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The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Labour Market in the Hotel Industry: Selected Conditions in Poland

Anna Tokarz-Kocik [1], Anna Bera [2], Karolina Drela [1] and Agnieszka Malkowska [1,*]

[1] Institute of Management, University of Szczecin, Cukrowa 8, 71-004 Szczecin, Poland
[2] Institute of Economics and Finance, Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management, University of Szczecin, Mickiewicza 64, 71-101 Szczecin, Poland
* Correspondence: agnieszka.malkowska@usz.edu.pl; Tel.: +48-91-444-3194

Abstract: Examining selected aspects of labour market performance in the Polish tourism sector can extend our knowledge of hotel company attitudes in connection with COVID-19. The aims of this article are to present selected determinants of labour market performance in the Polish tourism sector (with particular emphasis on the hotel industry) in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and to address the following research question: how did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the functioning of hotel companies in the key tourist region of Poland—Zachodniopomorskie province? The research methods used in the study included critical analysis of source literature, survey method, correspondence analysis method, and analysis of primary and secondary data, mainly from official statistics. The survey was conducted in January 2022. Information was collected from 129 respondents using surveys. The results of the research presented in the article reveal that the observed long-term upward trend in the national labour market has been halted by the pandemic and that (among the various accommodation facilities) hotels are the most vulnerable to changes in the tourism labour market. The authors' contributions to the literature are the identification of the extent to which businesses from the hotel industry have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the determination of the impact of the pandemic on selected employment-related aspects of business operations in Zachodniopomorskie province.

Keywords: labour market; hotel industry; COVID-19 pandemic; border region

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1. Introduction

The tourism sector, including the hotel industry, is highly sensitive to global factors, such as economic crises, climate change (related to the intensification of extreme weather conditions, e.g., floods and hurricanes), natural disasters (volcanic eruptions and earthquakes), disease threats (e.g., pandemics), increasing terrorism threat and ethnic or religious conflicts, as all these phenomena cause safety concerns for tourists staying in given regions and considerably reduce tourist traffic [1–3]. Recently, the hotel industry has particularly strongly reacted to the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic that has materialised [4–7]. In regions or countries where tourism is an important sector of the economy, the above phenomena additionally heavily hit the labour market [8–10].

It is difficult to predict what the condition of the tourism industry will be after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic [11–14]. One of the scenarios predicts that the tourism industry will survive in such a condition that, after the lifting of bans and restrictions, will allow it to return to the state at the level before the pandemic, although it also needs to be taken into account that there are forecasts that predict that tourist traffic will recover very slowly and that it will be difficult to achieve results at the level of 2019 [11–14], especially in times of energy crisis, armed conflict in Ukraine and high inflation in many countries [11,15].

In Poland, the state of pandemic was declared in March 2020. As a result, both its course and the preventive measures taken against the spread of the COVID-19, involving, among others, social distancing, leading to restrictions on the activities of certain industries nationwide or in individual regions, disrupted the normal market mechanism of supply and demand for labour in 2020 [16].

The aim of this article is to present selected determinants of labour market performance in the Polish hotel industry in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and to address the below research question. Specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the functioning of hotel companies in the key tourist region of Poland—Zachodniopomorskie province?
2. Did the type of facility determine the size of the dismissed employees (what was the impact strength)?
3. Which of the hotel facilities were most affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations?

The added value of the article is to show the sensitivity of individual hotel facilities exposed to the risk of a pandemic in Zachodniopomorskie province in Poland. The authors' contribution to the literature is the determination of the extent to which enterprises in the hotel industry were affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on selected employee aspects of economic activity in Zachodniopomorskie province.

The theoretical issues were examined based on an analysis of the available literature on labour market and tourism economics. The research methods used included critical analysis of source literature, survey method, correspondence analysis method, and analysis of primary and secondary data, mainly from official statistics. The survey was conducted among selected tourism sector entities in Poland in January 2022. Information was collected through surveys with a representative sample of 129 respondents from Zachodniopomorskie province. The survey focused on hotel facilities.

In addition, for the purpose of the article, statistical data on the labour market in Poland and in the examined region were analysed mainly from 2019, i.e., the year preceding the pandemic, to 2022 (data for the first quarter). This allowed us to assess the reaction of the Polish labour market to the pandemic, which spread to Poland in mid-March 2020. The research covered Zachodniopomorskie province, which is key in terms of generating revenue from tourism. Among the 16 Polish provinces, it is Zachodniopomorskie province that boasts the largest share in the Polish tourism market.

