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# Hunting tourism in Poland – an outline of the problem

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**Abstract:** Wildlife hunting is a controversial and highly polarised topic both in Poland and abroad. The arguments advanced by the supporters of hunting tourism concern a specific approach to nature conservation and, at the same time, the inflow of additional funds for local communities. The examples from other countries cited in this paper indicate that part of these revenues remain in the source countries and Poland is no exception in this respect. However, regardless of the validity and quality of these arguments, the rather commonly held opinion that shooting of animals is beneficial for nature distracts attention from the fact that Poland is perceived as an El Dorado for tourists who kill ‘for fun’. One of the key issues regarding hunting tourism is whether the development of this form of tourism is an adequate/appropriate/ethical way of using animals compared to other tourism-related activities, such as watching wildlife or taking photographs. On the other hand, it is impossible to expect tourists to depart from commercial killing of animals in Poland over the coming years. For this reason, further research concerning the main problems presented in this article is needed from the perspective of local residents and hunters themselves.

**Keywords:** tourism, hunting tourism, Poland

## 1. Introduction

Wildlife hunting is a controversial and highly polarised topic both in Poland and abroad. Despite a number of discussions, as well as questions about whether hunting tourism is needed and how effectively it brings benefits to local ecosystems, there is a lack of research in the national scientific literature which would analyse it more widely. Such insights are the result of a literature review. The examined literary works comprise both international publications related to the discussed subject matter as well as Polish literature hitherto not very widely representative of the addressed topic. Very helpful were also numerous statistical data, reports, expert opinions on hunting and hunting tourism in the world, including those concerning the studied issues in Poland. The findings presented in this paper have been divided into three separate parts. The first one

identifies discrepancies in the literature on the matter in question against the background of the cited examples of research conducted abroad. The second section of this paper introduces the reader to the issue of hunting in Poland. Finally, the third part characterises the current state of hunting tourism development in said country based on available data. This approach to the subject is an outline of the situation in terms of hunting tourism in Poland and an attempt to indicate directions for further scientific research in this regard. The aim of this article is to initiate a discussion on hunting tourism in Poland in general. The authors also aspire that this discussion will contribute to increasing the availability of information related to the phenomenon and initiate further analyses.

## 2. Hunting tourism – problem overview

Hunting has been practiced since the earliest times and is culturally rooted in societies around the world. Hunting practices pursued by the first European explorers and settlers in Africa were not controlled and had a devastating effect on several species of wildlife, which led to some of them becoming extinct and others, such as elephants, being substantially reduced in numbers (Lindsey, 2008).

Over the years, however, people still have not ceased to hunt, and the motivation to participate in hunting as such has evolved in many cases from the initial need to satisfy hunger to sports or hobbies for which specialised travel agencies are being established. What is more, the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity distinguishes between resident hunting and hunting tourism. The former stands for hunting “conducted by hunters within their country of residence, and most commonly in the area where they physically reside and have hunting rights. Emphasis is generally placed upon physical recreation, consumption, traditions, and management aspects of hunting (...). They usually do not require the services of hunting tour operators” (European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, 2007). On the other hand, “Hunting tourism is conducted by hunters who may sometimes travel considerable distances from their home and/or own hunting grounds, and often abroad, in order to hunt” (European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, 2007). Hunting tourism is sometimes presented as a form of nature tourism, and additionally, according to some, “if well regulated, (it) may be comparable to eco-tourism” (European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, 2007). The market for tourist hunting, like any other market, is influenced by supply and demand, costs and benefits, as well as national and international regulatory systems.

In regard to hunting tourism, specialised tour operators are called to deliver the service. They are “Agents or agencies that directly or indirectly provide services (guiding, outfitting, lodging, hunting opportunity) for hunter tourists” (European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity, 2007). Their efforts are based on identification of the needs and motives of their customers. In general, the incentives of persons

