

Article

Eco-Friendly Tourism Decision Making during COVID-19—Sailing Tourism Example

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Abstract: In 2020, tourism was highly affected by COVID-19 and its restrictions, such as tourist traffic. Decisions related to trips were made in a state of high risk and uncertainty. This article's main aim is to present the results of research on decision making by people practising sailing tourism during COVID-19. The survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2021 on 580 sailors from Poland, Germany, Croatia, Italy, France, and Turkey. This is interesting because of the specificity of this form of nautical tourism, which is characterised by high flexibility in the planning and implementation of the cruise. Sailing tourism is also environmentally friendly due to the type of propulsion used and the low noise levels generated. Research has shown that country-specific travel restrictions impact sailing tourism and cruise decisions. The obtained results are important for developing sailing tourism and may contribute to rationalising decisions taken during crises.

Keywords: COVID-19; sailing tourism; functioning of the tourism; tourism management; functioning of sailors' society in the COVID-19 pandemic



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1. Introduction

Political, socio-cultural, and economic conditions are changing dynamically and the uncertainty around decision making is more frequent [1]. However, a health crisis of an unprecedented scale such as COVID-19 put the world in a completely different reality, wherein even experienced analysts were unable to assess the risk. The pandemic has affected all areas of human life, including tourism.

Until 2019, tourism was considered as one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world [2] regarding the annual number of participants in tourist traffic and generated revenues [3]. It was a driving force behind the economic development of towns, cities, and countries [4–7]. The situation has completely changed in the second quarter of 2020 [8,9].

The global mobility of societies and the specificity of SARS-CoV-2, such as lack of awareness about transmission by asymptomatic people, contributed to its spread across the world unlike ever before [10–12]. It almost paralysed tourism. International arrivals dropped by 74% and there were one billion lesser international arrivals at destinations worldwide compared to the previous year. The collapse in international travel resulted in an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues [13]. The greatest decrease was in all mass tourism. Staying in hotels and travelling by bus or plane has become almost impossible due to the risk of contagion and the restrictions. However, people have a natural need for recreation and have often sought other, safer, and available forms of tourism. More

people opted for domestic trips and forms of tourism that allow to avoid contact with many people. Instead of staying in cities and closed spaces, they chose tourism practised in close contact with nature. Thus, it can be concluded that, due to the pandemic, many people have abandoned tourist trips or turned to eco-friendly forms of tourism. This has had the rather unexpected effect of reducing pollution generated by tourism [14].

This article focuses on tourist decisions related to sailing tourism. Sailing tourism is one of the forms of tourism that has features by which it can be considered relatively safe to practise during the pandemic. For sailing yachts, the wind is the main source of propulsion (engines are used relatively rarely, as auxiliary propulsion), so they can be considered as environmentally friendly crafts. This type of tourism is important for the economy of many countries, specifically for regions with appropriate water bodies (sea and inland waters). Sailors visiting ports constitute a great purchasing power and generate demand for various services, thus stimulating the development of local entrepreneurship [15]. Charter services are treated in some countries, such as Croatia, as a key element of the tourism economy [16]. During a pandemic, however, it is important to note that the specificity of sailing tourism may make it resistant to many limitations of the situation. This form of tourism allows great flexibility in choosing the route and is characterised by great independence in the organisation area. The yachts are a means of transport and a place to stay, which allows for a significant reduction in the number of people met.

Despite its large and growing importance for the economies of many countries, sailing tourism is rarely the subject of scientific research, and research on the sailors' tourist behaviour during a pandemic can be considered pioneering.

Nautical tourism is relatively rarely the subject of scientific research. In many countries, there are also no centrally kept statistics and reports that could facilitate this. Due to the topicality of the topic, it is difficult to find other sources analysing the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic impact on sailing. Therefore, it can be concluded that the article is pioneering and fills the existing research gap. The presented analyses and conclusions may also be a valuable source of knowledge for entities managing the development of tourism.

This study aimed to present the results of research conducted on decision making by people practising sailing tourism. The main focus was on decisions regarding tourist cruises conducted in 2020. This was specifically during the ongoing pandemic, which meant sailors had to make decisions in an unprecedented crisis. Hence, they were forced to make a choice under risk conditions. Due to the ignorance regarding consequences of the current situation, the decisions made are subject to uncertainty. Hence, they take place under conditions of risk and uncertainty.

The structure of the article and the method of presenting the results of the research were subordinated to the implementation of the goal. The formulation of research questions was treated as an important element of the research procedure. The main research question was formulated regarding the impact of the pandemic on decisions made by European sailors. Four detailed questions were asked to emphasise the considered aspects in the sailors' decision-making process. They concern the frequency of sailing, the cruise routes, the crew composition, and sailing plans for 2021. Details are provided in the methodology section.