In order to achieve the research objective, the first part of the article presents a literature review, and the second part pertains to research related to developments in the Polish labour market and Polish hotel industry during the pandemic as well as the analysis of own research (related to Zachodniopomorskie province). The article ends with conclusions drawn from empirical research. Since the examined issue is wide and multifaceted, the article only discusses the most important problems.

2. Literature Review

In many Member States, European regions and cities, tourism is a key factor in the economic and social fabric [17]. Moreover, it provides much-needed jobs and income, often concentrated in regions lacking alternative sources of employment, and makes the employment of low-skilled workers possible [18]. In some of these regions, tourism accounts for 10 to 50% [19] of total employment. Globally, the tourism industry creates 1 in 10 jobs and provides a source of livelihood for millions of people, in both developing and developed countries [20]. In Europe alone, tourism provides 27 million jobs and supports millions of businesses [21].

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the object of the "market transaction" was human labour, inextricably linked to an individual, the worker, but also beneficiary of the work of others (services). The trade was conducted between employers, who created demand for labour and offered jobs [22], and potential workers, who offered their services, determining the labour supply [23]. However, the year 2020 proved that there can arise extraordinary situations that disrupt the typical, well-known market game, as a supply shock caused, among other things, by labour supply occurred [24–27]. It is important to note that work is a value in itself, not only for economic reasons, and is one of the crucial aspects of human life [28]. The outbreak of the coronavirus caused people to re-evaluate their activities and actions and realise that there are values in life more important than work, for example, health and life, as was seen during this difficult period [29]. Many economists believe that the social and economic effects of the pandemic on the labour market (and beyond) could be dramatic [30,31].

Due to the difficult situation for the tourism sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market in this sector has become the subject of research, where attempts have been made to present the impact of the pandemic on the labour market in the hotel industry.

When authoring works on this subject in Poland, M. Adamowicz [32] distinguished four research trends on the pandemic and the labour market:

- The behaviour of employees and employers during the pandemic and its effect on the economic situation of the population [32–35];
- Unemployment and professional activity of different groups of the population in the labour market [32,36–38];
- Remote work, new technologies and new forms of its performance [32,39–42];
- The influence of the state on the labour market as an instrument for mitigating social effects and sustaining economic growth [32,41,43,44].

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the labour market worldwide, including the tourism sector [45]. This applies to both employees and employers, and the businesses they run, regardless of the region of the world. The closure of companies or the reduction in their activities translated into the loss of jobs, which in turn resulted in increased unemployment and the decrease, or loss, in income for entire families [46–50]. Women working in the most affected sectors of the economy have been particularly affected, especially since it is mainly women who are responsible for providing unpaid care in addition to their jobs [51]. Young people also faced difficulties [51,52]. Numerous small and medium-sized enterprises failed to keep afloat, although many companies and employees adapted to the changing conditions through innovative solutions. Millions of people started telecommuting overnight [25]. Some of the legal and technological solutions introduced during the pandemic [53] are likely to be maintained and change the future labour market [54].

The sense of uncertainty that prevailed among the tourists has passed on to the employees of the tourism industry and to the young people who are apprehensive about their professional future in such an unstable economic sector as tourism [25]. Another problem is that young people lack enthusiasm for work [55]. During the pandemic, 100,000 employees were laid off or left the hotel industry in Poland [56]. Those laid off no longer want to return to their previous jobs and believe that tourism does not provide stability. As experienced employees have resigned, hotels are hiring random people, and this affects the quality of the services provided [57].

In conclusion, the situation in the labour market reflects the socio-economic condition of the country, and this has been recently influenced by both the shock of the pandemic and the solutions adopted by the government to counteract the effects of the spread of the coronavirus. Moreover, even though each of these elements affected individual sectors of the economy to varying degrees, there are still many quantitative and qualitative changes taking place on both the supply and demand sides of the labour market [32].

3. Changes in Labour Market in Poland, Specifically, in Zachodniopomorskie Province, during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The situation of the Polish labour market in the period leading to the COVID-19 pandemic was steadily improving, as confirmed by data from official statistics [58]:

- The working population was increasing, with the employment rate for those 15 years and older growing from 50% in 2010 to 54.4% in 2019, while the professional activity rate went up from 55.3% to 56.3% over this period;

- Unemployment was falling; the unemployment rate (LFS) decreased from 9.6% in 2010 to 3.3% in 2019, i.e., the lowest level since the beginning of the system transformation;
- At the same time, the ratio of the unemployed to the employed was improving; in 2010, for every 1000 employed persons, there were 1001 unemployed aged 15 and over, and in 2019, 840 persons.

