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## Perception of Tourist Places from a Spatial Perspective

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** Determining the essence of the complexity of tourist places from the point of view of building the tourist attractiveness of a place, including its promotion, and Attempting to assess the tourist attractiveness of the theoretical administrative unit in terms of the tourist attractiveness of places (model approach).

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Rethinking the complexities of tourist sites, understood as tourist attraction sites, is inspired by the work of Skinner (1964), Tuan (1977) and Sack (1997). The description of spatial relations place-territory and tourism marketing-place marketing and also the evaluation of the tourist attractiveness of the theoretical administrative unit in terms of tourist attractiveness of places were based on the author's research results.

**Findings:** The study shows that there is a significant difference between the tourism attractiveness of the administrative unit as a whole (territory) and the tourism attractiveness of the place(s), which may represent only a small part of the whole.

**Practical Implications:** The results of the study enable more effective tourism policies in spatial terms, which can be carried out territorially and locally.

**Originality/Value:** Previously used approaches did not distinguish a separate evaluation of places. This resulted in the fact that from the field of tourism policy, including investment and marketing activities, often referred to, for example, a city or region i.e. an already recognized brand, and not to a specific place, even though it was a specific, sometimes small place that could be the tourism strength of a large territory. The proposed solutions raise the complexity of this issue.

**Keywords:** Tourist place, place marketing, territory, tourist attraction.

**JEL Classification:** Y20, Z30, Z33.

**Paper Type:** Research Paper.

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## **1. Introduction**

Without going into a very detailed analysis of the many concepts of place functioning in geography, it is important to emphasize their richness in content, which, taken together, gives a full idea of the complexity of spatial relations, their structure(s), organization, materiality and identity (Jałowicki, 2011; Wójcik, Suliborski, 2021). On the basis of the very many questions and doubts about place that have their bearing on the understanding of the complexities of tourist places (tourist attraction places), thoughts inspired by the work of Skinner (1964), Tuan (1977) and Sack (1997), among others, are worth noting:

1. In order to consider a place as tourist-attractive and to delimit it, it is necessary to understand how people experience space and place. It seems particularly important to consider the different groups of users of a place (active, passive, theoretical and potential).

2. The functioning of tourist places must relate to the life stages of users, which is due to the changing feeling of spatial range of the place (people in the maturity stage due to high mobility have the feeling that the place can be the whole world - they have this range the largest, in childhood and old age it is significantly reduced) and usually increasing with age sentiment, attachment to the place, sometimes rootedness.

3. All tourist sites are subject to life cycles, hence the need for dedicated, targeted operating strategies (including marketing strategies) that take into account the current stage of development of a place, its overall age or permanence, the temporary nature of a place, and the fact that it can undergo both liquidation and rejuvenation (new birth).

4. Tourist sites must take into account their individual attributes, such as geographic extent, shape, and a number of elements of internal characteristics, such as the back - front of the place, right - left side of the place, horizontality - verticality of the place, interior - exterior, center. Also important are the location and geographic orientation of a place in space in relation to other elements of space and related concepts such as proximity, centrality, neighborhood, border and others.

5. The spatial extent of tourist sites is usually conventional, which can affect the socio-cultural, perhaps also economic and even political effectiveness of impact and role in education in the broadest sense, hence the need to delimit the impact of tourist sites not on the basis of artificial administrative boundaries, but spatial methods, such as the extent of impact.

6. Tourist places can combine into larger units (sets of places), forming conceptual places, but these as a whole do not necessarily engage attention, positive emotions in

everyone. Therefore, one should be wary of generalizations and references to symbols.

7. In the characterization of tourist places, it is also necessary to pay attention to the attitude of users to places previously historically designed, decorated sometimes for a foreign culture, religion of the country, region or even family. It is worth checking whether, in such cases, there is a process of assimilation, understood as a process of taming, adopting, sometimes giving a new meaning to the space, including objects, objects, buildings considered foreign, foreigners.

8. In designing tourist sites, it is also worth noting what Jałowicki (2011, p. 10) writes, that "most of the places have value only on a local and/or regional scale, but some are important for the entire nation; others play such a role for followers of a particular religion, and still others seem important even on a global scale."