2. Literature Review

2.1. COVID-19—Basic Information

The COVID-19 outbreak, caused by the novel SARS-CoV-2, began as an epidemic on 17 November 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, Central China [17] and, on 11 March 2020, it was recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic [18]. From November 2019 to January 2020, the disease appeared mainly in Wuhan; however, in mid-January, it had spread across China [19].

Gradually, it spread to other countries and continents. In February and March 2020, the situation was challenging in Europe and the United States. On 13 March 2020, the WHO announced that Europe became the centre of the pandemic [20].

In the first months, the world experienced great anxiety about unknown diseases. There were no masks, disinfectants, respirators, or beds. Doctors did not know how to help infected patients, and hospitals were not prepared for such a large number of infectious patients and the fight against the disease.

Between February and May 2020, the daily number of infections worldwide increased from over 14,000 to almost 100,000. In July, nearly 300,000 infections were reported every day. These numbers steadily increased to exceed the limit of 500,000 per day in October. At the beginning of January 2021, almost 850,000 new cases were reported worldwide. The record showed over 900,000 cases by the end of April 2021. By 29 April 2021, more than 150 million people worldwide were infected. Moreover, about three million people died [21].

Measures were taken, internationally, to prevent the spread. Travel was reduced, quarantines and curfews were introduced, and several sporting, religious, and cultural events were postponed or cancelled. Some countries closed their borders or introduced restrictions on border traffic, including passenger arrivals, and restrictions on people crossing borders [22].

In the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) report, after presenting the status as of 18 May, the restrictions were eased (for seven countries). Nonetheless, all the examined countries continued to limit arrival [23], with about 31% of travel destinations requiring a negative PCR test result shortly before arrival or quarantine [24].

Since the beginning of this millennium, international travel has been hit by several waves of the pandemic, making biosecurity a political priority and public concern [25]. These events revealed not only the exposure of international travellers to severe infections but also tourism's role in facilitating the spread of infectious diseases [26,27]. As human mobility is inextricably linked to health hazards and contributes to the spread of many infectious diseases [28,29], researchers are increasingly trying to understand the impact of the pandemic on travel behaviour [30,31].

Increasing empirical evidence [32–36] shows that the pandemic has a severe and long-lasting impact on the perception of risk and travel related decisions in affected regions [37].

However, compared to the rapid resurgence of tourism demand, for example, after the SARS outbreak, COVID-19 has caused a drastic drop in tourism demand worldwide since the beginning of 2020 due to strict social distancing restrictions in countries or regions and tourists' personal perceptions of risk [38]. Among the growing number of studies on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism demand, there have been attempts to investigate the relationship between the pandemic and the level of acceptance of crowded spaces [39–43]. Research shows that the pandemic prompts tourists to avoid travelling to crowded environments to reduce the risk of disease transmission [44–46].

2.2. Decision Making

Decision making is a sequence of actions performed to isolate various possibilities from which the 'best' one is implemented. One of the oldest and best-known definitions was by Trewarth and Newport: 'decision-making process is the selection of a course of action from among two or more alternatives to reach a possible solution for a problem' [47]. Islam states that it is a 'process of defining and determining a course of action based on the values, beliefs, and preferences of decision makers to solve a specific problem in a comprehensive manner' [48].

People are forced to make decisions in various areas of their lives, professional and private. They are concerned with issues of various importance and depend on multiple factors [49]. These factors include the conditions/states in which decisions are made. According to Griffin, there are three states: certainty, risk, and uncertainty [50].

A state of certainty is one in which the action unequivocally determines the result; the decision maker can state what is to be achieved and the effect of a particular choice. The state of risk occurs when the consequences of a decision may be desirable and undesirable and result in gains and losses. However, a set of consequences and the probability of their

occurrence can be defined. The state of uncertainty occurs when all the consequences or the probability of their occurrence cannot be determined [51–54].

According to Xie et al. [55], ‘safety is a basic need for tourists’. Travel decisions made during a pandemic can be considered risky and uncertain. The risk is related to the possibility of infection while travelling or during a stay in a selected tourist destination. Moreover, there is a financial risk if the planned trip does not happen.

As a result of the dynamic epidemic situation and the obvious link between the growing incidence rates and population migrations (including tourist traffic) [56], various countries introduced restrictions on tourism. They were intended to slow down and limit the spread of COVID-19 [57]. They were often applicable almost immediately after their announcement, resulting in the state of uncertainty for tourists who planned their trips in advance.

An additional influencing factor was the communication about new cases of illnesses and introduction of restrictions. There was chaos and sensation-seeking in the media, which could cause fear among the audience. In their work, Hajibaba et al. [58] and Villacé-Molinero et al. [59] emphasised that, in some cases, these may even lead to cancelling the trip. Zenker et al. (2021) write about the fear of travelling resulting from the fear of contracting coronavirus; in their article they call it coronaphobia or coronavirus anxiety [25] and treat it as a disease.

