role of these tourist trips mainly in building proper family relationships and self-esteem. The benefits of social tourism for the elderly were highlighted by Allan [65], Kaufmann, Shim and Russ [66] and Philippson [67] and for people with disabilities by Mellian Gassiot, Prats and Coronima [68], among others.

In recent years, world literature has also emphasized the large and positive role of social tourism in the lives of socially excluded people. It points out the benefits of organizing tourist trips for people who are not able, often for economic as well as other reasons, to make any trip even within their own country. Social tourism contributes to social well-being, increases self-confidence and future prospects and reduces isolation, loneliness and stress [69]. It directly supports the primary social objective of improving the quality of life of older, disabled and poor people by enabling them to discover new places through tourism [70].

5. Barriers and Directions of Development of Social Tourism in Poland

Social tourism is now a very popular form of tourism all over the world. It is practiced by socially excluded people and supported by government, social and private sectors. It is a widespread type of tourism in European Union member states. International tourism is a basic branch of the European economy. The European region is characterized by a high level of development of tourist and hotel services—especially the area belonging to the European Union, whose share in world tourism is about 50% [71]. Since the beginning of the 21st century, European Union tourism policy has been increasingly focused on social tourism initiatives. Policy aspects in this field are one way of achieving sustainability in the tourism economy in Europe [52].

L. Minnaert, R. Maitland and G. Miller distinguish four types of social tourism, defining them as: participation, inclusion, adaptation and stimulation models [72]:

- The participation model encourages people who are economically disadvantaged or disabled to engage in tourism.
- The inclusion model refers to community-based tourism initiatives that aim to encourage certain social groups to practice tourism. This can be done through subsidized programs such as vacation vouchers, among others.
- The adaptation model refers to social tourism offers related to the adaptation of the tourism infrastructure to the needs of people who practice this type of tourism. An

example of this could be the selection of suitable accommodation for the disabled or elderly or the provision of additional services for them.

- A stimulation model that has as its main objective the economic benefits of social tourism development for tourist reception areas. This form of social tourism often offers an all-inclusive option and targets seniors in particular.

Each of these models represents a direction for the development of social tourism in the European Union. People who practice it, regardless of the tourism segment they represent, derive many benefits from it. These include improved mental and physical health, educational, cultural and social benefits.

Generally, social tourism in Europe as well as in other continents can be divided according to different criteria. Taking into account the type of tourists participating in social tourism, we can distinguish between people with disabilities; members of poor families, both children and adults; and seniors. In turn, applying the type of tourist reception areas, we can mention coastal, mountain and lake regions. In another division, we can indicate urban and rural social tourism. It seems that another important criterion regarding the supply side of social tourism is the type of its organizers. In this case, we can discuss governmental contribution, private sector sponsors and activities of social entities organizing tourist trips for socially excluded people.

The 2019 EU report on the development of the tourism sector in the global European Union market identified the most important forms of travel and leisure. The report dealt with the overall state of development of the tourism industry in the 27 member states and pointed to it as one of the most important branches of the European economy. It was emphasized that tourism is the main instrument for strengthening the image of Europe in the world and promoting various forms of recreation on the Old Continent [65]. In the document, there were also references to social tourism, but it was not one of the fundamental types of tourism. The document pointed out the lack of a common EU tourism policy and described it as an unfortunate matter. The policy aspects of tourism are carried out solely by the member states [73].

Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed on a large scale to the barriers to the development of social tourism in the European Union in the last two years. This deadly disease, especially for the elderly, has caused huge financial losses and global health and economic crises [74]. It has contributed to an enormous decline in the tourism, hotel, transport and catering service sectors [75].

Other barriers to the development of social tourism in EU countries include poor cooperation between the organizers of such leisure. It seems that increased cooperation in the development of this type of tourism between the government and representatives of the social and private sectors in different countries will allow, despite the pandemic crisis, further development of tourist services offered for socially excluded people. In addition, promotional activities are important, mainly the promotion and preparation of individual components of tourist infrastructure to meet the needs of tourists.