The Delimitation of Tourist Places mentioned in Section 1 stems from the restrictive assumptions made by many authors that a specific area should meet in order to be managed under the principles of a tourist attraction, such as spatial separation, institutionalization of functioning, a holistic organizational concept and an orientation towards its own goals (Szromnik, 2016). This approach, however, strongly emphasizes elements related to management, and perfunctorily the space itself, although it is the basic factor structuring spatial relations, including social ones.

## **2. Territory-Tourist Place Relationship**

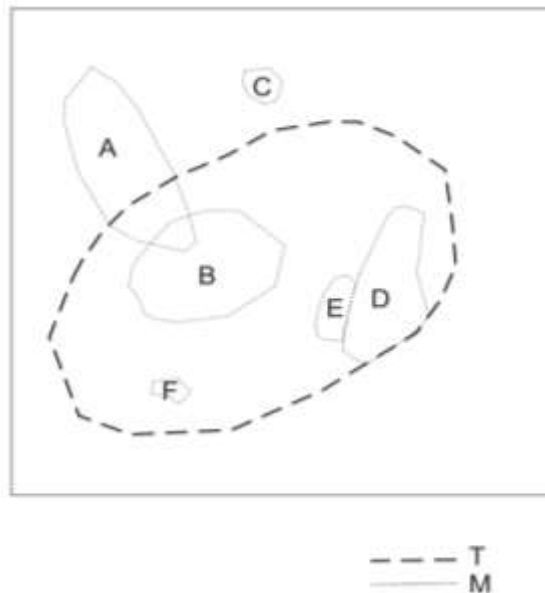
When we talk about spatial tourist attractiveness, are we talking about the attractiveness of the administrative unit as a whole, or about a specific geographic location (place)? After all, we usually go to visit a specific place(s) in the city, we live on a specific street, place in the city, our business was located at a specific address, place in the city. In light of these assumptions, we can raise further questions: shouldn't we measure the tourist attractiveness of an administrative unit by the number or area of places that meet a selected criterion of tourist attractiveness relative to the entire area of the unit, and how the organization of flows of place users (tourists) between places affects tourist attractiveness.

From a geographical point of view, it should also be added that the number and shape of tourist places, their area and distribution in relation to the borders of the administrative unit are not determined by anything, they are unlimited (Figure 1). Moreover, the characteristics of the places according to the mentioned criteria can be different in different units, and the size of the unit itself (in terms of area or population) does not affect these characteristics (Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020).

Spatial discontinuity of tourist sites can also generate a lot of conflicts concerning, for example, the mentioned flows between users of sites and local communities (over tourism?). In this context, it is important to take care not only of the places, but also of the spaces between them, including the linear arrangements (perhaps corridors) between them. Theoretically, there is also the possibility that an administrative unit is not the nominal owner of all the tourist sites it formally uses.

From the perspective of the tourist attractiveness of places, all places, or in special cases a single place, can build the image of an entire, sometimes large, administrative unit without being a significant percentage of its area. It is also possible that a single place is much larger than a single administrative unit, or even several or more than a dozen administrative units and of different orders, including countries.

**Figure 1.** Relationship of places (M) to territory (T)



**Source:** Rudewicz, Czaplinski, 2023

In the case of a larger number of such places, it is worth noting that they usually do not form a compact whole and do not show spatial continuity, although they may be adjacent to each other, intermingle or remain at a distance, sometimes considerable, forming a conceptual space, so to speak. It will be interesting to see whether, in the competition for their distinctiveness, places located in a single administrative unit compete in the field of aesthetics of the place, the broader landscape, emotions evoked by memories, or whether they compete by stirring up conflicts among themselves.

There are also cases where places are nominally outside the border or on the administrative boundary with another unit(s), and yet a particular unit usurps the right to use the place to promote its own image. The situation seems even more complex on large bodies of water, where reference points, including boundaries, are sometimes not very clear.

### **3. Tourism Marketing Vs. Place Marketing**

As with the territory-tourist place relationship, there are a number of analogies in the territory marketing-tourist place marketing relationship. The animators of the latter in the theoretical spatial unit, although statutorily responsible for the territory of the entire administrative unit, *de facto* focus on the marketing of specific tourist destinations. Each place is a different geographic location, different resources, different potential and different capital. Marketing of tourist places, however, can intermingle, touch, neighbor or be at a considerable distance from each other (Figure 2a).

Another complex case concerns tourism marketing of places, the activities of which may be carried out at the intersection of even several territorial units, each of which pursues its own, sometimes different, territorial marketing policy (Figure 2b).