undertaking hunting tourism activities are of various nature; moreover, there may be several types of hunters within the same area. Buckley and Mossaz (2015) draw the attention to the hunters who hunt to shoot as many animals as possible, the ones who hunt for meat and collect trophies or for the sake of legal or illegal trade. As the authors show, each of these groups may include residents of the area they are active in, legal commercial hunters who travel and pay for the hunt themselves, as well as poachers. However, hunting tourism is sometimes described as a consumption activity involving the acquisition of animals and stands in opposition to other wildlife tourism activities, such as nature watching or eco-tourism. In 2016, the Namibian trophy hunt generated approximately USD 431 million in revenue, of which about USD 72 million came from non-consumption tourism spending (MacLaren et al., 2019). When it comes to hunting at large, Europe is a diverse continent. Hunting systems, the role of hunters in society, their motivations, their traditions, and the way they perceive one another vary from country to country and from region to region (Hofer, 2002). It is estimated that in 2016 the hunt by EU customers generated, both directly and indirectly, USD 270 million (MacLaren et al., 2019). An analysis of the offers indicates that an average value of the hunt itself accounts for one third of the price, the next one includes travel costs, while additional expenses constitute the last third (Hofer, 2002). Safari Club International, an American organisation with more than 50 000 members (About Us, <https://www.safariclub.org>), often business owners and executives, reports that its members spend on average 37 days a year hunting, of which 21 outside the United States, spending on average USD 61 000 on travel-related costs (Lovelock, 2007). Hunting tourism is supported by a system of prizes and medals for hunters who demonstrate their skills in specific competitions. It is also complemented by various events, fairs and exhibitions, including the European Hunting Horn Championships. It is hard not to mention diverse customs, cuisine, gestures, words (the paint being game blood) and superstitions related to hunting. Despite various attempts to familiarise people with the

phenomenon of hunting tourism and explain its main purpose, the activities related to it are accompanied by a number of controversies,

which are founded on ethical dilemmas and the uncertainty concerning its ecological, economic or social consequences.

### 3. Hunting tourism – the state of research on the subject undertaken in Poland

Hunting tourism is one of the less researched forms of tourism and is often not identified as a tourist activity. When analysed from the perspective of this very industry, it is considered a niche market targeted at a group demonstrating relatively specific characteristics. In world literature, the scope of research on hunting tourism (though rarely encountered) is rather wide and concerns mainly analyses with respect to ethical consequences, economic viability with reference to sustainable development, or motivations and opinions of hunters and residents. The ethics and etiquette of hunting are also oftentimes presented in national literature. For example, such analyses in the context of concealing violence were performed by Urbaniak (2018) and Skubala (2012). Other than that, Rancew-Sikora (2009) tried to capture the reason for hunting. As for hunters' activities, including the frequency and length of trips, they were analysed by Maćkowiak and Budyk-Tomkowiak (2012), while Piszczek (2013) focused on adapting the forest for qualified tourism. As noted in the introduction, the review of the literature on the subject allows one to see the polarisation in opinions on the evaluation of the studied phenomenon. On the one hand, the first two items mentioned above generally classify them as negative, but on the other hand there are voices supporting the practice of hunting tourism in Poland (Bukowska, 2009). Researchers argue about the ethical responsibility of people helping to restore and

manage wildlife populations. In the academic community, the arguments against hunting focus mainly on the fact that it involves killing. Urbaniak (2018) points out that the strategies of actions proclaimed by hunting ethics and etiquette actually mask "killing animals for entertainment purposes, the feeling of possible mental discomfort during the acts of killing, the anachronism of environmental protection through destruction". The controversy becomes even more evident since the main objective of killing wildlife has moved away from the historical necessity of hunting to satisfy hunger towards sports and recreational activities. One should also bear in mind that hunting tourism appears in various planning documents concerning social and economic development, or those dedicated strictly to tourism in a given area, as a remedy facilitating economic improvement. Having said that, local communities are still not always favourable to the development of this form of tourism. Similar disproportions in the assessment of the phenomenon are visible even among the tourists themselves, including the representatives of the tourism industry. It so transpires that a part of said industry has become interested in consumer forms of tourism connected with wild animals (hunting) in general. In spite of such an extensive discussion, which has activated various environments in Poland as well, there is still a palpable lack of information and research on the actual impact of hunting tourism on the country's economy.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Hunting in Poland

For thousands of years, humans have played an important role in ecosystems, influencing processes in the natural environment. One of the manifestations of such activities is hunting management. Currently, the law on hunting in