Social tourism in Poland also occupies an important place in domestic tourism traffic. Its development depends primarily on financial issues and on support, not only in economic aspects, by various entities. Generally, development concerns government, its subordinate units, foundations and other entities of social and nonprofit sectors as well as private sector support. The segment of social tourism requires actions aimed at removing or minimizing economic (lack of sufficient financial resources), architectural and other barriers faced, for example, by people with disabilities [46]. The following instruments are used to remove economic barriers [46]:

- Legal (e.g., the Act on Employee Benefit Fund);
- Financial (system of discounts for tourist travel, lowering prices for tourist services outside the season);
- Organizational (organization of trips for children from poor families by various foundations and associations),

Among the projects and investments conducive to the development of social tourism in Poland, one can also mention activities contributing to the development of low-cost tourist and accommodation facilities [46]. In recent years, a new form of social tourism has been developing in rural areas in Poland, which is a specific type of recreation in agritourism farms. These are so-called care farms, which offer mainly recreation for the elderly and disabled [76]. It is worth quoting here one of the definitions of care services. According to this definition, care services “include assistance in meeting daily needs, care, hygiene, nursing and ensuring contact with the environment, while specialist care services are services adapted to special needs resulting from the type of disorder, such as assistance in managing money, assistance in running errands, physical rehabilitation and must be provided by persons with appropriate qualifications” [76]. Care services can be innovative and branded agritourism services. Their provision refers to the specialized offer of an agritourism farm, in this case care farms.

In Europe and the European Union, the development of agritourism farms which are also care farms has a much longer history than in Poland. In the literature, the phenomenon of care farms in rural areas can be found under the names: “care farms”, “green care”, “farming for health” and “social farming” [77]. In the European Union countries, the development of agritourism based on providing care services to selected groups of tourists is a very widespread phenomenon. On a large scale, this type of offer in rural tourism and agritourism is developed primarily in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, as well as in France and Italy [78]. In care farms, in addition to the basic tourist services such as accommodation and catering, the offer addressed, for example, to seniors or people with disabilities and their caregivers includes various forms of recreation. Agritourism is of positive importance for the economic standard and quality of life of rural regions and societies [79]. In typical European agritourism farms with livestock, an important component of care services is the possibility of contact with farm animals. Such offers have been popular for a long time, e.g., in Austria, Finland, Germany, Sweden and Italy [80,81].

Apart from the development of care farms, other directions of social tourism in the world and in Europe include building positive relations between the participants of social tourism and the inhabitants of visited areas. This points to the need for socially excluded people to maintain respect for the values and customs characteristics of the indigenous population, which directly brings social tourism closer to the concept of sustainable tourism [82]. Agritourism has distinctive environmental impacts with respect to traditional farms [83].

6. The Essence of Social Tourism and Its Determinants in the Czech Republic

Social tourism includes the travel of seniors, young people, people with disabilities and low-income families. Target groups in social tourism usually have special accessibility requirements. They require special services. In this context, we can use the term available tourism for all. The concept of accessibility includes barrier-free access, financial accessibility and equality in gender, age and religion [84]. Accessible tourism is not only socially responsible, but also a promising service sector. The number of seniors and people with special needs is still high. By 2030, accessible tourism could have the market potential to cover almost a third of the population. In the Czech Republic, an increase in demand and an increase in the number of jobs in social tourism can be expected [85].

Social tourism is financially and legislatively supported by the European Union and the individual member states [86]. The Ministry for Regional Development administers subsidies in the Czech Republic. In the period 2010–2016, a separate subsidy program focused directly on social tourism operated. In recent years, support for social tourism has been part of the National Tourism Support Program [85]. The system of subsidies in the Czech Republic does not reach the level of developed countries of the European Union. There is a lack of specialized grant schemes for disabled people, families with children and socially disadvantaged groups.

Grant programs supported in the period 2010–2016 the active integration of target groups into tourism and access to tourist attractions. Subsidies from the state budget can

be used by business entities and municipalities for specific activities supporting social tourism. The main goal of the grants is to enable socially disadvantaged groups of the population to access natural and cultural-historical heritage. The creation of new products, the active inclusion of target groups, the reduction of seasonality, the improvement of tourism infrastructure and the accessibility of attractions are supported. Grants from the program were allocated evenly in all regions of the Czech Republic. Most Czech regions focused mainly on supporting socially disadvantaged families with children. The Hradec Králové, Karlovy Vary and Moravian-Silesian regions have implemented more projects in senior tourism. A minority of projects focused on the disabled [87].