The above trends observed in the Polish labour market were halted by the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in Poland. Following the introduction of social isolation restrictions, Polish enterprises, including those in the tourism industry, were forced to close or limit their operations. This, in turn, caused many changes in the national economy, mainly in the labour market.

The year 2020 saw the most harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Polish labour market. The registered unemployment rate rose to 6.3% (i.e., up by 1.1 percentage points compared with 2019, when it was 5.2%). The employment rate fell to 54.3% (down by 0.1 percentage points compared with 2019), and the professional activity rate was 56.1% (down by 0.2 percentage points compared with 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic had an adverse impact primarily on the professional situation of young persons. In 2020, compared with 2019, the number of employed 15–34 year olds decreased by 955,000, with women outnumbering men in this group.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all provinces of Poland, and the strength of its impact varied (see Figure 1).

The analysis of the data in Figure 1 indicates that the smallest decrease in the registered unemployment rate in Poland was recorded in Opolskie province (0.7 percentage points), while the largest decrease was recorded in Zachodniopomorskie province (decrease of 1.5 percentage points, i.e., from 6.8% in 2019 to 8.3% in 2020). This can be explained by two factors. Firstly, Zachodniopomorskie province is the region most visited by tourists in the entire country, and tourism was one of the sectors most severely affected by the pandemic. In Poland, in 2020, employment levels fluctuated to varying degrees, depending on the type of business [29]. The highest year-on-year change dynamics, indicating a decrease in the employed population, was observed in the accommodation and catering sector, with year-on-year differences becoming more considerable in each subsequent quarter of 2020 (on average, in the first quarter of 2020, the employed population was smaller by 2.8% year-on-year, and in subsequent quarters, the year-on-year drops amounted to 12.2%, 16.3% and 18.2%, respectively) [29]. Moreover, the number of employees also decreased year-on-year in the sector of culture, entertainment and recreation [29].

Table 1. Main indicators of the labour market in Zachodniopomorskie province during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indicators	Year		
	2019	**2020**	**2021**
Registered unemployment rate	6.8%	8.4%	7.1%
Number of unemployed persons	41,800	52,000	43,400
Professional activity rate	53.3%	54.9%	57.1%
Employment rate	53.0%	53.0%	54.9%

Source: [59].

Secondly, Zachodniopomorskie province is a border region of peripheral nature [60]. During the pandemic, the labour market of the examined region was affected by, among other things, the situation of cross-border workers [61].

In the region under study, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed both to the increase in the unemployment rate and the increase in the number of unemployed in 2020. These rates went up again in the subsequent year, 2021. It should also be emphasised that both the professional activity rate and the employment rate in Zachodniopomorskie province grew in 2019–2021, but less rapidly than in 2020 (see Table 1).

