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## Stakeholders' Relationships in the Sustainable Development of Tourist Destinations

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## **STAKEHOLDERS' RELATIONSHIPS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

### **Abstract**

The aim of the article is to present various types of relationships occurring between stakeholders in a tourist destination and to indicate their role in the sustainable development. The article consists of four parts preceded by the introduction. In the first part, the essence and role of the sustainable development were presented. Secondly, the particular types of relationships which may occur between actors in tourist destinations were defined and discussed – conflict, competition, coexistence, coordination, cooperation and collaboration. In further discussion, the roles of these particular relationships in the sustainable development were presented. In the third part, on basis of examples, it was indicated and explained which relationships serve to stimulate this development and how, and which ones hamper this development. The last fourth part consists of the conclusions in which it was emphasized that even though in the economic reality the presented scenarios of relationships are frequently of a mixed character, their model presentation allows to understand better their role in the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** relationships, sustainable development, tourist destinations

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## Introduction

The formation of proper relationships between various stakeholders in tourist destinations is one of the crucial conditions for the sustainable development of these destinations. In the literature, different types of these relationships are analyzed. These are: conflict, competition, coexistence, as well as coordination, cooperation and collaboration.<sup>1</sup> Some of them, e.g. conflict or unjustified competition hinder this development, others, however, e.g. coordination or collaboration stimulate this development, including sustainable one.<sup>2</sup> In literature it has been stressed for years that cooperation is very important for the sustainable development. According to some authors, it is even a condition indispensable for this development.<sup>3</sup> For the benefits obtained due to proper relationships between stakeholders result from sharing complementary resources and lead to reaching synergic effects, which would be impossible to reach when acting individually. In the conditions of the sustainable development the complexity of a tourist product requires not only cooperation in the creation of this product, but also the pro-

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<sup>1</sup> T.B. Jamal., D. Getz, *Collaboration theory and community tourism planning*, "Annals of Tourism Research" 1995, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 186–204; M. Watkin, B. Bell, *The Experience of Forming Business Relationships in Tourism*, "International Journal of Tourism Research" 2002, 4, pp. 15–28; A. Fyall, B. Garrod, *Tourism Marketing. A collaborative Approach*, Channel View Publications, Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto 2005.

<sup>2</sup> M. Augustyn, T. Knowles, *Performance of tourism partnerships: A focus on York*, "Tourism Management" 2000, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 341–351; B. Bramwell, B. Lane, *Collaborative Tourism Planning: Issues and Future Directions*, in: *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships. Politics, Practice and Sustainability*, B. Bramwell, B. Lane (eds.), Channel View Publications, Clevedon 2000, pp. 1–19; A. Caffyn., *Is there a Tourism Partnership Life Cycle?*, *Collaborative Tourism Planning: Issues and Future Directions*, in: *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships. Politics, Practice and Sustainability*, B. Bramwell, B. Lane (eds.), Channel View Publications, Clevedon 2000, pp. 200–229; *Co-operation and Partnerships in Tourism: A Global Perspective*, Canadian Tourism Commission, World Tourism Organization, World Tourism Organization Business Council, Madrid 2004; K. Czernek., *Uwarunkowania współpracy na rzecz rozwoju turystyki w regionie*, Proksenia, Kraków 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Action for more Sustainable European Tourism*, report of the Tourism Sustainability Group, EU, February 2007; [www.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/files/docs/tgs](http://www.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/files/docs/tgs) (access: 18.02.2014), E.T. Byrd, *Stakeholders in Sustainable Tourism Development and their Roles: Applying Stakeholder Theory to Sustainable Tourism Development*, "Tourism Review", 2007, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 6–13; D. Lorant, *Cities, events and environmental protection: tasks of sustainability*, in: *Transformation of historical cities' function*, Publishing House University of Economy in Bydgoszcz, Bydgoszcz 2012, pp. 55–62; A. Niezgoda, *Problems of implementing sustainable tourism in Poland*, "The Poznań University of Economics Review", 2004, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 30–42.