Sometimes tourism marketing of places can be entangled with territorial marketing activities of several levels, including local, regional and national. Finally, the marketing activities of place marketing by virtue of the area of influence may, on the one hand, go beyond the territorial marketing activities associated with a specific administrative unit, and, on the other hand, simultaneously encroach on the area of farther-flung units and the tourism marketing they carry out, which may or may not be in dispute.

In addition, many difficulties must be posed by spatial discontinuity (getting to a place, moving between places) and the previously signaled course of borders, including state borders, which may divide or separate places. All this will affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the marketing activities carried out in the field of not only tourism.

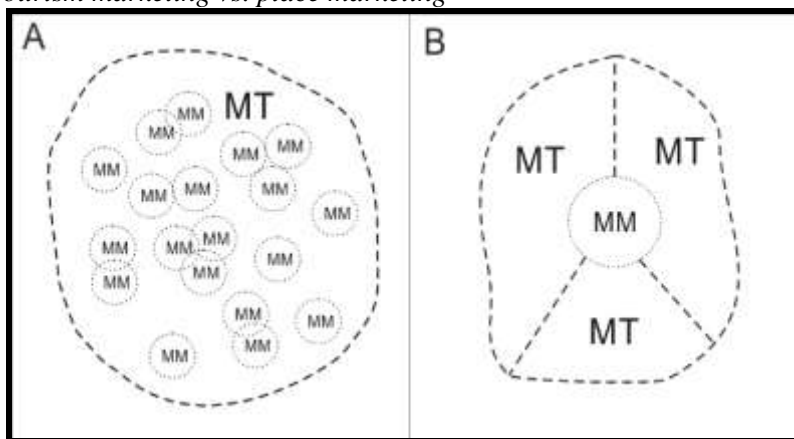
### **4. Location of Tourist Places**

Speaking of the location of a tourist site, there are a number of doubts about what this statement entails in terms of location, boundaries, range of influence, as well as the broad spatial relationships that determine the spatial organization of space. As an example for discussing the intricacies of the thread taken up, let's take the anonymous theoretical battlefield as a tourist attraction.

When characterizing the location of such a tourist site, and at the same time preparing for marketing activities or their continuation in the spatial dimension,

while taking into account strictly factual content, it is worth exploring the knowledge as to the actual location of the battlefield, and in identifiable cases also its most important parts. Such information will first and foremost affect the credibility and distinctiveness of the site, followed by its proper aesthetics, display and organization, and in particular the planning of individual zones, including the most important memorial zone, and supporting zones, including parking, catering, commemorative, among others.

**Figure 2.** *Tourism marketing vs. place marketing*



*Source: Czaplinski, Kavetsky 2021 (modified).*

Of course, there are many places where the above spatial considerations, due to lack of knowledge, high research costs, spatial constraints, or locational convenience, are treated with great conventionality or with pretentiousness, when the story of a place is imaginary. Nevertheless, it seems that conformity to historical truth should be the primary goal. A completely separate problem, not addressed in our deliberations, but only signaled, is the attitude of all user groups to the accuracy of a place in physical space.

On this occasion, it is worth formulating some additional remarks relevant to building the tourist attractiveness of a place, including its promotion.

1. Does the place coincide entirely with the battlefield? For very different reasons (legal, administrative, environmental, other), it may be only a fragment of the battlefield commemorating a much larger area. Theoretically, the reverse situation is also acceptable, that is, that the scope of influence of the site, that is, its de facto area, is larger than the battlefield, which may be influenced by various types of spatial relations, related, for example, to the identification with the site of the surrounding population, or perhaps to the use of the potential of the site in the implementation of their own projects.

An affirmative answer to the essential question, in addition to the aforementioned credibility, may also be relevant from the point of view of the accessibility and capacity of the place, as well as the effectiveness of marketing activities carried out, for example, in terms of outdoor marketing. At this point, it is also worth extending consideration to the question of whether or not the battlefield in question is contained within a single administrative unit, which will be important in marketing intentions and activities, especially their possible coordination.

2. What is the accessibility of a place? At the same time, the ability to reach a place as a travel destination can be considered in physical (distance), temporal (travel time), economic (cost of travel) or topological (directness of travel) dimensions, and consider what is the possibility of stopping and stopping of the available means of transport.

