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## Identification and Comparative Analysis of Selected Elements of Tourism Potential from a Regional Perspective

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Małgorzata Brojak-Trzaskowska<sup>1</sup>, Karolina Drela<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of this article is to identify the elements of tourism potential, particularly in the regional dimension, and to compare two spatial units in Poland through the prism of accommodation development. A hypothesis was formulated that accommodation is an important element of tourism potential in a region, and that its quantitative, qualitative and spatial development is an important factor in increasing tourism attractiveness. Adequately to the aim and the hypothesis, the following research questions were formulated: what elements does the tourism potential of the region consist of, and is tourism development an important component of this potential? The main aspect of the article is the identification and analysis of indicators for evaluating accommodation development in a regional perspective.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The research approach used in the theoretical part of the article is based on the method of critical analysis of the literature. The considerations in the empirical part have a positive dimension, i.e. a descriptive and explanatory one (in the field of tourist development as an element of the tourist potential of selected regions in the northern Poland). Moreover, in the study of the accommodation development of selected spatial units, the analysis method was used, and in the process of formulating conclusions – the synthesis method.

**Findings:** The theoretical and empirical research, thanks to the approach used, made it possible to identify one of the key elements of regional tourism potential, i.e. tourism development. The research was narrowed down to accommodation facilities as the basic component of this development.

**Practical Implications:** Analysis of the status and use of accommodation in selected regions of northern Poland has shown that tourism is one of the pillars of the economy in this area. This is determined by the presence of attractive assets, transport accessibility and tourism development. The observed increase in tourist traffic and intensity of use of accommodation facilities indicates the recovery of tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications of this phenomenon should be taken into account at the microeconomic level (in development strategies of tourist enterprises), at the level of local self-government units in terms of regional and local tourism development policies, and at the macroeconomic level in terms of national tourism policy. Enterprise strategies and tourism policies should be integral components of Poland's sustainable socio-economic development.

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<sup>1</sup>Assoc. Prof., Institute of Spatial Management and Socio-Economic Geography, University of Szczecin, Poland, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9986-6263, e-mail: [malgorzata.brojak-trzaskowska@usz.edu.pl](mailto:malgorzata.brojak-trzaskowska@usz.edu.pl);

<sup>2</sup>PhD, Institute of Management, University of Szczecin, Poland, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0358-7938, e-mail: [karolina.drela@usz.edu.pl](mailto:karolina.drela@usz.edu.pl);

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**Originality/value:** *The article addresses the current and important issue of tourism potential on a regional basis, with particular emphasis on accommodation development. It combines theoretical and empirical research into a coherent whole, filling a diagnosed gap of a cognitive, practical and applied nature.*

**Keywords:** *Regional analysis, regional development, tourism and development, tourism potential and attractiveness of the region, tourism development, accommodation.*

**JEL classification:** *D69, L83, O12, O18, R11, R12, Z32.*

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## 1. Introduction

The development of tourism should be approached in a systematic and comprehensive manner, taking into account the totality of conditions that constitute its development potential, often referred to as tourism potential. This concept is not clearly defined in the literature. Regardless, its role and importance in shaping tourism development is always emphasized.

Tourism potential includes structural resources (tourism assets and development, transport accessibility) and functional resources (e.g., economic, ecological and socio-demographic) conditioning tourism development (Latosińska and Żek, 2010).

This potential can be understood in two ways, i.e., in a narrow sense as the service potential of a tourism economy entity or in a broad sense as the potential of a tourism reception area. The potentials of businesses operating in an area are components of the tourism potential of that area (Thalassinos *et al.*, 2015). However, the latter is not a simple sum of the former, nor are the potentials of tourism businesses the only components of potential in the broad view. Tourism potential is primarily a category related to tourism space (Rapacz, Gryszel, and Jaremen, 2010, p. 195; Pociovalisteanu and Thalassinos, 2009).

Given the complexity and heterogeneous nature of tourism potential, it was considered substantively reasonable to focus the research first on the conceptual scope and structure of this potential, and then on empirical studies of accommodation as an element of tourism potential at the regional level.