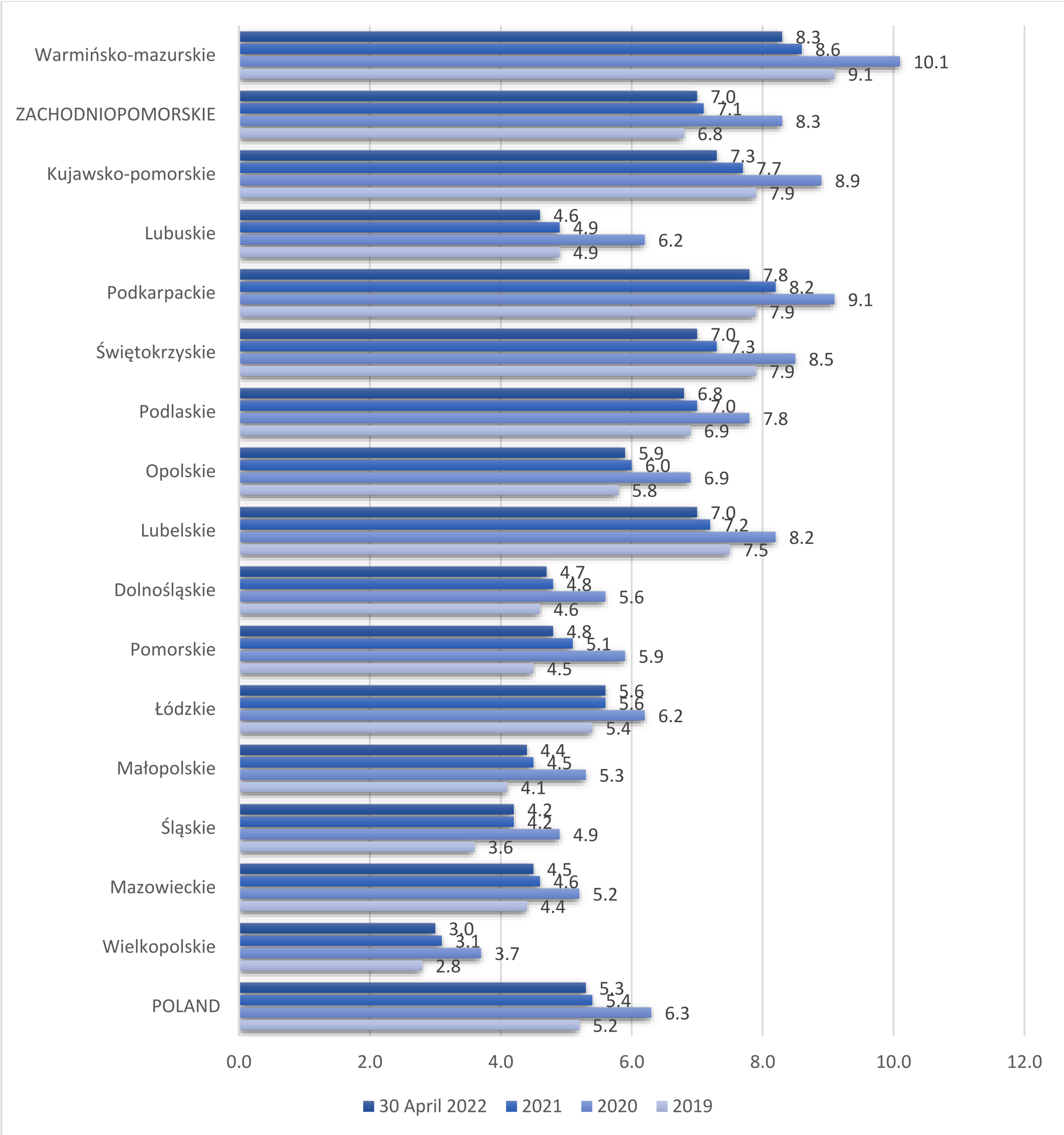

Figure 1. Registered unemployment rate in Poland by province in 2019–2022 (%). Source: [59].

The years 2021 and early 2022 saw an improvement in the labour market in Poland, including the examined region (see Figure 1 and Table 1). This was due to the financial and non-financial instruments introduced, including the so-called Anti-Crisis Shield, which enabled solutions aimed at protecting jobs and incomes to be adopted [32]. Moreover, the introduction of new regulations making remote work possible has also played a crucial role, resulting in more telecommuting opportunities. However, it should be noted that remote working was not as critical in the tourism sector as in other sectors, such as education [62].

In 2022, an important factor influencing the post-pandemic labour market in Poland, including Zachodniopomorskie province, was the introduction of new regulations on the employment of Ukrainian citizens [63]. By mid-May 2022, more than 133,000 Ukrainian citizens had found employment in Poland. In Zachodniopomorskie province, employers declared to employ 6400 Ukrainians [59].

4. Polish Hotel Industry during COVID-19

The tourism sector is a quantified aggregate of diverse economic sectors, in connection with tourists' trips and stays, and is not a homogeneous part of the economy [64]. It is made up of business entities belonging to many sectors of the national economy. These include hotel industry, catering, transportation, travel agencies, retail establishments, museum facilities, and amusement parks [65].

Elements of the tourism sector are hotel management and related accommodation facilities. Polish official statistics provide an elaborate system of accommodation facility classification. In compliance with the Act [66], the following types of hotel facilities are distinguished:

- Hotels—facilities with at least 10 rooms, most of which are single and double rooms, providing a wide range of services related to the stay of customers;
- Motels—facilities located along roads, with a parking lot, with at least 10 rooms, most of which are single and double rooms;
- Guesthouses—facilities with at least seven rooms, providing their customers with full board;
- Caravan and camping sites—guarded facilities that provide overnight camping in tents and caravans, food preparation, car parking, and services related to the stay of customers;
- Tourist houses—facilities with at least 30 beds adapted for customer self-service and providing a minimum range of services related to the stay of customers;
- Youth hostels—facilities designed for individuals or groups of young tourists, adapted to customer self-service;
- Shelters—facilities located outside built-up areas, by tourist trails, providing a minimum range of services related to the stay of customers;
- Camping sites—unguarded facilities for overnight camping in tents.

According to the Polish Central Statistical Office, as of 31 July 2019 (before the pandemic), 11,251 accommodation facilities operated in Poland, of which 2635 were hotels and 8616 were other accommodation facilities (motels, guesthouses, etc.) [67].