Poland is based on the Act of 13 October 1995, hunting law (Ustawa z dnia 13 października 1995 r., Prawo łowieckie). As stated in the provisions of the Act, hunting means protection of wild game (animals) and management of their

resources in accordance with the principles of ecology and rational agricultural, forestry and fishery management. At present, the Ministry of Climate is responsible for shaping the legal norms concerning hunting in Poland. What is more, it is also accountable for regulations concerning, among others, the list of game species and hunting plans, qualifications of game wardens and exams for entrepreneurs providing tourist services in the field of hunting organisation. The hunting industry is managed by the Polish Hunting Association, although other entities are also involved in the implementation of tasks in its scope. The State Game Warden is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Act. Apart from observing the regulations, the hunter's conduct is determined by the documents of ethical nature, created under the Polish and international law (Collection of Ethical Principles and Hunting Traditions, European Code of Conduct on Hunting, CIC). The first document, published on the website of the Polish Hunting Association, includes a provision stating the following: "The hunter does not seek material benefits in hunting, as hunting cannot be a means to achieve them" (<https://www.pzlow.pl/kultura/>). The basic organisational unit within the Polish Hunting Association is hunting clubs. According to data from Statistics Poland and the state itself, there were 2 592 hunting clubs in Poland in 2019, which had a total of 126 583 members (GUS, 2019). The number of hunting clubs and their members is visibly growing (Table 1), both the highest values being noted in the Mazowieckie voivodeship. The minimum age of hunters in Poland is 18 (as of 15.04.2020). FACE (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU) claims that "the law in Poland is unjustly discriminatory in this regard" (FACE Statement, Proposal to allow U-18s participate in hunting in Poland, 2020), and hunters themselves try to persuade said organisation to change this rule by explaining that they do not "teach others to kill for pleasure" (Myśliwi chcą by dzieci mogły brać udział w polowaniach, 2019).

According to Art. 42 of the Act of 13 October 1995, hunting law (Ustawa z dnia 13 października 1995 r. Prawo łowieckie), there are only three groups of people who are allowed to hunt. The first one consists of the members of the Polish Hunting Association (PZŁ). The second

one includes the foreigners who are EU citizens, provided that they are authorised to hunt in a Member State and passed a supplementary examination on the provisions concerning the rules and conditions of hunting, the list of game species and hunting seasons. The third group that may hunt in Poland constitutes foreigners who bought a hunt from an entrepreneur conducting business activity in the field of hunting, consisting in the provision of tourist services that covers the hunting carried out on the territory of the Republic of Poland. Should that not be the case, said foreigner needs to have the consent of the minister in charge of the environment to become authorised to hunt (Art. 43, §1 of the Act). In 2018/2019, the list of major game species that may be shot was enlarged to include deer, hares, partridges and pheasants. At the same time, the following animals were removed from the list: fallow deer, roe deer, wild boar and foxes. As shown in Table 2, during the years 2018/2019, of all the major game species (elk, fallow deer, mouflons, deer, roe deer, boar, foxes, hares, pheasants, partridges, ducks), the ones most often shot were boar (266 047) and roe deer (210 133). Compared to the previous period (2017/2018), the shooting of deer, hares, pheasants and partridges increased.

**Table 1.** Hunting clubs and their members (in thousands) in Poland, 2010–2019 (based on GUS, 2019)

Year	Number of clubs	Total members
2010	2 533	109 325
2015	2 554	118 362
2018	2 558	125 137
2019	2 592	126 583

The value of game purchase in 2018 amounted to PLN 102 449,3 thousand (GUS, 2019) and, similarly to the number of hunting clubs, the number of their members rose compared to the previous year. The activity and functioning, as well as the implementation of their statutory tasks by the relevant entities within the framework of hunting economy, was subject to the NIK audit which "revealed a number of substantial irregularities at all stages of hunting economy covered by the audit, both in terms of its organisation and implementation" (NIK, Informacje o wynikach kontroli prowadzenie gospodarki łowieckiej, 2015).