ecological behaviors resulting from the similar level of awareness and ecological education of all entities involved. The lack of pro-ecological actions on the part of only one participant may annihilate the actions of the rest.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the great role of cooperation in the sustainable development in the economic reality, it is observed that frequently collaboration between stakeholders ought to exist, there occurs a conflict or competition or entities coexist not noticing their mutual dependence. Therefore a question appears how these relationships may affect the sustainable development and whether some of them, generally regarded as negative, e.g. conflict or competition may consequently stimulate this development. Therefore the aim of this article is to present various relationships occurring between stakeholders in a tourist destination and to present their role in the sustainable development.

## 1. The essence and role of the sustainable development

The concept of the sustainable development is the result of development tendencies research and formulating warnings against global consequences of civilization development, in particular economic growth and natural environment resources damaging. The guidelines in the scope of the sustainable development occur increasingly frequently in academic discussions, as well as legal and strategic documents in many countries in the world. In Poland, the sustainable development is included in the Constitution (Art. 5) and basic legal acts. In the Environmental Law the sustainable development is defined as: "such social-economic development, where the process of integrating political, economic and social actions occurs with the preservation of natural balance and the stability of basic nature processes in order to guarantee the opportunity to satisfy the basic needs of particular societies or their citizens of both contemporary generation and the future generations".<sup>5</sup>

The popularity of the concept causes it to be increasingly frequently included in the strategic documents at the level of voivodeships, counties, municipalities

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<sup>4</sup> More: A. Niezgodna, *The role of environmental knowledge, attitudes and initiatives in the development of tourism product*, "Tourism", 2011, No. 21, pp. 34–39.

<sup>5</sup> Ustawa Prawo ochrony środowiska z dnia 27 kwietnia 2001 r. (Dz.U. nr 62, poz 627, art. 3, pkt 50).

as well as individual economic enterprises. However, one may notice that there are cases when the concept of sustainable development is treated as a popular slogan without reflection in actions.

One should stress that the premises of the sustainable development require the three aim groups to be realized in the specific area, that is, ecological, economic and social aims. This triad is codependent and the aims should be realized jointly. The frequent mistake involves the reduction of sustainable development issues to ecological matters. According to the state policy, the rules of the sustainable development should be translated to other areas of economy. In reference to tourist economy, they are connected to the concept of tourism not only economically effective but also friendly towards the environment (natural, social and cultural).

When making developmental decisions, the decision-making entities ought to consider tourism as an option of (sustainable) economic development, treated equally with other forms of economic activity.<sup>6</sup> It is also necessary to diagnose the resources existing in the given area and the perspective analysis of the possible development paths considering different variant forms. One ought to remember that the regions exist where the development of industry or agriculture may conform to the sustainable development concept. The condition is to plan how to use the existent resources. There may occur conflicts between stakeholders. The closing of industrial plants does not always equal the improvement of natural environment and it may additionally contribute to the negative social and economic effects. Therefore, the codependency of economic, social and ecological aims requires the complex approach towards the possibility of other regions development. The resignation from the foregoing economy sectors for the tourism development is not always beneficial.<sup>7</sup> The complex nature of a tourist product and the discussed aims of the sustainable development require various specific forms of relationships between different stakeholders.

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<sup>6</sup> A. Niezgoda, *Obszar recepcji turystycznej w warunkach rozwoju zrównoważonego*, Publishing House of University of Economics in Poznań, Poznań 2006, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> A. Niezgoda, *Uwarunkowania wdrażania koncepcji rozwoju zrównoważonego na obszarach recepcji turystycznej*, in: *Wyzwania współczesnej polityki turystycznej*, A. Rapacz (ed.), Academic works No. 259, Publishing House of University of Economics in Wrocław, Wrocław 2012, p. 267.

## 2. Types of relationships between stakeholders in a tourist destination

In academic works on the problem of ties between entities in a tourist destination, among the possible relationships, one enumerates: antagonism/conflict, competition, coexistence, coordination, cooperation and collaboration.<sup>8</sup> According to the authors, they often constitute continuum – from the most conflictual to the integrated ones in which every next type of relationships means the stronger tie between the partners and in some cases, includes the features of the previous relationship.