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, numerous hotels in Poland closed down (see Table 2), leaving a large number of tourism workers unemployed. The Polish Hotel Industry Chamber of Commerce reported that 38% of hotel industry employees in Poland lost their jobs in 2020 [67].

Table 2. Number of hotels in Poland by province in 2019 and 2020.

No	Province	Year 2019	Year 2020	Change 2020/2019
1	Dolnośląskie	268	275	+2.6%
2	Kujawsko-pomorskie	133	128	−3.8%
3	Lubelskie	127	126	−0.8%
4	Lubuskie	70	67	−4.3%
5	Łódzkie	115	103	−10.4%
6	Małopolskie	391	365	−6.7%
7	Mazowieckie	271	246	−9.2%
8	Opolskie	63	57	−9.5%
9	Podlaskie	51	50	−2.0%
10	Pomorskie	205	204	−0.5%
11	Podkarpackie	144	140	−2.8%
12	Śląskie	221	199	−10.0%
13	Świętokrzyskie	100	97	−3.0%
14	Warmińsko-mazurskie	117	112	−4.3%
15	Wielkopolskie	225	199	−11.6%
16	Zachodniopomorskie	134	130	−3.0%
	Poland	2635	2498	−5.2%

Source: own work based on [67].

The turbulence resulting from temporary closure and the opening of facilities substantially contributed to a considerable decline in the development of accommodation facilities. At the end of 2020, 2498 hotels operated in Poland, representing a 5.2% decrease in the number of hotels compared with 2019.

The pandemic in Poland had two peaks. The first one was in spring 2020, and the second one was in late autumn and winter 2020; hence, in the first year of the pandemic, most hotel facilities could only operate for 7–8 months. The revenue decline is estimated to have been approximately 40% in the first three quarters. Significant declines were also reported in hotel occupancy rates, which, according to the Polish Central Statistical Office, averaged 29.6% at the end of 2020, a record low for the Polish hotel sector. The change is particularly noticeable when compared with the occupancy rates from 2016–2019, which were stable and averaged 52.3%. The immediate cause of such significant declines in hotel operating results lies in the more than twofold decrease in the number of tourists using hotel services, as compared with the 2016–2019 average [67]. The restrictions, effective in 2020, forced the public to stay home and limit movement in general.

During the pandemic, new trends emerged (substantial shift to home office or hybrid work, new forms of online business meetings), which strongly influenced the condition of hotels, especially urban ones. Negligible business demand from the so-called meetings industry (MICE) contributed to the decline in the operating results of hotels in large cities.

5. Research Methodology

This paper used a quantitative research method to highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the functioning of hotel companies in the key tourist region of Poland—Zachodniopomorskie province. The research methods used in the study were critical analysis of source literature, survey method, correspondence analysis method, and analysis of primary and secondary data, mainly from official statistics. The study was conducted in January 2022. Information was collected from 129 respondents using the survey method. The survey was intended for entrepreneurs conducting business activity in the hotel industry in Zachodniopomorskie province and was anonymous. The questionnaires were filled in by persons managing the examined hotel facility, responsible for personnel decisions and having appropriate knowledge of the researched issues. The selection of respondents was purposeful due to the nature of the problem under study.

The questions were original, and their substantive scope was related to the current problems of the tourism industry in the face of the real threat of COVID-19. Only a part of the obtained research results was used in the article. The questions were adapted to the studied target population and are part of an extensive study entitled PAPI/CAPI study of economic entities operating in the tourism industry in Poland in terms of the use of financial and non-financial instruments in mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in tourism. The article contains basic information about the study.

The study covered all tourist facilities in Zachodniopomorskie province that were actively operating in accordance with the Polish ministerial list—Central Register of Hotel Facilities [68]. The article presents a part of a larger survey conducted using the PAPI/CAPI method, a survey of economic entities operating in the tourism sector in Zachodniopomorskie province in terms of the use of financial and non-financial instruments for mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism, based on a prepared questionnaire and based on the provided database of entities.

The survey was conducted in all hotel facilities existing in 2022 in Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship. There were 129 objects, including 93 hotels, 4 motels, 10 guesthouses, 15 caravan and camping sites and 7 youth hostels. The questionnaire addressed to hotel facilities included 33 questions covering the following:

- Characteristics of the surveyed entities (e.g., number of employees, information on the financial situation related to the pandemic and direct impact of the pandemic on the company's operations);
- Information on supporting enterprises during the pandemic;

- Assessment of instruments/forms of support;
- Demographics.