This means that the study takes a broad approach to tourism potential, i.e., relating to the tourist reception area rather than to specific businesses. Two territorial units in

Poland were selected for the study, i.e., Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie Voivodeships. The time perspective covered the years 2019-2022.

The subject of the research interest focused on one of the basic elements of tourism potential (besides tourism assets and transport accessibility), i.e., tourism accommodation facilities.

## **2. Literature Review**

Tourism potential is defined as the stock of possibilities and capacities that a given unit possesses (Nitkiewicz-Jankowska, 2011). In doing so, a distinction is made between environmental potential (which is the sum of natural possibilities for meeting social needs and the ability of the ecosystem to bear anthropogenic burdens), ecological potential (created by natural resources with an appropriate structure, productivity and sustainability) and recreational potential consisting of the attractiveness and suitability of the environment for tourism use (Nowakowski, 2001; Kożuchowski, 2005).

The tourism potential of a region consists of its tourism assets and all forms of development and functioning of the area in the economic, political and social spheres (Croes, Ridderstaat, Bak, and Zientara, 2021). In the case of tourism, one of its elements is the values of the geographical environment, which should be characterized by adequate attractiveness, absorptive capacity and tourist capacity.

However, the geographical environment has its natural limits of strength and functionality, beyond which the values representing it lose their value. Knowing the structure of tourism potential (Khan, Bibi, Lorenzo, Lyu, and Babar, 2020) is important from the point of view of the possibility of creating tourism attractions or products.

The literature does not explicitly define the term 'tourism potential' (Marciszewska, 2010; Amin and Priansah, 2019). There are other terms that are not identical to the region's potential for tourism development, but capture its essence. If it is assumed that this potential is formed by natural and anthropogenic assets, various attractions, infrastructure, availability of services and products, without which tourists would not have the chance to receive full satisfaction, a broad understanding of potential goes beyond the tourist attractiveness of the region and thus captures the conditions for the development (mainly strengths and opportunities) of tourism in the area.

Among the components of tourism potential (Lee, Olasehinde-Williams, and Akadiri, 2021), its attractiveness and tourism products play a special role, which demonstrates the distinctiveness of the terms 'tourism potential' and 'tourism attractiveness'.

In spatial terms, tourism potential is identified by some with the tourism attractiveness of the geographical environment (Wyrzykowski, 2010), extended by tourism capacity and optimum periods of use of assets. The tourist attractiveness of an area, locality or object is determined by three factors - the rank of tourist assets, the degree of transport accessibility and the state of development. Together they determine the geographical conditions for the development of tourist traffic in a given area.

Tourist assets are specific features and elements of the natural environment and manifestations of human activity which are of interest to tourists. Tourist attractiveness therefore means a set of features and qualities of a given space that attract tourists (Nowakowski, 2001). They constitute a subjective value that is difficult to assess unequivocally (Sinambela, 2021; Graziano and Privitera, 2020).

Tourist attractiveness consists of assets, tourist and paratourist development together with transport accessibility (Kaczmarek, Stasiak, and Włodarczyk, 2005; Gołembski *et al.*, 2002). These elements can also include the state and protection of the environment, as they have a direct impact on the quality of tourist assets. Both the state of the environment and the protection measures carried out are an individual issue and vary from region to region, and therefore have different significance.

The tourist attractiveness of an area (Nitkiewicz-Jankowska, 2011; Kim, Duffy, and Moore, 2020) manifests itself through the presence of specific spatial features that generate tourist interest. These include environmental and developmental qualities. Attractiveness in this perspective has a subjective meaning, depending on the psychophysical characteristics of the recipients (Okafor and Khalid, 2021).

A tourist attraction can be an area, region, locality or object. On the one hand, the tourist attractiveness of regions and objects is determined by objective factors (natural and anthropogenic qualities, tourist infrastructure), while on the other hand it is determined by the subjective perception of these factors by tourists (attractiveness of spending leisure time), investors (attractiveness of locating and conducting business) and residents (attractiveness of living) (Rapacz and Jaremen, 2011). The assessment of an area's tourism attractiveness is an important element for creating a tourism development concept or strategy (Kim, Duffy, and Moore, 2023).