Until now, there has not been a health crisis of such a large scale, so it is not easy to rely on analyses based on historical data in this matter [60]. Earlier pandemics, such as the first pandemic caused by SARS in the 21st century, which developed between 2002 to 2003 [61], did not spread as widely as COVID-19. Tourism of selected countries was affected. It is the first time that the whole world is facing the same problem and, as experts say, there may be more pandemics of this scale [62,63] or the current pandemic due to the mutation of the virus may continue for a long time [64], thus examining the impact and the associated state of risk and uncertainty on tourism decisions seems justified.

2.3. *Sailing Tourism as an Example of Eco-Friendly Tourism*

Sailing tourism is one of the forms of tourism included in nautical tourism—a sector of coastal and marine tourism and a form of water-based tourism [65,66], for which popularity has been growing in Europe recently [66–69]. Nowadays, nautical tourism is important for local economies. According to Spinelli and Benevolo, ‘nautical tourism plays a key role in the economic development and in the social and environmental sustainability of coastal tourist destinations’ [70]. It directly contributes to the development of services and technical, communication, and social infrastructure [71,72].

Nautical tourism has various definitions in the literature; often, this form of tourism, next to yachting, also includes cruising [73]. This article focuses on yachting tourism carried out on sail-powered yachts—hereinafter referred to as sailing tourism and related to voluntary voyages on sailing yachts for personal use and commercial activities, which take place outside the place of permanent residence, as well as related to staying in the ports for rest and recreation [74,75].

Tourism and maritime activities have been hard-hit by COVID-19 given its global character, service orientation, and involvement of numerous stakeholders [76]. The World Tourism Organization estimates that the tourism sector is the most affected [77]. According to a study by Kim et al. [78] considering COVID-19 and the associated risks for tourism, there was a search for options that could satisfy the sense of security. Regarding SARS-CoV-2, safety, according to all recommendations, depends, inter alia, on maintaining an appropriate social distance [39]. Sailing tourism can play a significant role in this context. It is a form of active tourism, with specific features that, when considered in the aspect of COVID-19, make it relatively safe and have a low risk of infection. These features include the following [79]:

- The ability to easily limit contact with people from outside the crew and the impact on the composition of the crew as sailing cruises are generally organised independently without the intermediation of travel agencies;
- Great independence due to the catering and hotel facilities on the yachts, which are a means of transport and a place to stay, allowing people to limit contact with others during the cruise to crew members only;
- Flexible planning of the cruise route;
- In many cases, travel to a departure port is self-organised, using personal transport. This gives independence in the event of restrictions on the use of public transport or the suspension of specific air and rail connections. It also reduces the risk of contamination on the way to/from the port.

These features can be appreciated by tourists even after COVID-19 [39,40]. This experience is sensitive to a number of factors and may completely change the picture of tourism in the future.

It is worth noting that sailing tourism is also a form of tourism with a relatively low negative impact on the environment. It generates a negligible amount of air pollution and is not a source of noise. It is one of the environmentally non-invasive forms of tourism that enables safe recreation and mental and physical regeneration in naturally valuable areas. In this context, sailing tourism can be considered an example of eco-tourism, i.e., tourism developed with respect for the environment and requiring responsible behaviour from the participants [80]. Eco-tourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to discover our world and be aware as to how we can protect it. Moreover, eco-friendly tourism means using products and services which do not harm the nature in tourist spots. [81]. Some authors also mention 'deeper appreciation of nature' and 'sustainable use of natural resources' [82]. Taking into account the motives of sailing tourism, such as being cut off from other people and being close to nature (it is nature based, which is one of the most obvious characteristics of eco-tourism) [83], it should be recognised that sailing tourism also has these features.

Its developing can be considered beneficial from the point of view of social interest (improving psychological condition during a pandemic by relaxing in the fresh air) as well as eco-friendly. Due to its eco-friendly nature, it is also a form of sustainable tourism, which provides many interesting experiences thanks to communing with nature while respecting natural and landscape values.

3. Methodology

Based on participant observation and literature review, the features of sailing tourism were identified, which may be significant regarding the COVID-19 risk or the introduction of related restrictions. Considering this, a research process was designed to answer the main and specific research questions.

The main research question was:

- How has the pandemic influenced European sailors' decisions? (MRQ)

To emphasise the considered aspects in the sailors' decision-making process, the following detailed research questions were treated as a supplement:

- Has the pandemic affected the frequency of sailing? If so, how? (RQ1);
- Has the pandemic affected the cruise routes? If so, how? (RQ2);
- Did the pandemic affect the crew composition? If so, how? (RQ3);
- How has the pandemic affected your sailing plans? (RQ4).

The research questions were the basis for preparing the form for the computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) survey. This data collection technique is often used due to the wide access to the Internet in Europe, allowing for quick responses. This technique is also safe during a pandemic and limited personal contact. It has also been used in surveys of respondents' opinions on issues related to tourism and travel [84–87].

The survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2021 among European sailors from Poland, Germany, Croatia, Italy, France, and Turkey. The research focused on European countries, where sailing tourism has been developing in recent years. These areas differ in the degree of tourism infrastructure development; however, the level of interest is comparable.

The survey forms in the six language versions were distributed by Facebook and posted on sailing forums and association profiles. This was considered the best way to reach European sailing tourists. Sailors are a hermetic group of people who prefer to focus on various types of thematic clubs and, nowadays, are also active on the Internet. A total of 580 completed forms were collected. The respondents were asked the following questions:

- How did the pandemic affect your sailing frequency in 2020?
- How did the pandemic affect your cruise routes in 2020?
- How has the pandemic affected the crew on your voyages in 2020?
- What are your sailing plans for 2021?

The first was a single choice closed question, while the remaining questions allowed more than one answer. The answers were obligatory.

The analysis of the results has been illustrated, which allowed for a clearer presentation. The following charts were mainly used: column, stacked column, doughnut, clustered bar, and radar. The latter is a graphical method used to display multivariate data. Hence, it is increasingly used by researchers in this type of analysis [88,89]. Moreover, statistical measures were used in the analyses, including classical and positional position measures.

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of the respondents taking part in the study, considering their gender and age range. The largest group is men aged 51 to 60, while the youngest respondents, women and men, are the smallest group.

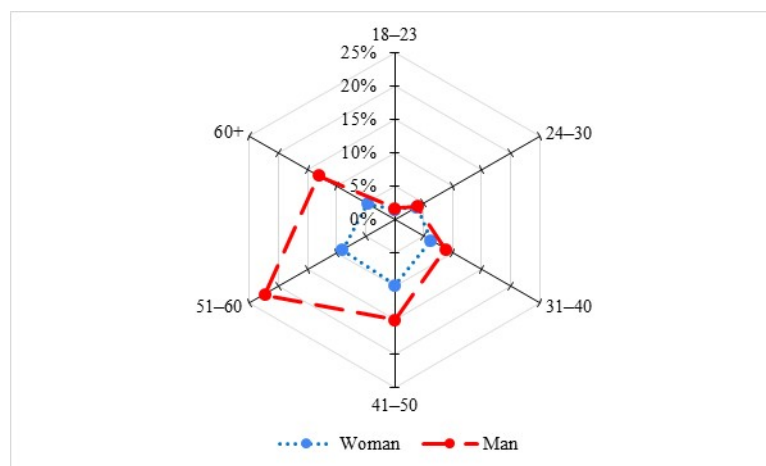


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of the respondents taking part in the study, considering their gender and age range.

Among all respondents, 35% were women and 65% were men. These shares were slightly different among different age groups (Figure 2a).

The percentage of women decreased with age. Hence, the median age of the surveyed women (46 years) was lower than that of men (52 years) compared to 50 years for all respondents. The median values are in the age ranges with the highest numbers within each gender separately (Figure 2b).

The age distribution showed left-hand asymmetry, which means that more questionnaires were completed by older people than the average age value. This is true for all respondents and according to gender, but it is a stronger tendency in men.

Due to these observations, it is difficult to analyse respondents' answers concerning their gender and age. However, an attempt was made, and certain relationships were obtained in the groups divided by these two features.

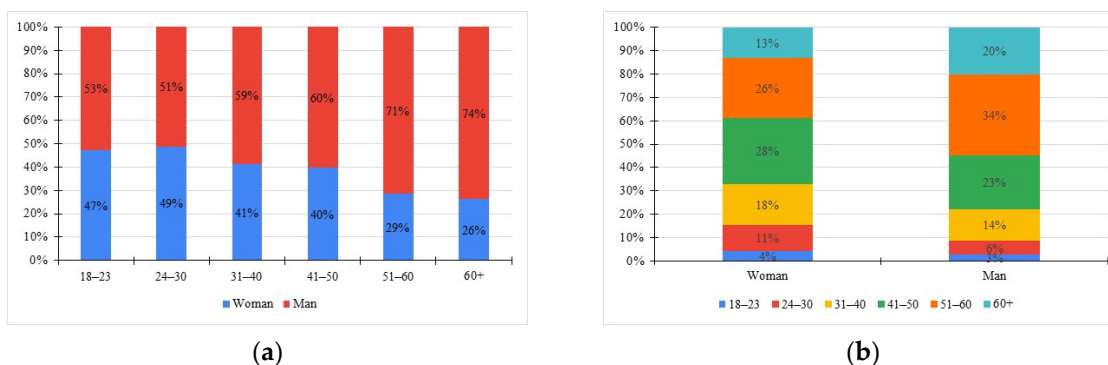


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents participating in the study: share of gender in individual age groups (a) and share of particular age groups in each gender (b).