The survey was conducted in various hotel facilities in Zachodniopomorskie province. In total, 4.7% of the facilities did not employ any employee under an employment contract. A total of 18.6% of respondents constituted micro enterprises; a total of 56.6%, small enterprises; a total of 17.8%, medium-sized enterprises; and 2.3%, large enterprises. In terms of legal form, 24.8% of the facilities operated as sole proprietorships; a total of 5.4%, as civil partnerships and general partnerships; and 1.6%, as partnerships. A total of 2.3% of the surveyed facilities qualified as limited partnerships, and 0.8%, as limited joint-stock partnerships. A total of 51.2% were limited liability companies, and 6.2%, joint-stock companies. A total of 2.3% were owned by Public Education System Institutions, associations and local government legal persons.

6. Results

In January 2022, a survey was conducted among hotel facilities in Zachodniopomorskie province. Its aim was to answer the following research question: how did COVID-19 pandemic affect the functioning of hotel companies in the key tourist region of Poland—Zachodniopomorskie province? The survey covered facilities listed in Central List of Hotel Facilities (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of hotels in Poland in Zachodniopomorskie province by facility type in 2019, 2020 and 2022.

Type of Facility	Quantity in 2019–2020	Quantity in 2022
Hotel	140	93
Motel	5	4
Guesthouse	10	10
Caravan and camping site	18	15
Tourist house	0	0
Youth hostel	10	7
Shelter	0	0
Camping site	0	0
Total	183	129

Source: Own work based on [68].

The survey was conducted in all hotel facilities existing in 2022 in Zachodnio-pomorskie Voivodeship. There were 129 objects, including 93 hotels, 4 motels, 10 guesthouses, 15 caravan and camping sites and 7 youth hostels. The introductory question addressed the need for travel companies to downsize during the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant proportion of respondents (77.5%) said that the COVID-19 pandemic did not force them to downsize. The distribution of responses, depending on the type of hotel facility, is presented in Figure 2.

Most employees were laid off from hotels (25.8%), and the fewest employees were laid off from guesthouses—only 10% of the surveyed facilities.

The multifaceted research and the results obtained provided the basis for further economic and econometric analyses.

In the first stage of the survey, the severity of COVID-19 pandemic effects was analysed according to the type of accommodation facility. The method of correspondence analysis was adopted [69]. It enables the detection of hidden correlations between variables to be performed. A contingency table is used for this purpose. It is equivalent to principal component analysis except that principal component analysis is conducted for quantitative (numerical) variables, while correspondence analysis is conducted for qualitative (non-numerical) data. Correlations among variables in correspondence analysis are established using biplots to display values of both variables (one variable is referred to as the row variable, and the other, as the column variable).

The severity of the pandemic impact was determined on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high)). The results of the correspondence analysis are shown in Figure 3.

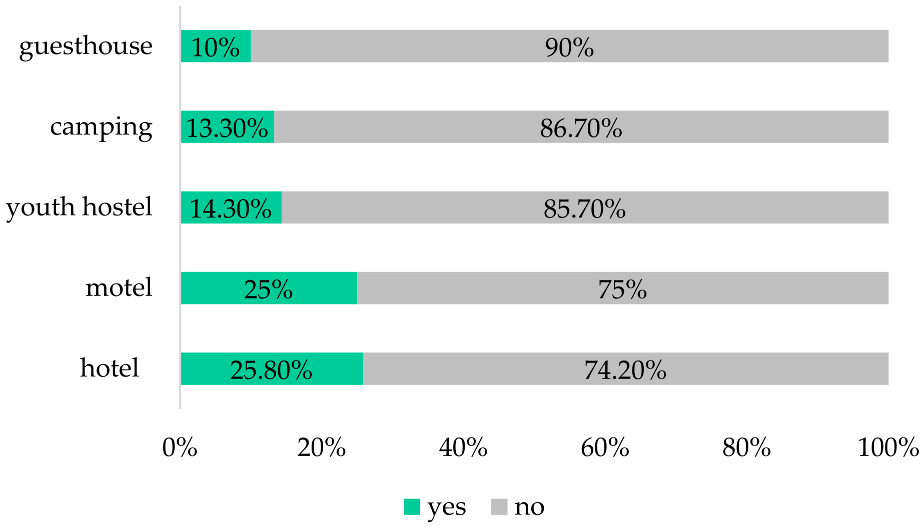

Figure 2. Percentage of hotel facilities (by type) that made staff reductions as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