In addition, it is worth talking about accessibility to a place (external accessibility) and accessibility in a place, within its area (internal accessibility). Evaluating the classic, conventional factors influencing the construction of opinions about a place (without taking into account the role of the Internet in the broadest sense), it seems that this element can now be considered one of the key ones.

3. What is the scope of a place's influence from the perspective of those involved? From a classical point of view, it is usually local or regional, less often national, but it can also be relevant to the cultural heritage of the world. This element is important in coordinating marketing activities at different spatial scales. The outreach also seems to involve service personnel, those actual and those potential, who are most often recruited from the local community.

These staff members are most likely to have identity ties to the place consciously or not raise its credibility and promote the place as local ambassadors to both visitors (strangers) and their own community (their own). It should be added that the range of influence, which we can further divide into direct and indirect (closer and further), cannot be determined on the basis of marked administrative boundaries, regardless of their rank. It is also impossible to determine the extent of the impact of a place a priori, delineating, for example, hypothetical isolines.

However, there are many models of spatial influence (Chojnicki, 1966; Mazurkiewicz, 1986, among others) and direct research (for example, Bartosiewicz, Pielesiak, 2015; Hess, Rubin, West, 2004), the results of which could be used in the development of promotional strategies and serve to build a place brand by determining the extent of a place's influence as precisely as possible.

4. What are the mechanics of a place? This is about how the flow of people within a place is designed, taking into account, among other things, the natural ways in which people move, their spatial habits and cultural habits, changes in intensity, seasonality, and finally the maximum capacity of the place. All this is done in order to make the place safe and marketing activities noticeable. In addition, it is also worth paying attention to the so-called crowding - what it brings to people's spatial behavior towards each other, towards others, towards space.

Of course, the feeling of crowding is a relative concept, nevertheless, there are noticeable changes in social behavior as a result of the presence of other people (sometimes also other people's things) in a place (Krzyszowska-Kostrowicka, 1997; Sztompka, 2002). Examples include Polish beaches or mountain hiking trails.

5. What are the multisensory characteristics of a place? After all, it should be noted that a place does not only have visual qualities, but is perceived with all our senses (Kowalczyk, 1992). Thus, the perception of a place may be determined by an initially imperceptible element (sound, smell), which will positively or negatively influence our opinion of the place. This, in turn, must be taken into account when building a marketing strategy for a place.
6. What is the cultural interpretation of the place? In particular, this applies to the local cultural tradition, the code of which is not necessarily recognized and/or accepted by all users of the place, especially those from a different cultural background. Therefore, in promotional activities and building the image of the place, it is necessary to seek solutions that foster intercultural dialogue.
7. Is the place in a spatial sense, but also in any other sense, for example, cultural, natural, is not an element of a larger whole?
8. Is the place subject to seasonal attraction?

All of the above comments on the theoretical battlefield as a place that can be considered classical are essentially local in nature. Nevertheless, they are influenced by a number of conditions arising from processes occurring at larger spatial scales, including the global scale. This includes the processes of globalization, especially in the socio-cultural dimension, and its consequences.

Thus, to the above remarks one should add many elements of a more general nature, resulting, for example, from cultural pluralism, generational changes, changes from the analog world to the digital world, which will be reflected on a local scale, in a specific place, its perception. It is also necessary to mention, without elaborating on



this thread, what impact the development of information technology will have on a place, including its perception, also in the context of marketing activities.

In determining an appropriate marketing strategy, the key question should be considered: who is/should be the customer of the place? However, the answer to it is determined by a much more general question: what is the goal of a tourist destination? If the goal is to use the capital of the place to achieve economic growth, then it is reasonable to define the customer of the place, and the activities themselves will be of a business nature.

However, if the purpose of operating a tourist place is the equitable and sustainable development of the local community, then those using such a place will not be customers, because the purpose of this type of activity is not to sell a product (unless it is the place itself), but to change behavior, social relations. Of course, an intermediate form is possible.

Another important issue in considering the place will be the question of what is allowed in building the attractiveness of a tourist place, including promotional departments, and what is not. The purpose of all such activities is to achieve its expressiveness, which will allow the so-called retention, to attract attention, and, consequently, to use the place, and perhaps to build the emotional relations associated with it.