**Table 2.** Shooting of major game species in thousands of heads<sup>1</sup> (based on GUS, 2019)

Listing	2015/2016	2017/2018	2018/2019
Elk (moose)	-	-	-
Fallow deer	9.6	9.5	9.0
Deer	89.3	94.4	95.4
Roe deer	203.4	214.8	210.1
Boar	342.1	341.4	266.0
Foxes	159.5	154.5	153.8
Hares	15.2	10.7	13.4
Pheasants	128.5	102.4	102.9
Partridges	2.7	2.1	2.3

<sup>1</sup>The data do not include animal breeding centres run by scientific and didactic institutions.

## 4.2. Hunting tourism in Poland

Hunting tourism finds its enthusiasts in Poland as well. Said country is in this regard an attractive market for both domestic hunting tourists and those coming from abroad. On the website of one of the travel agencies revolving around hunting tourism one can read that 700 hunters from abroad come to Poland every year (<http://hummeltravel.pl>). In the case of other agencies, for example, Art-Hubert provides services to about 120 hunters in the Podkarpackie region and about 300 nationwide. In turn, BPD “Bieszczady” serves about 200 hunters (Przystanek Podkarpackie, 2016). In terms of the regions’ agencies, the hunters come on average for 5 days of their stay, and only around 10% of their customers are interested in sight-seeing (Przystanek Podkarpackie, 2016). Rancew-Sikora (2009), while also referencing research by other authors, points out that half of all Eurasian offers are sales proposals from Poland and Hungary. Both countries sell 30–40 thousand hunts to foreign tourists annually. However, as the author herself notes, the situation is changing due to competition from other countries, including Belarus. Hunters from Denmark, Norway and Sweden are keen to come to Poland to hunt due to the price, communication accessibility and availability of game. It became apparent that the tourists also happen to travel from Poland not only to nearby countries (Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Russia, Norway) but also to the African continent, e.g. to hunt in Mozambique, Cameroon or Namibia.

In order to promote joint hunting expeditions to the farthest corners of the globe, the Polish Safari Club was established. The purpose of the Diana Club of the Polish Hunting Association, on the other hand, was to popularise hunting among women, which resulted in 141 women belonging with the club in 2017 (<https://www.pzlow.pl/jak-zostac-mysliwym/kluby/klub-dian/Turystyka.lowiecka>). As an illustration, the share of women participating in hunting in the United States is at the level of 7%, with 1–4% being the average for Europe (Rancew-Sikora, 2009). The Bukowska survey carried out in accommodation facilities in the Pilczycki forest, aimed at hunters specifically, shows that the age of a qualified hunter ranged from 37 to 70 years old, with an average age of 45–50 years, whereas the hunters aged 25–30 accounted for 3% of the whole studied group. Men represented a large majority (98%) of qualified hunters, while women usually came to hunt as accompanying persons (Bukowska, 2009).

The duration of the hunt and the hunters’ preferences for game species were of various nature. Research by Maćkowiak and Budyk-Tomkowiak (2012) indicates that 53.3% of the members of hunting clubs from the Wielkopolskie voivodeship go on a one-day hunt. The rest take part in longer trips. Moreover, the study conducted among the members of PZŁ showed that hunters are most willing to hunt wild deer and roe deer, killing an average of 130 animals from this group

during their lifetime (Rancew-Sikora, 2009). In the case of commercial hunting, the price depends on animal species (rarity, difficulties in obtaining, quality and size of trophies). The issues of trophy valuation are regulated by the Regulation of the Minister of the Environment of 19 May 2005 on the method of valuation and registration of hunting trophies. Hunting trophies are recorded in the Central Registry of Hunting Trophies. Generally, the hunting package includes multiple services, e.g. housing (accommodation, meals, registration fees), organisation of individual hunting (shooting, preparation of the fishery, providing a guide during the hunt, initial preparation of the trophies, valuation and evaluation of the trophies, transport services). According to the regulations applicable in Poland, an entrepreneur who undertakes and performs an economic activity consisting in the provision of tourist services that cover hunting carried out on the territory of the Republic of Poland and hunting abroad is obliged to pass an examination on the

knowledge of hunting and nature protection rules or employ a person meeting this condition by the Act of 13 October 1995, hunting law (Ustawa z dnia 13 października 1995 r. Prawo łowieckie). This examination is conducted by an examination committee appointed by the minister in charge of the environment. However, should there be no plans to ban commercial hunting in Poland in the coming years (despite the fact that such initiatives are sometimes undertaken worldwide), the need to deepen natural knowledge and create a system enabling hunters to improve their education in this respect at the level of the hunting clubs is becoming more and more evident (Gwiazdowicz, 2012). Such an observation is supported by examples of rather surprising mistakes made by certain hunters, featured in the press (Kulka, 2020). Apart from the need for better education, there is also a postulate for broader monitoring of hunting tourism in Poland and greater availability of information on the extent of the phenomenon.