During the COVID pandemic, central authorities addressed the downturn in the tourism sector and the impact on businesses. Specific social tourism support programs were not presented. However, disadvantaged groups were reflected cross-sectionally within the individual measures. Social tourism participants have been favored, for example, in travel agency vouchers. The Lex voucher was approved due to the temporary insolvency of travel agencies due to travel restrictions. The Lex Voucher Act made it possible to postpone the return of funds to clients and subsequently make tours. The grace period was one calendar year. However, selected groups of social clients could reject the voucher and request payment of advances. The socially disadvantaged groups included: holder of disability cards, people registered as job seekers, pregnant people, people on maternity or parental leave, people over 65 years of age or single parents caring for a dependent child [88].

Even more important is financial support for the development of social tourism, ensuring the availability of tourist destinations and infrastructure. The prerequisites for accessible tourism include barrier-free transport, the infrastructure of accommodation and catering facilities, clear information symbols, elevator control, specialized services of travel agencies and management of accessible destinations [89]. Accessibility is an important determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty [90].

Looking more closely at the determinants of accessible tourism in the Czech Republic, we find that the approach to this sector is changing positively. However, the accessibility of the tourism environment still lags behind developed destinations. If we compare the Czech Republic with European destinations, we can find the differences. For example, France and Spain have a uniform methodology for evaluating and certifying the accessibility of accommodation facilities. In the Czech Republic, several methodologies are used that are not officially approved. Clients of accessible tourism cannot obtain relevant and high-quality information. Some accommodations may provide misleading information. France, Spain and the United Kingdom regularly offer travel support for the elderly and families with disabled children. The Czech Republic does not currently implement such programs [91].

The development of accessible tourism is related to the quality of transport. Ties would be positive. Very large, specialized minibuses for people with disabilities operate in large cities in the Czech Republic. Conventional transport systems are not fully accessible. Accessibility of railway stations, taxi services, and long-distance bus transport for larger groups is limited. Special attention must also be paid to overcoming information and psychological barriers [92]. The realized mapping studies show that the accessibility of tourist facilities and attractions in the Czech Republic is still not sufficient. Regarding the accessibility of accommodation facilities, there are differences between the regions of the Czech Republic. The situation is significantly better in the capital city of Prague and other tourist-exposed areas (Carlsbad, Lipno, Krkonoše, Český Krumlov and Šumava) in comparison to the rest of the Czech Republic. The accessibility of cultural and historical monuments can be assessed as very good. The problems are only in terms of the physical accessibility of toilets and refreshments in the buildings of monuments [93].

One of the preconditions for the quality provision of tourism services is knowledge of the needs of clients and the ability to deal with people with special needs. The development

of special courses and educational programs within secondary schools and universities is needed.

7. Tourist Attractiveness of Rural Areas and the Development of Social Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Poland and the Czech Republic

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a huge downturn in international tourism. It brought the tourism and hospitality sector around the world to a massive standstill in 2020 and stunted the growth of the directly related transportation and food service industries [92]. For example, there was a worldwide decline of as much as USD 900 million in international travel between January and October 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 [93]. COVID-19 has led to a sharp decline in the number of people traveling abroad and practicing tourism in their own countries. The governments of numerous countries have introduced various, often severe restrictions in the tourist and hotel service sectors. In some cases, hotel facilities have become completely inaccessible to tourists as a result of total “lockdowns” in the hotel industry.

In the European Union, COVID-19 also led to a total collapse of the tourism economy. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, international tourist travel has plummeted [94]. Coastal regions and tourist resorts, both those located on islands and those on the mainland, such as on the Mediterranean, have been hard hit [95]. There has also been a slump in tourist trips focused on visiting European capitals and their monuments, including Rome, Paris, London, Vienna, Athens and Prague [96].

Against the backdrop of an intense decline in tourism for the above tourist destinations due to travelers’ health concerns, many European residents have been choosing uncrowded regions and vacation destinations over the past two years. Rural tourism has been one of the travel options undertaken [97]. During the pandemic period, resting in rural areas away from crowded beaches in famous resorts in Europe was often the destination of holiday-makers from various EU countries. It also contributed to greater economic development of the visited regions, and it is commonly known that tourist services are of considerable importance for the socio-economic development of rural areas [98].