Watkins and Bell claim that competition is placed at the bottom of this continuum. They define it as achieving greater economic benefits by organizations, usually at the expense of others.<sup>9</sup> For instance, places of accommodation of similar standard, similar tourist attractions or objects enabling entertainment can compete against one another. Competition is also constituted by the rivalry of entities from a given tourist destination against the stakeholders from the other, competing destinations. Competition is a natural mechanism, which characterizes the functioning of the private sector, hence until it is justified it should not be regarded as an unwanted relationship scenario because such competition can stimulate cooperation. In the scope of competition, the entities from a tourist region may cooperate to attract a tourist to this particular area. However, when the tourist has already chosen the given destination, the entities compete so that the tourist chooses their offer and not the competitor's one. Cooperation, which will be discussed later and the competition take place at different stages. Therefore one should stress that the one does not have to exclude the other.<sup>10</sup>

Also the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)<sup>11</sup> indicates the important for the tourist regions (including sustainable development) role of proper relationships between entities acting in a given area. In its opinion

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. T.B. Jamal., D. Getz, *Collaboration...*, op. cit.; Watkins M., Bell B., *The Experience...*, op. cit.; Long P., *Researching tourism partnership organizations: From practice to theory to methodology*, in: *Quality Management in Urban Tourism*, P. Murphy (ed.), John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 1995.

<sup>9</sup> M. Watkins, B. Bell, *The Experience...*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Here one talks about the so-called *coopetition* – which means cooperation and competition at the same time and between the same entities (the name is derived from the blending of these two words).

<sup>11</sup> European Union advisory and consultative body.

entitled “Tourist policy and cooperation between public and private sectors”, the committee acknowledges that at the lowest level of the continuum of relationships which may occur between entities in a tourist destination (representing public and private sectors) are confrontational relationships, however, they are not called competition but antagonism/conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Antagonism constitutes a scenario where one side perceives the other as opposing or hindering its aims and interests. With regard to the sustainable development, striving for legal protection of areas environmentally valuable may be the example of such conflict. Residents may oppose and do not support the striving of organizations, authorities or entities connected to tourism to assign areas legally protected. The conflict may involve not only entities representing the same, but also separate sectors. For instance, the private sector representative may believe that the public sector hinders him to maximize the profit. It may occur, for example, through negligence in the scope of ensuring the appropriate technical and social infrastructure needed to conduct economic activity effectively and/or due to a bad quality of public service for tourists. In the opinion of the committee the private sector may be regarded by public authorities mainly as an apparatus for tax collecting, which to an increasingly greater extent drains financial resources of private sector which faces tough price competition. On the other hand, public authorities often believe that commercial sector creates problems, disturbs or disenables the realization of public aims connected with social wealth, protection and preservation of natural resources, the social cohesiveness and responsibility towards local communities.<sup>13</sup> However, conflict may sometimes be necessary as a starting point for agreement forming and a constructive dialogue between the sides.

The next scenario listed in the relationship continuum is the scenario of co-existence.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the entities tolerate one another but they act separately to reach their own aims. Simultaneously they respect their scopes of competences, they fulfill the legal and social obligations and obey the rights of other entities acting in favor of tourist development. It is the scenario of mutual tolerance,

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<sup>12</sup> *The opinion of European Economic and Social Committee* entitled: „*Polityka turystyczna a współpraca między sektorem publicznym i prywatnym*”, European Union Official Journal 2005/C 74/02 of 23.02.2005.

<sup>13</sup> *Opinia...*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

which, despite being better than the previous one – is still insufficient for the sustainable development.