4. Results

Figure 3 shows the percentages of answers to the first question related to the frequency of sailing in 2020. About a quarter of the respondents reported that the pandemic had no impact on it. The vast majority of respondents (74%) noticed this relationship. As many as 56% of participants said that they sailed less. However, there were some (18%) who, despite the pandemic, increased the frequency of sailing in 2020. This may mean that some people have given up other forms of tourism and decided to take up sailing.

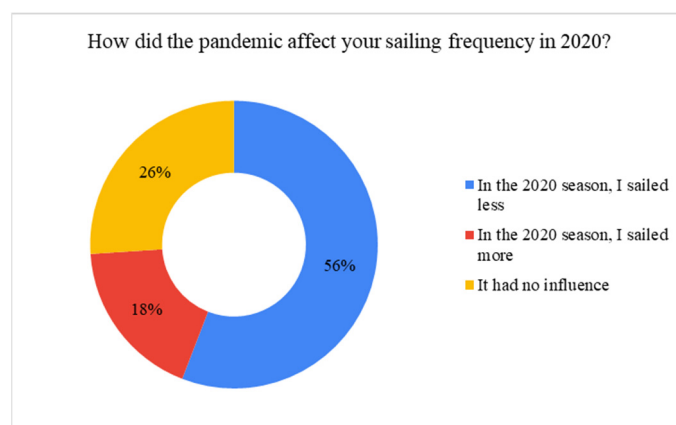


Figure 3. Percentages of answers to the question, 'How did the pandemic affect your sailing frequency in 2020?'.

When analysing the respondents regarding gender, similar percentages of responses were obtained, that is, gender is not a differentiating factor. Most European sailors of all sexes indicated a correlation between the pandemic and the frequency of sailing. The situation is slightly different regarding the respondent's age (Figure 4).

The distribution of answers for the oldest people differed the most; among them, 71% said the frequency of sailing had decreased and only 8% reported an increase. In contrast, compared to other age groups, the range from 31 to 40 years comprised the highest percentage of those who did not notice any correlation between the pandemic and the frequency of sailing.

The share of specific age groups in the answers was also analysed. About 50% of those who sailed less were at least 52 years old and those who had sailed for more than 48 years. However, the median age of the sailors who reported the pandemic as a factor to not sail on a sailing frequency was 49 years. Contrary to gender, age is a feature that differentiates the studied group of European sailors regarding sailing frequency.

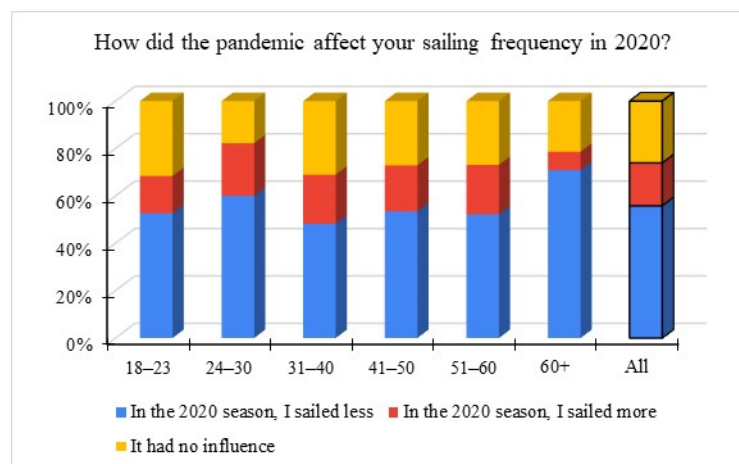


Figure 4. Percentage distributions of answers to the question, ‘How did the pandemic affect your sailing frequency in 2020?’ for each age group and in total.

The analysis of the answers to the survey’s second question on the cruise route in 2020 was divided into two parts. The obtained responses were synthesised, and it was indicated whether the pandemic affected the routes, and the responses were analysed regarding the decisions made under the influence of the pandemic.

The vast majority (83%) of the sailors participating in the survey confirmed that COVID-19 had an impact on sailing routes. Regarding the sailing frequency question, there was no deviation in the percentage of these responses in women or men. However, considering age as a factor showed that there were slight differences regarding the impact of a pandemic on their cruise routes. The percentages of the middle-aged groups, i.e., 31–40, 41–50, and 51–60, are the closest to the results for the entire group. However, the youngest respondents, more often than the older ones, indicated no impact of the pandemic on this aspect, while the oldest respondents reported the opposite. The percentage breakdown for each age group is shown in Figure 5.