Different types of tourism have been practiced in rural areas in the European Union, from typically passive leisure tourism to active tourism (hiking, cycling, canoeing) or tourism connected with cognitive motives, such as rural cultural tourism [99]. In the world literature, we can find various definitions and forms of tourism in rural areas, taking into account diverse criteria. For example, Gil and Nuevas [100] mention culinary tourism, hunting tourism, ecological tourism, sports tourism and agritourism.

Similarly, during the pandemic period, the tourism and hospitality sector was hit hard in Poland. In March 2020, an epidemic was declared in the country. During the spring period, the hospitality sector was shut down, leading to a complete stagnation of this branch of tourism. For example, March saw as much as 65% fewer tourists in the country compared to the same month of 2019 [101]. However, in a difficult period for the tourism economy for almost the last two years, tourist traffic in typical vacation regions was high, especially during the summer vacations in both 2020 and 2021. This was due to the lifting of restrictions related to the handling of tourist traffic during the summer vacations and the possibility of running tourist and hotel enterprises.

The leisure of tourists in Poland is carried out both in cities and in rural areas, which cover as much as 93.1% of the country [102]. Various forms of tourism can be practiced in these areas, especially in regions with attractive natural environment (lake districts, mountain regions and areas characterized by high forest cover). The most popular include:

- Sightseeing tourism and its two basic types: ecotourism (related primarily to recreation in naturally valuable areas) and (rural) cultural tourism, focused on visiting architectural monuments, museums, open-air museums in the countryside, participating in rural cultural events and learning about local folklore;
- Qualified (specialized) tourism and its various types: hiking, cycling, canoeing, sailing, speleology, horseback riding;

- Agritourism, i.e., resting at an agritourist farm constituting a specific rural accommodation facility whose main attraction for tourists should be the farm, especially farm animals;
- Rural tourism, which is connected with typical “ruralness”, i.e., with cultural values and getting to know the cultural and historical heritage of the countryside, which directly brings it closer to rural cultural tourism than agritourism—which is connected with getting to know agricultural areas—as well as with outstanding landscape values, which in this respect brings it closer to ecotourism.

In the broadest sense, rural holidays, regardless of the motives for tourist trips, are referred to in the Polish literature as “tourism in rural areas”. This approach means the administrative rurality of space, which emphasizes the fact that this form of tourism takes place in administrative rural areas which, in terms of settlement, landscape, and even functionality, are not always “rural” [103]. A similar approach to tourism in rural areas is adopted by J. Sikora, who considers it the broadest term when referring to tourists’ leisure activities in rural areas in Poland [104].

Rural tourism is a very common term used in the literature to describe resting in the countryside. Its characteristic feature is the cognitive motive aimed at getting to know and admire rural cultural values and natural and agricultural resources [105]. Table 5 presents selected definitions of rural tourism by Polish authors.

Table 5. Definitions of rural tourism in Polish literature.

Author and Year	Definition of Rural Tourism
B. Mikuta, K. Żelazna, 2004 [106]	“Rural tourism means the entirety of tourism economy that takes place in rural areas. It is a form of recreation taking place in a rural environment, using specific values and resources of the countryside. It includes various types of recreation related to hiking, sightseeing, getting to know the countryside, as well as personal contact with its inhabitants”.
J. Wojciechowska, 2009 [107]	“Rural tourism is a form of tourism occurring in rural areas, related to agriculture, forestry, horticulture or fishing, based on natural and cultural attractions and the advantages of everyday life of their inhabitants, and organized by entities not necessarily socially or economically connected with these areas”.
W. Kuźniar, 2013 [108]	“Rural tourism should be understood as all forms of tourist activity in rural areas, in which “rurality” in the landscape and functional dimension of the area identifies the core of the tourist product, which is an important motive for purchase in the decision-making process of the tourist”.

Source: [106–108].

The first definition of rural tourism by Mikuta and Żelazna [106] refers to the present understanding of tourism in rural areas. In turn, the next two definitions already pointed to specific features of such trips to the countryside. Currently, in Polish scientific literature, rural tourism is understood as cognitive tourism focused on sightseeing and exploring, firstly, the cultural and agricultural resources of rural areas and, to a lesser extent, particular elements of natural attractions.