The next type of relationship between stakeholders in a tourist region is coordination. According to Long, coordination constitutes a process where two or more organizations create and/or use the existent decisional rules in order to jointly handle the tasks connected to environment in which they act.<sup>15</sup> Thus, this is a coordination – proper orientation – of strategy, policies and the management of resources between different entities, each of which has its own aims but also realizes that the coordination and information exchange increase the complementarity of these aims which is beneficial for the society. Such form of relationship requires a higher level of cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

In the works of some authors (e.g. Himmelman, Long) including the authors of EESC opinion, coordination is an element of the next relationship scenario – cooperation.<sup>17</sup> In the literature one may use interchangeably the terms “collaboration” and “cooperation”. Wood and Gray acknowledge that collaboration takes place when a group of autonomic stakeholders engages in an interactive process using common regulations, norms and structures to act or decide in matters connected with a given field<sup>18</sup>. In contrast to collaboration, the aim of cooperation (named by the authors also *ad hoc* cooperation) is less complex, it is easier to define, to reach and to measure the results. Jamal and Getz agree with it claiming that cooperation means generally joint work aiming at a certain result. It does not, however, meet necessary conditions of a developed, dynamic cooperation (collaboration).<sup>19</sup> The authors claim that the term collaboration should be restricted only to such circumstances in which stakeholders recognize that there occur conflicts resulting from the complex problems and they want to reinforce the potential to overcome them. The problems and the aims connected with the sustainable development in a tourist destination are of such character due to the precedence of long-term aims.

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<sup>15</sup> P. Long, *Researching...*, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> *The opinion...*, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> A.T. Himmelman, (1996) *On the theory and practice of transformational collaboration: from social service to social justice*, in: C. Huxham (ed), *Creating collaborative advantage*, London: Sage, pp. 19–43; P. Long, *Researching...*, op. cit.; *Opinia...*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> D.J. Wood, B. Gray, *Toward a comprehensive theory of collaboration*, “Journal of Applied Behavioral Science” 1991, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 139–162.

<sup>19</sup> T.B. Jamal, D. Getz, *Collaboration...*, op. cit.



The authors of this article also believe that every collaboration is a form of cooperation, however, not every type of cooperation may constitute collaboration. For instance, recommending the offer of other economic entities to tourists, creating *ad hoc* working groups to solve a sudden problem in a tourist destination, one-time initiatives of collecting funds for the aim connected to tourism – all these actions constitute an example of *ad hoc* cooperation, not collaboration. The examples of the latter include actions, undertaken consecutively, for instance by Local/Regional Tourist Organizations, associated partnership groups, consortia, associations and other structures.<sup>20</sup> For they have specified long-term aims serving sustainable development of tourist areas and specific, advised and carefully planned actions of a tactic and strategic character are subject to these aims.

### **3. The role of particular relationships in the sustainable development of tourist destinations**

After the presentation and organization of methods of defining various relationships between stakeholders in a tourist destination, one should contemplate which of them serve sustainable development, and how.

Conflict definitely does not serve the sustainable development. When analyzing a conflict at the level of economic entities or local authorities, one may notice that it causes, among other things, mismanagement of resources of material character – in the form of finances, tangible assets, etc. as well as those of intangible character – time, human energy, etc. An example may be a conflict between residents and economic entities with regard to environment protection (referring to, for instance, garbage segregation, energy management or environment pollution) or even a conflict between different groups of residents. According to research conducted by S. Grönholm<sup>21</sup> temporary residents

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<sup>20</sup> A. Fyall, B. Garrod, *Tourism Marketing. A collaborative Approach*, Channel View Publications, Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto 2005; B. Bramwell, B. Lane, *Collaborative Tourism Planning: Issues and Future Directions*, in: *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships. Politics, Practice and Sustainability*, B. Bramwell, B. Lane (eds.), Channel View Publications, Clevedon 2000, p. 1–19.