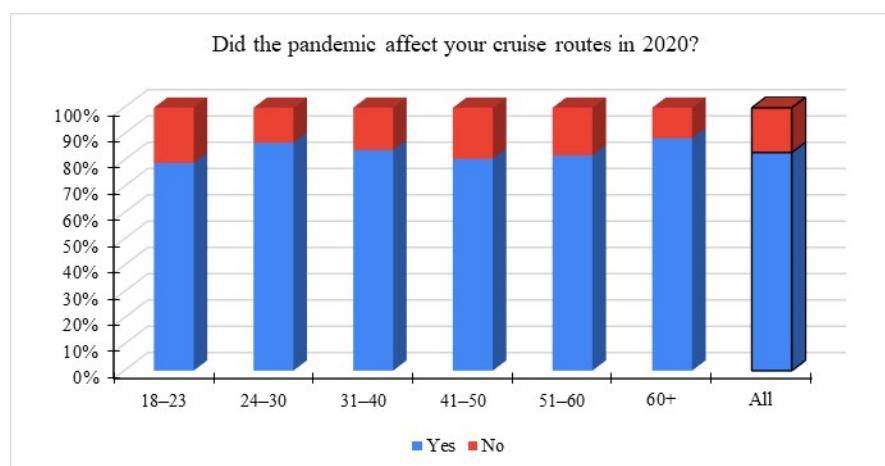


Figure 5. Percentage distributions of answers to the question, ‘Did the pandemic affect your cruise routes in 2020?’ for each age group and in total.

The second part of the analysis was limited to indicating what decisions and actions were taken by the respondents in connection with the pandemic situation (Figure 6).

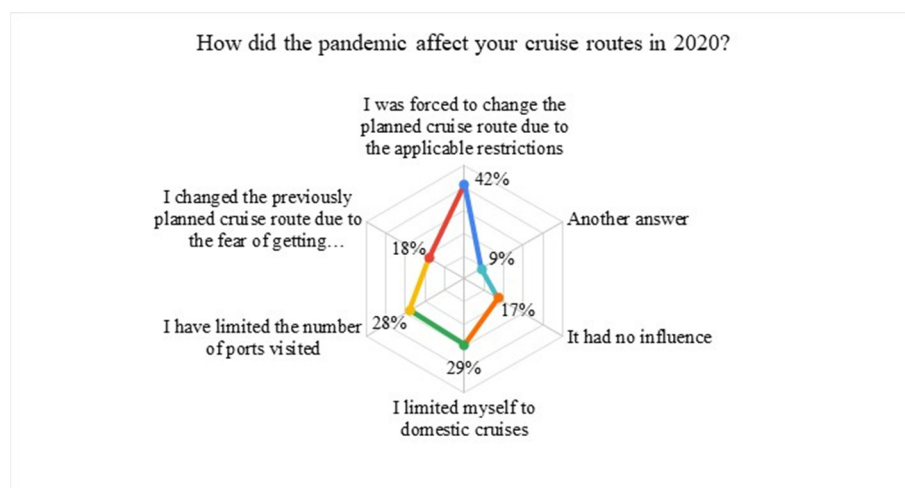


Figure 6. Percentage of responses to the question, ‘How did the pandemic affect your cruise routes in 2020?’.

The participants in this survey could choose multiple options in their response. Most (42%) respondents stated that they had been forced to change their planned cruise route due to applicable restrictions. However, significantly fewer (18%) changed the route because of the fear of contracting COVID-19. Among the respondents, those who said that the number of ports visited had reduced due to the pandemic and only domestic flights functioning was similar—28% and 29%, respectively.

Similar to the second question, the analysis of the answers to the third question regarding the impact of the pandemic on the crew composition during cruises in 2020 was divided into two parts. Moreover, the vast majority (80%) of sailors indicated that the pandemic had an impact on decisions related to completing the crew. In the group of women, a higher percentage (85%) was recorded, while the men’s responses were more similar to the total. Age as a factor also differentiates sailors regarding the impact of a pandemic on the composition of the crew (Figure 7).

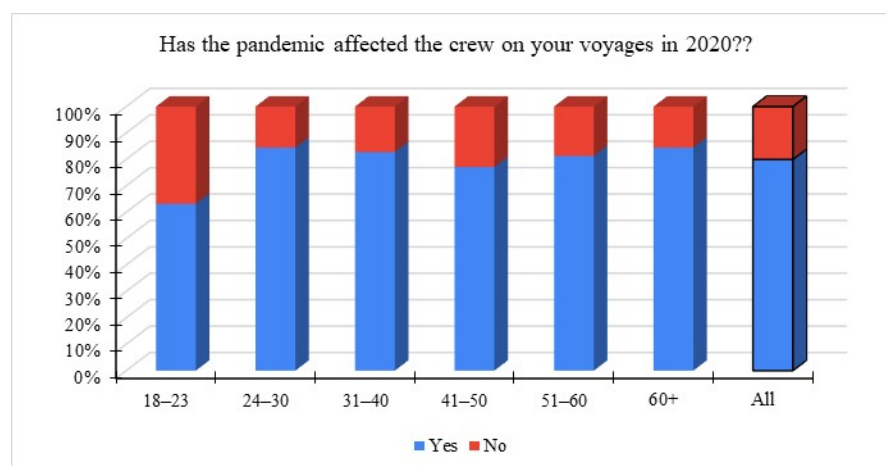


Figure 7. Percentage distributions of answers to the question, ‘Has the pandemic affected the crew on your voyages in 2020?’ for each age range and in total.