The most important factors determining the development of any form of tourism and tourist recreational services in rural areas in Poland are the outstanding values of the natural environment. Also important are the cultural values, alternatively referred to as anthropogenic. In their group, we can distinguish architectural monuments, open-air museums, cultural events, customs and traditions. Generally, the development of rural tourism and its related forms is based primarily on natural resources and cultural her-

itage [109]. Attractiveness of the areas of tourist reception is the most important component of the development of tourism services in the countryside, which is the destination of tourists' recreation.

Among the conditions of the development of rural tourism in Poland, apart from the tourist attractiveness of the visited regions, the role of the institutional environment should be emphasized. The development of tourist services, mainly in the field of marketing and promotion, is influenced by local authorities. As far as the social sector is concerned, the activities of agritourism associations, local tourist organizations and the Polish Tourist Country-Lovers' Society (PTTK) should be mentioned. The last organization promotes sightseeing and qualified tourism on a large scale [110].

Social tourism is also developing in rural areas in Poland. Its development is conditioned mainly by the natural attractiveness of rural regions, e.g., lake districts or mountainous areas. The material basis for social tourism is proper tourist infrastructure—both adequate accommodation and catering facilities as well as a wide range of recreational services, e.g., for the disabled or children. In the case of active recreation, it is important for a tourist reception area to have appropriate specialized values which enable the development of different forms of qualified tourism. These include hiking, biking and horseback riding trails, rivers where canoeing can be practiced, and lakes where sailing is possible.

Participants of tourist trips to the countryside, regardless of which groups of tourists they belong to, not only benefit from financial support offered by various entities and organizations, but also have guaranteed rest in nature, surrounded by attractive natural values.

The Czech Republic has sufficient potential for the development of rural tourism. In addition to the available rural areas with favorable conditions for the development of tourism, the Czech Republic has an extensive network of hiking trails, bike paths, wineries and equestrian trails [111]. However, the current development of this tourism segment lags behind the potential. From the point of view of central authorities, rural tourism and agritourism in the Czech Republic have long been on the margins of interest. The reasons are mainly the small turnover of most agritourism facilities or the fact that agritourism has long been seen as a complementary activity to agriculture [112]. The popularity of second homes and its considerable capacity may also be one of the reasons why agritourism services in the Czech Republic have developed more slowly than in other countries [113].

As a result of the COVID pandemic (2020 and 2021), the tourism industry in the Czech Republic has seen a significant reduction in the number of overnight stays and tourism revenues. According to the Czech Statistical Office, the share of tourism in GDP in the Czech Republic decreased from 2.9 to 1.5%. The dramatic decline in tourism mainly concerned inbound and outbound tourism. The decline in foreign tourists was most noticeable in urban destinations (especially in Prague and Brno). Rural destinations represented a new alternative for tourism development [114]. Domestic tourism did not decline in the Czech Republic during the COVID pandemic as much as international arrivals. The development of rural tourism in the Czech Republic during the pandemic corresponds to global trends in the industry. The consumer popularity of environmentally friendly and sustainable forms of tourism is also evident during a pandemic worldwide. The development of eco-friendly and sustainable forms of tourism is evident worldwide [115].

The development of tourism between urban and rural regions in the Czech Republic during the pandemic is evident from regional statistics. In the Czech Republic, according to the typology of the European Commission [116], the predominantly urban regions are the capital city of Prague and the Central Bohemian Region. Predominantly rural regions include the Pilsen, South Bohemian, Vysocina and Pardubice regions. Other regions are mixed (Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, Hradec Králove, Olomouc, Zlin, South Moravian and Moravian-Silesian regions). According to the Czech Statistical Office, the absolute number of arrivals has decreased in all regions of the Czech Republic. The rate of decline varied from region to region. A significantly higher absolute and relative decline was in 2020 and 2021 in all predominantly urban regions (Prague and Central Bohemia). On the contrary, all predominantly rural regions (Vysočina, Pilsen, South Bohemia and

Pardubice) recorded a significantly lower decrease. A significant contrast is evident between the capital city of Prague and the predominantly rural region of Vysočina. According to the Czech Statistical Office, the number of tourists in the Prague region fell by almost 80% between 2020 and 2019. The Vysočina region proved to be attractive. Future developments will show whether this was an exceptional situation or whether Vysočina will begin to use its potential. Vysočina is a predominantly rural region with the most UNESCO-listed monuments in the Czech Republic.