It can be used to classify the attractiveness of spatial units, making differences visible and allowing actions to be taken to increase attractiveness. The assessment of attractiveness will boil down to an evaluation of tourism potential (Ślusarz *et al.*, 2019). Tourist attractiveness is a subjective feeling. It is not always the geographical, social or cultural environment that is an attraction for the tourist.

Often silence, tranquillity, hospitality of the locals, new acquaintances or knowledge of the region can be a magnet for tourists (Cheng-Fei, Hsun-Inn and Huery-Ren, 2010) and influence the development of tourism in a region. A region's tourism

attractiveness is largely an individual category that changes under the influence of new needs and travel experiences.

These experiences are the result of evaluating a region through the prism of the resources conditioning tourism development and constituting tourism potential. For the purposes of this article, it is necessary to clarify the concept of 'tourism development' (Streimikiene, Svagzdiene, Jasinskas, and Simanavicius, 2021).

This development includes elements that ensure the proper functioning of a given place, assuming maximum satisfaction of tourists' needs, as well as elements that support tourist values, e.g., tourist trails, recreational facilities (Nitkiewicz-Jankowska, 2011). It is an important element of tourism potential, and is also defined as a collection of facilities, equipment and institutions together with a service base for the benefit of tourists in a specific area (Nowakowski, 2001).

The most important function of tourism development is the adaptation of the environment for the needs of tourism in three respects, i.e., the adaptation for the needs of tourism of tourist assets, the provision of access to objects and areas that are destinations, and the provision of necessary conditions of existence for tourists at the destination (Płocka, 1996; Adamopoulos and Thalassinos, 2020).

The state of tourism development depends on the size and type structure of the tourist accommodation and catering facilities, transport infrastructure, the state of development in basic cultural and health care services and "specifically tourist" facilities related to the main tourist assets and form of tourism (Płocka, 1996).

Tourism development is the process of adapting existing assets for "tourism consumption". In order to do this, it is necessary to create or adapt the infrastructure that will ensure that those interested can access the assets and fulfil their stay objectives (Benur and Bramwell, 2015). This development (Duxbury, Bakas, Vinagre de Castro, and Silva, 2020; Grilli, Tyllianakis, Luisetti, Ferrini, and Turner, 2021) is also called the material base of tourism or tourism infrastructure.

### **3. Methodology**

The article contains a comprehensive theoretical and cognitive discussion of tourism potential and attractiveness and their components (using the method of critical analysis of the literature on the subject), as well as the results of empirical studies on accommodation development as a component of tourism potential in the regional dimension (using the method of analysis and logical construction, or in other words the method of analysis and synthesis).

Due to the high spatial diversity of tourism potential across the country, the subject of the analysis in the empirical part was limited to two selected spatial units, i.e., Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie Voivodeships. The criterion for selecting these

units is similarity in terms of geographical location (northern Poland, coastal belt), importance of the tourism function in social and economic development and share of tourism in the structure of the economies of these regions, as well as similar values and indicators illustrating their tourism potential. Due to the high semantic capacity of tourism potential (as demonstrated in the theoretical and cognitive part), the study focused on selected elements of tourism development. The time perspective of the study covered the years 2019-2022.

#### 4. Results

Analysing the specific values presented in Table 1, relating to accommodation development as an element of tourism potential, it should be noted that in terms of the density indicator of accommodation facilities I (calculated as the ratio of the number of accommodation facilities to the area in km<sup>2</sup>), the two studied voivodships (Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie) perform significantly better than the national average.

A similar situation is observed for the accommodation density index II (calculated as the ratio of the number of accommodation facilities to the area in km<sup>2</sup>) and the tourism density index (average number of tourists using accommodation per 1 km<sup>2</sup> of area). Only Małopolska is characterised by a higher value of the accommodation density indicator.