Deviations were observed in almost all age groups, and the largest were in the youngest group, whereas as much as 37% of people indicated no influence on crew composition. The percentages that were closest to the total were recorded among people aged 51 to 60 years.

Figure 8 shows the results of the analysis of answers to the question related to crew composition in 2020. Similar to the second question, respondents could choose more than one answer. Responses were closely associated with the pandemic restrictions imposed for minimising social contact. The respondents indicated that they decided to limit the crew composition to their immediate family (40%) or closest friends with whom they kept in touch daily (27%).

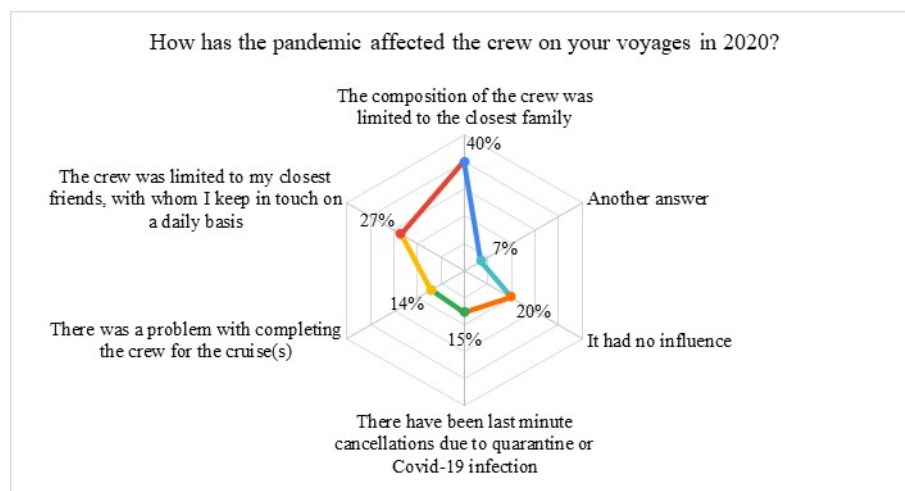


Figure 8. Percentage of answers to the question, ‘How has the pandemic affected the crew on your voyages in 2020?’.

Moreover, the respondents’ answers were analysed regarding whether the pandemic had an impact on decision-making time in several analysed aspects of sailing, that is, the frequency, cruise routes, and crew composition. Only 3% of all sailors surveyed said that the pandemic did not affect all three aspects. However, among those who indicated no impact on cruise routes and crew composition, about one-third sailed less and one-fourth more. A slightly higher percentage of respondents (7%) indicated no influence on the frequency and route. However, 3% were women and 4% were men. Considering the percentage of women (35%) and men (65%) in the entire study, it can be concluded that the pandemic had a much greater impact on the decisions made by women in the first two aspects of sailing. There was an even greater share of sailors (8%) who indicated no influence on the frequency of voyages and the crew composition. Among them, almost two-fifths were respondents who reduced the sailing frequency and one-fifth increased.

The last question of the survey concerned sailing plans in 2021, another year of the pandemic but slightly different from 2020. This difference results primarily from greater awareness of threats and the intensive vaccination campaign in Europe. However, the degree of uncertainty about the future was relatively high. The method of answering this question may also depend mainly on the respondent’s personality and experiences related to a pandemic (past illness, death of loved ones) or ordinary fatigue resulting from the situation. The results suggest some caution when formulating plans by sailors (Figure 9).

Most planned a domestic flight (43%) or withheld planning until the situation, caused by the pandemic, stabilised (18%). However, 39% of the respondents wanted to sail outside their country. Among those who claim that the pandemic did not affect the three analysed aspects of sailing, most are planning a foreign cruise in 2021.

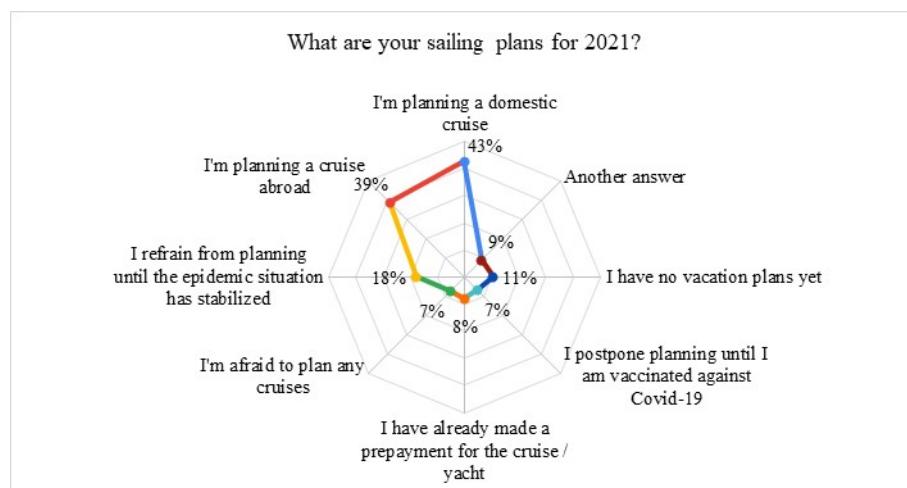


Figure 9. Percentage of answers to the question, ‘What are your sailing plans for 2021?’.