Vaishar and Stastna [114] state that the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for the development of rural tourism. The lower decline in rural destinations is due to increased interest in accommodation and other tourist services among domestic tourists. People preferred to enjoy second homes, biking, hiking, visiting natural monuments, water sports, camping and the countryside. On the contrary, the pandemic negatively affected visits to cultural, sports, gastronomic and corporate events and training. The cited authors also mention the security of the Czech countryside and the potential of historical, natural, gastronomic and cultural attractions. However, they recommend that regional authorities pay special attention to improving infrastructure, institutional framework, marketing and cooperation between all stakeholders in rural destinations.

For the inhabitants of both countries, their proximity and closeness make them mutually attractive in these times of uncertainty. There is no need to travel by plane, it is enough to cover the route by car. This is favored by the already well-developed road network in the Czech Republic and the improving road infrastructure in Poland, which is particularly well developed in the southern part of Poland neighboring the Czech Republic. This makes it easier to cross the border and shortens travel time. It is true that for the Polish tourism industry, the Czech market is definitely inferior to the European leaders in terms of size, but its location (direct southwestern neighbor of Poland) and the still-not-fully-used potential mean that it should be considered as one of the important sources in plans to increase the importance of Poland as the receiving country of tourism. Both countries can use the tourist potential of rural areas and the attractiveness of the natural environment and existing monuments and historical sites. Moreover, a factor contributing to mutual tourism exchange between Poland and the Czech Republic is the similarity of languages (which reduces the communication barrier) and reasonable prices compared to Western European countries (which is especially important in the case of social tourism). One can also add that for Czechs, attractive in Poland are numerous lake districts and the Baltic Sea; for Poles, attractive in the Czech Republic the famous Czech beer and cuisine. As a result of the above, the authors decided to perform the above analysis and compare both neighboring countries.

8. Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the literature and strategic documents of Poland, the Czech Republic, and the European Union, we found that the definition of social tourism has evolved in recent decades. We can find several groups of definitions of the concept of social tourism. Legal definitions are based on human rights to travel. Economic definitions focus on sources of funding for participation in tourism [117]. Recent studies define social tourism more comprehensively and identify social tourism with tourism for all. The analyzed studies within the literature review listed among the main target groups of social tourism people with modest incomes, single parents, seniors (usually with less than average income, facing deteriorating health), people with permanent disabilities or in the process of rehabilitation after an accident, immigrants (mainly from countries with low incomes) and caretakers of people with disabilities. According to the authors of this article, this definition corresponds to the reality of contemporary social tourism.

The definition of social tourism in Poland and the Czech Republic shows slight differences. The authors in both countries agree on short-term and long-term trips of various tourists, forming groups of socially excluded people. Polish studies emphasize that these trips organize representatives of the social sector (associations, foundations) and the public

sector (local authorities). Czech studies pay more attention to people with disabilities and accessibility. For example, Linderova and Janecek state that target groups in social tourism usually have special accessibility requirements and need special services [84]. Discussed studies in both countries consider social tourism as a promising economic sector. The articles expect growing demand for seniors and people with special needs.

The analysis made it possible to identify barriers to the development of social tourism in the environment of the Czech Republic and Poland. The authors of this article agree with published studies that state the global health situation is the most significant obstacle to the development of social tourism in recent years [46]. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected seniors and people with increased health risks even more than other groups of travelers. The Czech Republic and Poland were no exception in this regard. The development of the pandemic will be one of the most important factors in social tourism. However, even in post-pandemic times, we perceive additional risks. Rising inflation in Europe and the world is likely to affect socially disadvantaged groups the most. The development of social tourism in the coming years will depend on the support of low-income groups by public sources.