<sup>21</sup> S. Grönholm, *Perceptions of rural needs and policy – the case of the archipelago of Turku, “Regions”* 2010, No. 278, Regional Studies Association, pp. 12–14.

evaluated pro-ecological actions higher than permanent inhabitants of Turku archipelago in Finland. It appears that both inhabitants and temporary residents prefer protective attitudes, do not want dynamic economy development, they demand to “preserve paradise for resting and recreation”. One may talk here about the conflict between striving for economic development of enterprises and the inhabitants' willingness to preserve the existent state. Different results were obtained by J. Willet,<sup>22</sup> who analyzed pro-ecological attitudes of tourists and inhabitants in Cornwall. The tourists would like to preserve the idyllic landscape which remains in conflict with the residents' attitudes who, in turn, would like the region to develop more dynamically.

Competition cannot be identified with conflict, however, it may serve sustainable development. The condition is to treat a tourist product in a complex way and simultaneously take into consideration the aims of a social, economic and natural environment. Competition stimulates mechanisms which make the entities work more effectively and efficiently. The use of renewable energy sources favoring the reduction of costs for enterprises which, while competing, strive to achieve ecological aims may constitute an example. Competition through such actions, simultaneously favors social aims by improving the conditions of inhabitants' lives. However, competition which is unjustified and occurs in areas where various actors ought to join forces to achieve synergic results does not favor sustainable development.

Coexistence does not serve sustainable development as well. Such relationship scenario, similarly to conflict, causes the mismanagement of resources. Actions which may be undertaken jointly in the scope of cooperation or at least owing to coordination and which are realized by stakeholders separately and multiply the efforts of different people may constitute an example. Such a direct example may be constituted by organizing ecological trainings repeatedly by various entities and separate actions in the scope of promotion of these trainings by different entities. Another example might be constituted by separate categorization systems introduced by various entities for agrotourism farms. As a result, a tourist has to address the problem of different marking and is unable to decipher the symbols of set categories.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Willet, *Cornwall, the experience economy and the tourist return*, “Regions” 2010, No. 278, Regional Studies Association, pp. 19–21.

In contrast, coordination favors sustainable development. Due to it, it is possible to orient the efforts of various entities in the scope of this development. The tourist enterprises commitment for natural environment protection and undertaking pro-ecological enterprises in conducting a company are becoming an important instrument of Public Relations and the improvement of one's own image on the tourist market. If actions are coordinated, it may encourage the tourist flow to the destination and become an important factor for gaining competitive advantage without eliminating sustainable development aims. Independently from the fact that whether enterprises decide to make their ecological character public or not, they can affect the reduction of negative results evoked by the tourist surge. The coordination is also needed in planning and realizing the actions undertaken by self-government authorities in tourist areas. Local authorities may specify the standards regarding ecological functioning of enterprises, including the tourist ones (e.g. garbage segregation, the limitation of waste emission) through space planning, tax reliefs, etc. Due to these instruments, one may control the type of developing accommodation, transport and auxiliary infrastructure. A different action in the scope of coordination is ecological education, which local authorities may conduct through trainings, competitions, conferences organization as well as informative actions (notice boards, bulletin issuing, organization of ecological paths, etc.). The nature of a tourist product may also be affected by public institutions promoting tourism and tourist organizations, and associations. The role of promotional institutions may consist in conducting campaigns to educate tourists, local communities as well as contractors and tourism organizers. Through promotional actions one may form tourists' attitudes, develop interests in natural environment values, form ecological sensitivity in local community and visitors. The promotion of tourism in Poland for foreign recipients may emphasize the uniqueness of natural environment of many regions.<sup>23</sup>

Sustainable development is definitely favored by short and medium-term cooperation. The cooperation of hotels aspiring to have pro-ecological character with the suppliers who accepted the requirements regarding environment protection may constitute an example. Another action which may be an example of cooperation serving sustainable development may be joint organization of ecological trainings for employees of different enterprises or joint employment of specialists, whose obligation is to prepare and realize various ecological programs for reposing tourists.

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<sup>23</sup> A. Niezgodna, *The role...*, op. cit., p. 38.