5. Conclusions

The presented research results are of great importance for the development of sailing tourism. This is a type of tourism that is rarely the subject of scientific study. Thanks to the presented results, it is possible to learn about the sailors’ behaviour and decision-making processes in a specific situation—during an ongoing pandemic. It can be assumed that such niche forms of tourism, allowing for close contact with nature and thus limiting contact with other people, may become more popular when similar health crises occur in the future. Knowing the decision-making mechanisms is therefore important and can help the tourism sector in the future and limit possible losses.

In the time of the ongoing pandemic, the presented research can also be helpful for those managing marinas or working in institutions responsible for tourism development. Thanks to the presented results, it will be easier to predict how the introduced restrictions may influence the behaviour and decisions of sailors. It may contribute to the growing popularity of this form of tourism.

According to the research results, it can be stated that COVID-19 had an impact on the decisions of European sailors related to sailing tourism. This conclusion is also a response to the MRQs presented by the authors. In-depth analyses also allowed us to define decision-making areas where this impact was most visible. The impact of the pandemic on the frequency of sailing (RQ1) was reported by 74% of the respondents. However, it did not have only a negative influence on sailing activity. Interestingly, 18% of these people sailed more in 2020 than in previous years. This could be due to several reasons. Travel restrictions introduced by individual countries also influenced the practise of other forms of tourism, especially international tourism.

The unpredictability of introducing various restrictions was an additional factor that could have caused some people to choose forms that offered more flexibility regarding the trip, instead of travel agencies and risking the last-minute cancellation of their trip. One of them is sailing tourism, which is characterised by great independence regarding implementation, including the possibility of modification during the cruise. Another factor that could increase interest in sailing is the ‘intimacy’ of this form. It allows you to limit the number of people with whom you have direct contact. Such isolation (the most desirable and recommended in a pandemic), without missing out on a tourist trip, could have been a factor stimulating sailing. Since nautical tourism can be considered eco-friendly, this trend should be considered beneficial for environmental reasons. However, it cannot be ignored that the vast majority of people claiming that the pandemic had an impact on sailing described it as negative, thus being in line with the general trend regarding the implementation of cruises in 2020.

According to the research, the flexibility regarding the possibility of modifying the route of the voyage during its duration was a feature of sailing tourism that was often used by European sailors. As many as 83% of respondents changed the cruise route, 42% were forced to do so by the applicable restrictions, and the rest were driven by the fear of becoming infected or the desire to avoid potential problems if such restrictions appeared. This shows how much the uncertainty and risks associated with the pandemic influenced the decisions of European sailors regarding the choice of cruise routes (RQ2).

The crew composition frequently changed due to the ongoing pandemic (RQ3) and changing the cruise route was also partly due to the greater necessity and partly due to the desire to minimise the infection risk. The higher necessity meant missing out as part of the cruise crew, for example, due to COVID-19, quarantine, or the inability to travel due to the prevailing restrictions. However, risk minimisation was manifested in limiting the crew composition to people with whom the sailors maintained daily contact (family members or closest friends).

The results on sailing plans for 2021 (RQ4) were quite optimistic. It should be emphasised that the respondents provided answers when the further course of the pandemic could not be predicted in any way (high uncertainty). Nonetheless, 82% of respondents had vacation plans and planned domestic or foreign cruises. Only a few (7%) refrained from planning cruises.

The results show that COVID-19 largely influenced various aspects of sailing and related decisions. However, it could be concluded that due to its high flexibility in planning and implementation, sailing tourism will not fail and lose too much popularity, even during a pandemic in the next season. COVID-19 has negative and positive effects on sailing tourism in Europe. There are possible deviations from forecasts and greater uncertainty. However, this situation has led to the development of safer and more sustainable systems that affect travel behaviour.

This crisis will have an impact on the travellers' behaviour, specifically regarding greater individualisation of sea travel. Related stakeholders should use the quarantine period productively to find innovative solutions, inform customers about the national situation, and training crew and staff in new working conditions. Recommendations for a more successful recovery of sailing tourism are based on rebuilding trust among sailors and crew, checking relevant information regularly, complying with prescribed hygiene measures, and adjusting service delivery. Future research could focus on primary research on European maritime tourism in the post-COVID-19 period and benchmarking analyses of the countries involved in this study.

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