Social tourism in Poland and the Czech Republic occupies an important place in domestic tourism. The systematic literature review confirmed that the segment of social tourism requires the removal or minimization of economic (lack of financial resources) and architectural barriers faced by, for example, people with disabilities. As in the case of the definition of social tourism, we can find differences between the main conclusions of the studies in Poland and the Czech Republic. The authors of the Polish studies emphasize financial issues as the main barriers to the development of social tourism. Studies published by Czech authors contain mainly recommendations in the area of accessibility. The authors of this article are not inclined to conclude that the findings would identify differences in the environment of the two countries. In both the Czech Republic and Poland, there is no comprehensive system for providing discounts for social tourism as is usual in Western European countries. Even the accessibility of the tourist infrastructure is not comparable to the advanced tourist destinations of Europe. In our opinion, the different findings of Polish and Czech studies are due only to the preferences of their authors. Both Poland and the Czech Republic require the creation of a comprehensive system of discounts and support for socially disadvantaged groups.

Based on a systematic literature review and conducted interviews, we derived recommendations for the further development of social tourism in the Czech Republic and Poland.

Poland traditionally has a higher potential for rural tourism than the Czech Republic. Based on the researched sources, we can state that the development of agritourism is associated with social tourism. In recent years, a new form of social tourism has been developing in rural areas in Poland—a specific type of recreation on agritourism farms. These are so-called care farms, which offer mainly tourism for the elderly and disabled [84]. The rural regions of the Czech Republic also show weaknesses in terms of accessibility. The analyzed studies confirm a lower level of accessibility in Czech rural regions than Czech urban regions. The analyzed studies evaluated the availability of monuments, transport, and accommodation.

Based on a systematic literature review and interviews, we can specify recommendations for the further development of social tourism in the Czech Republic and Poland. For management and strategic planning, we recommend establishing platforms for cooperation between the public, nonprofit and corporate sectors in social tourism. We also consider it appropriate to set up regular communication channels for knowledge and information transfers between the private and public sectors. The public sector should realize mapping studies of the accessibility of accommodation facilities, cultural and historical monuments, natural attractions and transport in rural regions. Mapping studies will serve in social tourism marketing and as professional information material for improving accessibility. The developed countries of the European Union implement subsidy instruments to sup-

port the elderly, children from disadvantaged families and the disabled. Poland and the Czech Republic should prepare a long-term concept for the support of social tourism in the framework of national tourism programs. Lastly, we consider developing specialized educational courses focused on communication with participants in social tourism. Furthermore, implement these courses in the study fields of high schools and universities of marketing, trade and tourism.

The analysis of studies focused on rural tourism in the Czech Republic and Poland during the COVID-19 pandemic confirms that tourists often choose places away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Agritourism, ecotourism, active tourism, caravanning and social tourism are very popular [75]. The presented types of tourism refer to current trends that are constantly changing, and tourists are looking for new forms of recreation with elements of health, eg in rural areas—agritourism [118,119].

In the first quarter of 2022, a post-pandemic increase in tourism performance is evident. The values of inbound, domestic, and outbound tourism statistics show an increasing trend. At present, it is difficult to predict whether the growth of the tourism sector will be stable if, under normal conditions, tourists would not prefer sea, city, or other foreign destinations to rural tourism. In connection with rural tourism, the question is: what will be the consumption behavior towards domestic tourism? The second question is whether the Czech countryside will also create an attractive offer for returning foreign tourists. The development of rural and social tourism after the end of the pandemic forms the basis for future research.

Tourism is an important sector of the economy in both compared countries, as well as around the world. It provides employment to a large social group and brings significant income. However, this branch of the economy, just like any other, is subject to dynamic changes depending on the changing socioeconomic environment. Therefore, monitoring trends and drawing conclusions, allowing for making well-informed decisions, is important for an efficient management process of this sector. On one hand, this study is theoretical—through the analysis of the literature, it organizes the terminology related to social tourism. However, on the other hand, it may be of a utilitarian nature and can be useful for policy-makers, decision-makers, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders related to rural and social tourism for whom the analysis of the current opportunities and barriers would be very useful. An important aspect in the context of the efficient management process is also the ability to see the differences between tourist attractiveness and tourist potential, which is necessary in the process of planning new policies, interventions and further activities supporting the development of social tourism in rural areas, which is currently dynamically developing around the world.

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