## 5. Discussion

In July 2015, a lion named Cecil was killed by a hunter. This caused a public outrage and led to a discussion about the trophies and techniques used by hunters (in this case – luring the lion out of the park). In fact, however, the problem is more complex and concerns a number of aspects, be they ethical, environmental or economic. The voices of hunting tourism opponents are being heard ever more frequently in Poland, which causes a reaction of its supporters. The discussion between supporters and opponents of hunting tourism starts with arguments related to nature conservation and additional funds for local communities. The arguments for the development of hunting tourism as a tool for the protection of wildlife and a source of income for local communities are central to many debates.

Pabian (2017) points out that hunting organised in different parts of the world is not fully compatible with the ideas of ecotourism and sustainable development. Despite the best efforts of the hunting industry to promote it as environmentally friendly, unregulated hunting has unfortunately had a considerable impact on

certain endangered species (Lovelock, 2007). During collective hunting, in addition to killing wildlife, other species of fauna and flora are disturbed, and hunting equipment can interfere with wood felling, cane cleaning and crop mowing, which often generates conflicts between a forest and hunting grounds (Piszczek et al., 2013). The counterarguments therefore concern the decrease in the number of predators and increased pressure from man, threatening wildlife all over the world. Additionally, opponents of hunting tourism and hunting itself draw the attention to a small percentage of hunters with reliable knowledge of natural interdependence (Urbaniak, 2018). The supporters of hunting tourism argue that hunting tourists contribute relatively large amounts to the local economy and the communities themselves, who by spending their money support the hotel, catering, retail and transport industries, and also pay licence fees and employ guides. There are opinions that these activities allow more money to be spent on nature conservation, and improved protection leads to an increase in the number of animals, which in turn allows for more hunt-

ing opportunities and thus more funding and support for local communities. For this reason, hunting may be seen by tourists (hunters) as a sustainable activity, and the belief that their funding increases the efforts to protect nature makes it possible to kill even more animals. The economic impact and benefits for local tourism providers, communities and regional economies are more frequently used by hunter tourists to justify their actions. At the same time, only one third of the income remains in countries, generating very little in relation to the region's GNP, although this proportion depends on a number of factors (Lovelock, 2007).

Hunting trophies and other animal souvenirs are a separate issue of discussion. The

payment of wildlife trophy fees and licences demonstrates the ability to contribute to nature conservation programmes, but the extent to which local communities and nature conservation programmes are supported in this way depends largely on the model of revenue collection and spending systems adopted in a given area (Lovelock, 2007). It is difficult not to notice that the tourist demand for animal souvenirs is often accompanied by illegal hunting or poaching, which has been and still is a visible practice, occurring even in countries where hunters are subject to considerable public control and enforcement and penalties for non-compliance are high (Bauer and Herr, 2004).

## 6. Conclusions

One of the key issues in hunting tourism is whether the development of this form of tourism is an adequate/appropriate/ethical way of using animals compared to other tourism-related activities, such as watching wildlife or taking photographs. While the answer seems obvious, it can be assumed that no radical changes nor a departure from commercial killing of animals should be expected in Poland over the next few years. The opinion regarding the 'salutary' (for nature) animal shooting rather often distracts attention from the fact that the country is seen as an El Dorado for tourists who kill 'for fun'.

The nature conservation approach is followed by other arguments related to taking care of local communities by providing them with additional, considerable income. The examples from other countries mentioned in the paper indicate that only a certain part of this income stays in the source countries. Poland is no exception in this respect. Nevertheless, with regard to the country, further research concerning the main problems presented in this article is needed from the perspective of local inhabitants and hunters themselves.

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