**Table 1.** Selected indicators on the condition and use of tourism accommodation facilities as an element of the tourism potential of selected regions of northern Poland in 2019-2022

Specification	Zachodniopomorskie				Pomorskie			
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2019	2020	2021	2022
Tourist accommodation facilities	1604	1484	1465	1397	1658	1555	1390	1395
Accommodation facilities (thousand)	145,4	141,1	144,2	143,3	119,5	115,7	111,3	110,9
Occupancy rate (in %)	51,5	37,8	44,0	47,8	43,1	31,7	38,2	42,7
Accommodation density index I	7,0	6,5	6,4	6,1	9,0	8,5	7,6	7,6
Accommodation density index II	5,0	6,2	6,3	6,3	6,5	6,3	6,1	6,1
Tourism density measure	140	92	107	142	177	108	129	179
Tourism intensity index I	189	124	146	198	139	84	101	139
Tourism intensity index II	947	587	710	922	442	286	341	425
Accommodation	22	15	17	23	27	17	21	30

development indicator								
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*Source:* Compiled on the basis of (Tourism, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023).

Taking into account tourism intensity indicators I according to Schneider (calculated as the number of tourists per 100 inhabitants) and II according to Charvat (number of overnight stays per 100 inhabitants), respectively, it was found that three voivodeships, i.e., Zachodniopomorskie, Małopolskie and Pomorskie, have the highest values nationwide.

An important figure confirming the large share of seasonal facilities in the structure of the entire tourist development in the West Pomeranian and Pomeranian regions is the accommodation development index (calculated as the number of tourists using accommodation facilities per 1 bed), which takes on some of the lowest values in Poland (well below average).

## 5. Discussion

Tourism potential is the property of a space giving it the capacity to attract and satisfactorily serve tourists, as well as determining the possibilities for the development of tourism sector entities operating in this space. It influences the possibilities of development of tourism and tourism economy in a given area (town, region or country).

The geographic location of the regions under study (partly in the coastal belt) means that seasonal establishments dominate the structure of all accommodation development - only one in three facilities operates year-round. At the same time, these are the regions with the highest number of establishments and beds nationwide.

In this respect, the regions under study are ahead of others, including those with a high level of attractiveness and high tourism potential, especially Mazovia, Małopolska and Lower Silesia.

The main driving force behind the deterioration of the figures surveyed in 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions associated with it, which resulted in a decrease in the number of tourists. As a result, there was a decline in the volume of domestic and foreign tourist traffic and a deterioration in the surveyed indicators.

Despite the unfavourable downward trend between 2019 and 2022 in the number of facilities and beds (the state of the accommodation infrastructure) in the surveyed regions of Poland, a clear improvement was observed (starting from 2020) in the indicators of the use of facilities and beds. This phenomenon should be assessed positively.

## 6. Conclusions

The growing interest in the development of tourism should go hand in hand with knowledge of the conditions for its development and an awareness of the benefits and risks accompanying such development. Tourism development is associated with many benefits for the regions. At the same time, potential threats relating to the quality of the environment and the life of local communities, the tourist product, its brand, the image of tourist reception areas or tourists, should be recognised when the tourist capacity of a given territory is exceeded.

Therefore, it is necessary to plan tourism development based on correct valorization of tourist areas, allowing for optimal use and building up of tourism potential and tourist development of the regions in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

The tourism potential in Poland is characterised by high spatial diversity, which in turn translates into development opportunities for tourism in the regions. The regions that positively stand out on the tourist map of Poland are - apart from the Małopolska region - two studied voivodeships, i.e., Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie 2.

The source of competitiveness of these regions is, in a broad sense, their development potential or, in a narrower sense, their tourism potential, related to their geographical location, tourism assets (e.g., natural and cultural), relatively good transport accessibility, as well as tourism development, especially accommodation, catering and recreational facilities.

The upward trend in tourism intensity and the use of facilities and accommodation indicates the growing importance of tourism in the regions studied, which should be taken into account in socio-economic development policies and strategies at the level of the various local government units.

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