Cooperation may also consist in common marketing actions undertaken by various tourist entrepreneurs in order to acquire tourists and consequently, to generate profit which allows to develop the entrepreneurship further in a tourist region. However, this type of cooperation may be insufficient to achieve the aims of sustainable development. Enterprises may cooperate, for instance, by creating the joint stall at the trade fair, but neither the ecological character of the offer is emphasized there nor it is aimed at promoting local suppliers or food manufacturers.

Sustainable development is a long-term process of planned and coordinated actions, it is often necessary to constitute different forms of long-term cooperation (some may even last several or more years), that is collaboration. Collaboration is connected to the higher level of trust between the partners, with the wide benefits not only for the cooperating organizations, but mostly, for the whole destination, with the great commitment on the part of both sides in order to gain wide benefits resulting from the collaboration and oriented to make decisions jointly and to reach a consensus. These are necessary conditions for the sustainable development to take place in a possibly most effective way. The long-term action in the scope of creating tourist trails, which is connected to the creation of a complex tourist product by various entities, may constitute an example as well as actions in the scope of joint control of tourist development results in a destination or referring to actions involving local communities in tourist development planning. One ought to add that the democratization of social life and the citizens' permanent participation in the development planning become the conditions for sustainable development.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, to sum up, in order to talk about sustainable development between stakeholders in a tourist destination, at least the coordination of actions of various partners is needed, however, one cannot acknowledge that this is a sufficient scenario. One needs cooperation or even collaboration which constituting the highest level of partnership relationships, includes the features of both coordination and cooperation

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<sup>24</sup> More: A. Niezgoda, *Obszar...*, op. cit., pp. 245–246.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to present the relationships between stakeholders acting in a tourist destination and indicating what role the particular types of these relationships have in the sustainable development. This aim was reached. However, one should stress that the relationships scenarios presented in the academic works are of a model character – in economic reality they hardly ever occur in a pure form and it would be difficult to unambiguously qualify the situation in a given tourist destination to the one of these scenarios. It also refers to Polish regions where the cooperation relationships are just starting to be formed, often with difficulties. In economic reality one usually encounters rather mixed forms – the conditions which constitute various relationships are fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent. Due to the complexity of a regional tourist product and the necessity to participate on the part of various stakeholders in the process of creating this product, the reaching of consensus will always, to a certain extent, be connected to the conflict between interest groups, even if, for some time, the high level of understanding and harmony would be reached. Similarly, one should not negate competition. As was mentioned, it constitutes the natural mechanism of private sector functioning and it is necessary to ensure its efficiency.

For the sustainable development not to become a slogan without the reflection in real actions, this concept ought to be translated to the awareness of both policymakers and citizens. The awareness and understanding of codependency of economic, ecological and social aims constitutes the basis for cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders and favors synergic effect.

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## RELACJE INTERESARIUSZY W ROZWOJU ZRÓWNOWAŻONYM REGIONÓW TURYSTYCZNYCH

### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie różnego rodzaju relacji zachodzących między interesariuszami w regionie turystycznym oraz wskazanie na rolę tych relacji w rozwoju zrównoważonym. Artykuł składa się z czterech części poprzedzonych wstępem. W części pierwszej przedstawiono istotę i znaczenie rozwoju zrównoważonego. Następnie, zdefiniowano i omówiono poszczególne rodzaje relacji jakie mogą występować między aktorami w regionach turystycznych – konflikt, konkurencję, koegzystencję, koordynację, kooperację i kolaborację. W kolejnych rozważaniach zaprezentowano znaczenie poszczególnych rodzajów relacji dla rozwoju zrównoważonego. W części trzeciej, odwołując się do przykładów, wskazano i uzasadniono, które relacje oraz w jaki sposób służą stymulowaniu tego rozwoju, a które ten rozwój blokują. Ostatnią – czwartą część – stanowi zakończenie, w którym podkreślono, że mimo iż w rzeczywistości gospodarczej przedstawione scenariusze relacji często mają charakter mieszany, to ich modelowe ujęcie pozwala lepiej zrozumieć ich rolę w rozwoju zrównoważonym regionów turystycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** relacje, rozwój zrównoważony, regiony turystyczne