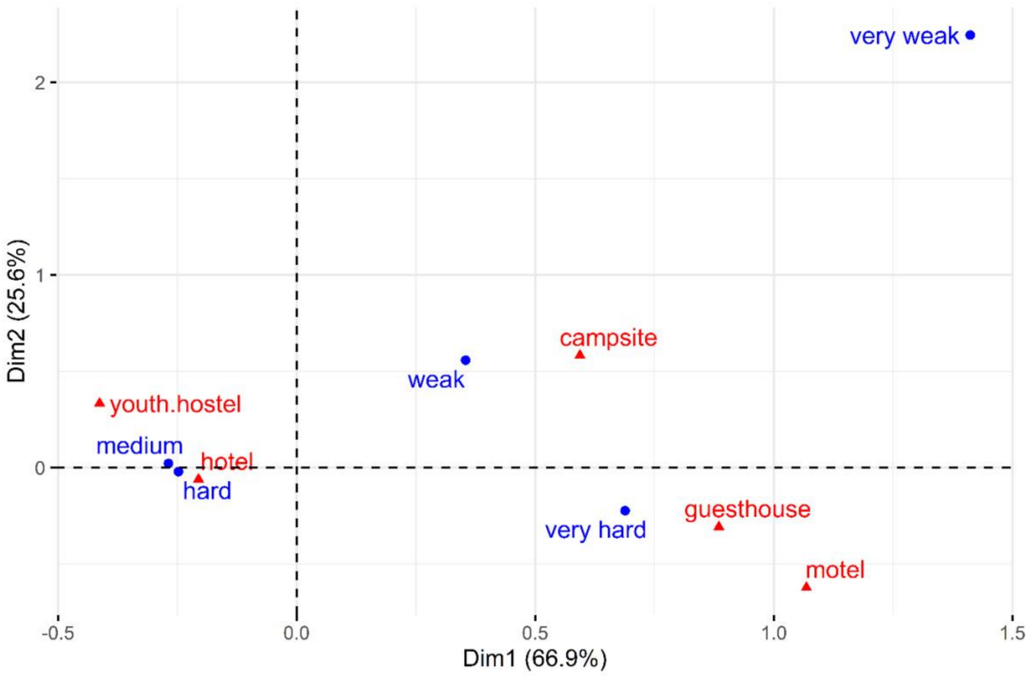

Figure 3. Severity of pandemic effects by type of accommodation facility.

None of the respondents stated that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had had a very low impact on them. Caravan and camping site managers claimed that the severity of the pandemic effects was low; for hotel managers, it was moderate and high (with high severity prevailing); for youth hostels, it was moderate and high (with moderate severity prevailing), but this was not as marked as for hotels. The severity of pandemic effects on guesthouses and motels was very high.

The second part of the survey assessed the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on conducting business. It was examined whether the pandemic led to the introduction of any of the following four measures:

- Reduction in working hours;
- Switching to working from home;
- Pay cuts;
- Employee layoffs.

The respondents representing the examined types of accommodation facilities indicated whether or not the measure was implemented (for example, whether or not working hours were reduced, etc.). A logistic regression model was used for this purpose [70]. The odds ratio pertaining to the probability of introducing a given measure (for example, reducing working hours) in a group of facilities (for example, motels) compared to a reference group was examined. Hotels were used as the reference group. The survey sample was heavily imbalanced (out of 129 surveys, 93 were completed by hotel representatives, and the remaining 36 were completed by representatives of other facilities), and certain types of facilities did not introduce some of the measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it was decided to include all non-hotel facilities in one group—"other". The calculated odds ratios (ORs) are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Odds ratios for particular measures introduced by facilities (values significant at $p < 0.05$ are in bold).

Introduced Measure	OR	*p*-Value
Reduction in working hours	0.456	0.182
Switching to working from home	0.513	0.318
Pay cuts	**0.165**	**0.005**
Employee layoffs	0.776	0.648

For each measure, the risk of introducing a particular measure was lower in other accommodation facilities than in hotels (for reduction in working hours, it was 54.4% lower; for switching to working from home, it was 48.7% lower; for pay cuts, it was 83.5% lower; and for employee layoffs, it was 22.4% lower). This means that in the case of hotels, the pandemic contributed more to the introduction of these measures. However, the results should be interpreted with caution, as the odds ratio was only statistically significant for pay cuts. Therefore, the ratio can be interpreted according to the value given in Table 4 only for this measure. For the other measures, one can only conclude that the odds were probably lower in the other facilities than in hotels. However, the sample size would need to be increased for the results to be reliable.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

On the subject of the article, the first research was started in Poland. Panasiuk [71], Stojczew [72] and Borzyszkowski [73] dealt with this topic, but none of these studies refer to Zachodniopomorskie province, which proves their original character. The key importance of this region in Polish tourism is a valuable contribution to the recognition of the behaviour of tourism market participants in terms of the materialized risk of COVID-19.