There are a number of activities in this regard relating to building the attractiveness of a place. One of them is to refer to sometimes globally recognized, scenically distinctive places, such as Paris, Switzerland, Venice and the like. Leaving aside the accuracy of the comparisons, which in itself is questionable, and the fact that several places sometimes aspire to one location, which in turn can lead to a conflictual situation, it seems more important to answer the question of whether one builds one's own local/regional identity of one's tourist destination in this way (Szymańska, 1999).

It seems that in the case of places that are strong, especially ethnically, this type of action is more durable and less harmful than in the case of places that are just building their image and creating a brand, where the transience of designs and the constant search for new associations are often evident (Łukowski, 2013).

Another example is to identify a place with the notion of a land, that is, a unique place that has specific characteristics related to nature (animate/inanimate), its inhabitants (with their material/spiritual culture) or, for example, the form of tourism and recreation promoted there, usually using local natural resources, although sometimes their uniqueness is debatable. The emerging marketing strategies often include terms such as capital, sometimes with the extension summer or winter, center, heart. There are also many references to historical figures and events.

However, this can be troublesome to read, given the relatively frequent shifting of Poland's borders, for example, and the fact that the promoted figures have stayed in these places (if they were there at all) for a very short time and have not distinguished themselves in anything special. Finally, an idea for raising the tourist attractiveness of a place is to refer to forms of contemporary pop culture, such as festivals, although it remains an open question to what extent the chosen place is culturally (including ethnically) linked to the festival tradition.

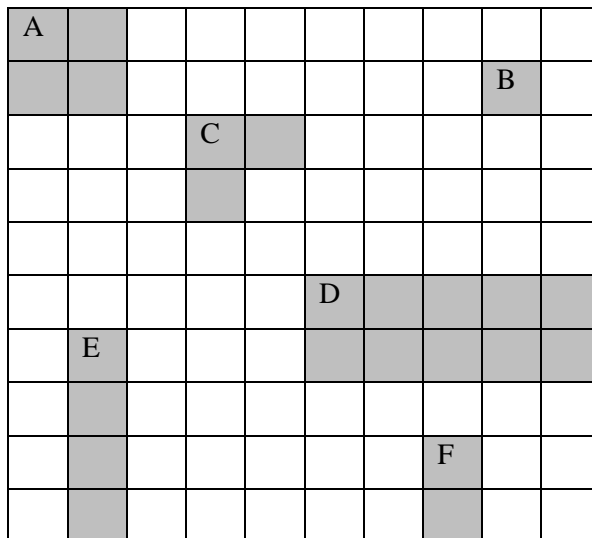
**5. The Use of Tourist Places in Assessing the Tourist Attractiveness of a Theoretical Administrative Unit (e.g., cities)**

In accordance with the previous assumption that we generally visit specific places in the territory, an attempt was made to assess the tourist attractiveness of the theoretical administrative unit in terms of the tourist attractiveness of places. This attempt can be considered a theoretical model approach.

Let us make the following assumption:

the theoretical spatial unit Z has an area of 100 km<sup>2</sup> (10 x10 km<sup>2</sup>). This means that one field is 1 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Tourist places in a theoretical administrative unit (e.g., a city)



*Source:* Own study.

If we further consider that not the entire area of the unit is attractive to tourists and only 23 fields out of 100 then: the overall tourist attractiveness of the unit "Z" is 23% because 23 km<sup>2</sup> out of 100 km<sup>2</sup> were considered attractive to tourists.

However, there are issues to be further resolved:

- criterion for separating tourist attractive sites,
- whether all tourist traction sites have the same rank.

## **6. Conclusions**

The above very general remarks indicate the importance of place in the context of resources, potential and capital, which can be used in enhancing tourist attractiveness, and therefore also in effective marketing campaigns (Czaplińska 2023). The coherence between these activities and the delimitation of places is important.

This means that, while it is possible to devise various ideas of tourist attractiveness quite freely, it is later much more difficult to bring them to social rooting in a place, but also the other way around - resources are treated quite freely as a starting point for shaping the tourist attractiveness of a place.

In conclusion, it is still worth noting the sense of a tourist place, which is subject to spatio-temporal variability. If we take for granted this variability, we must also agree with the thesis that the content of a place can undergo constant interpretive changes.

The growing dynamics of human existence, determined, among other things, by postmodernity, very quickly causes the meaning of certain places to change, which translates, for example, into their popularity or unpopularity. Permanent volatility affects the choice of concepts and strategies for tourism marketing activities, so it is difficult to achieve the desired results in the long term.

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