The added value of the article is to show the sensitivity of individual hotel facilities exposed to the risk of a pandemic in Zachodniopomorskie province in Poland. The authors' contribution to the literature is the determination of the extent to which enterprises in the hotel industry have been affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on selected employee aspects of economic activity in Zachodniopomorskie province. It was shown that enterprises in the hotel industry have been affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to varying degrees. None of the respondents stated that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had a very low impact on them. Caravan and camping site managers claimed that the severity of the pandemic effects was low; for hotel managers, it was moderate and high (with high severity prevailing); for youth hostels, it was moderate and high (with moderate severity prevailing), but this was not as marked as for hotels. The severity of pandemic effects on guesthouses and motels was very high.

The study also showed that the impact of the pandemic on selected employee aspects of economic activity in Zachodniopomorskie province was different for hotels and other hotel facilities. For each measure, the risk of introducing a particular measure was lower in other accommodation facilities than in hotels (for reduction in working hours, switching to working from home, pay cuts and employee layoffs). This means that in the case of hotels, the pandemic contributed more to the introduction of these measures. The considerations presented in the article may be a guideline for local tourist organizations and other entities of tourism policy. The experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic and the practices used by other organizations could be a starting point for building a comprehensive crisis management system. This certainly requires appropriate substantive, organizational and financial preparation.

The research presented in the article has significant implications for economic practice. It was carried out on the tourist market, in the hotel industry, in conditions of a real epidemic risk (it was carried out for the first time in Zachodniopomorskie province, in Poland). Our research provides essential knowledge indicating that hotels, as tourist facilities, should introduce remedial measures to be able to be sensitive to shocks caused by extraordinary situations, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including its rapid spread around the world, has proven to be the most severe public health crisis in over a century. It relatively quickly and significantly hit the Polish labour market. The conducted research confirmed that the positive and long-term trend of Polish labour market growth was halted by the pandemic. The year 2020, i.e., the first year of the pandemic, saw the most detrimental effects of the pandemic. At that time, the key indicators of the Polish labour market, such as the unemployment rate, the employment rate and the professional activity rate, significantly deteriorated. It should be emphasised that this trend could be noticed in all regions of Poland, to varying degrees. Zachodniopomorskie province saw the largest decrease in the unemployment rate in Poland in 2020 compared with 2019.

This was caused, among others, by its specific nature, i.e., the key role of tourism in this region's economy, as well as its border location and the cross-border labour market. It should be noted, however, that the collapse of the labour market was short-lived. Research has shown that since 2021, the situation has been gradually improving, as evidenced by the declining number of unemployed persons and the increasing number of employed persons. It seems that the short-term collapse of the labour market under study should not lead to significant socio-economic consequences; nevertheless, the long-term implications are difficult to predict, especially because in 2022, the Polish labour market, including tourism, was affected by new significant factors, such as high inflation and the effects of the armed conflict in Ukraine.

In addition, our research found that hotel facilities in Zachodniopomorskie province were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to varying degrees. Respondents representing caravan and camping sites assessed the severity as low; hotels, as medium to high (with high severity prevailing); and youth hostels, as medium to high (with medium severity prevailing). The severity experienced by guesthouses and motels was very high. Additionally, it was shown that for hotels, the pandemic contributed more to the introduction of the measures under study.

The limitation of the study is represented by the survey, the territorial scope of which covered only one region of Poland, i.e., Zachodniopomorskie province. However, it should be emphasised that this is a key region in the Polish tourism market and the surveys conducted in this region were representative. Research has shown that the tourism industry labour market remains vulnerable to the turbulences associated with the materialisation of the COVID-19 pandemic risk.

In conclusion, the high level of vulnerability of tourism to external shocks indicates that it is necessary to provide mechanisms and solutions that can ensure the sustainable development of the industry. While the tourism development strategies adopted so far have focused on measures to maximise profits, especially profits derived from international tourism, the current developments prove that it may be equally important to adopt solutions to reduce losses in risk situations.

To sum up, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of changes in socio-economic life. It is difficult to identify a sector that has not felt the effects of this crisis to a greater or lesser extent. One of the most affected sectors is certainly tourism. Moreover, tourism has not faced such a crisis before. The pandemic affected virtually all sub-sectors of tourism; in addition, its impact was visible in virtually all corners of the world. Overall, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be theorized that the tourism system was more vulnerable than other systems [74].

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