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## Selected Forms of Active Tourism as a Way of Discovering the Tourist Attractions of the City of Szczecin

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to identify the dominant forms of active tourism that take place in the diverse urban space of Szczecin and being a form of exploring its tourist attractions.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** An inventory was made of the latest and unusual tourist offer of Żegluga Szczecińska, addressed to visiting tourists and residents, implemented in the city. A query was conducted, which allowed for the collection of secondary statistical data on several measures of tourist traffic, which further constituted the basis for calculations of the dynamics of tourist traffic in the period in question.

**Findings:** Szczecin's unusual location on the border with Germany and in the vicinity of the Scandinavian countries, the unique diversity of landscapes and natural values, combined with the remains of multi-epoch cultural heritage visible in the urban space, allows to practice various forms of active tourism in the city, getting to know its values, without having to leave its borders. These elements are intertwined, giving residents and tourists the opportunity to learn about both the history and geography of Szczecin, choosing the best form of tourism and recreation.

**Practical implications:** Research results may be used for promotional purposes, including: institutions supporting the development of tourism in the region, promoting national heritage as an element of world cultural heritage, or social movements and non-governmental organizations, as well as for educational purposes by educational institutions.

**Originality/Value:** Drawing attention to an innovative way of learning about material heritage by creating thematic tourist trails. A compilation of the most interesting landscape elements of Szczecin, the capital of Western Pomerania, and forms of recreation and active tourism that can take place in the diverse outdoors of the agglomeration.

**Keywords:** Active tourism, nature tourism, heritage tourism, agglomeration, Szczecin,

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## 1. Introduction

Szczecin, as an urban tourist area, has a multifunctional character, and one of its functions is tourism. The city of Szczecin, due to its vast surface area included administratively in the boundaries of the agglomeration and extremely:

- valuable natural values:
  - hydrographic network occupying about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the city, which includes lakes, including Lake Dabie (55.6 km<sup>2</sup>), the 3rd largest lake in Poland, rivers, including the Odra, the 2nd longest river in Poland, farm ponds and smaller watercourses;
  - green areas occupying more than 20% of the city's area, which include: parks, dendrological and rose gardens, the Central Cemetery, the largest necropolis in Poland and one of the largest in Europe, combining natural and anthropogenic elements, with the character of a landscape park, forests, 3 primeral forests, protected areas, i.e., 2 Landscape Parks, 4 Natura 2000 Areas, ecological corridors of supra-local importance (4 of 6 include water areas);
- rich history and cultural values, shaped over the centuries by various nationalities (Slavics, Brandenburgers, Danes, Swedes, French, Prussians, Germans, Poles) (Duda, 2017):
  - the city's location at the intersection of several historical and thematic routes - the European Brick Gothic Route, the Hanseatic Route and the Pomeranian Way of St. James - interesting architectural assumptions;
  - location in a cross-border area - communication with Germany and Scandinavia, is an area with great potential for creating non-standard forms of outdoor active tourism for cities, where the dominant motive of the trip is to undertake a particular type of recreational or hobby activity.

Therefore, the study attempts to compile non-standard forms of active tourism found in the offer of the Szczecin Shipping Company Events Tourism (Szczecin Shipping Company, 2023). Its choice is dictated by its long history and uninterrupted connection with Szczecin since the 1950s and the continuation of the city's water tradition.

Over the years, the range of activities carried out has changed, starting with passenger shipping by white fleet vessels in Pomerania, and ending with tourism promotion through the Visit Szczecin project.

The project organizes, among other things, Cross-Border City Walks, which are a series of thematic excursions allowing a new discovery of Szczecin. With its thematic diversity, language accessibility and flexibility of the dates of the events gather a wide audience.

## **2. Literature Review**

Qualified tourism in Poland has a long and rich history, the origins of which date back to the second half of the 19th century and are related to initiatives undertaken by the first organizations related to with tourism, i.e., the Polish Tatra Society and the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (Bieńczyk, 2007).

Over the years, social preferences, needs and motives for traveling, as well as the organization of specialized tourism have changed many times. The literature has written about changing tourist preferences for adventure, cultural and eco-tourism depending on achievements and social affiliations (Tran, 2006).

Rodríguez del Bosque (2009) attempted to prove that tourists' expectations are based on the reciprocal correlations between factors, i.e., past experiences, external communication, word-of-mouth communication and destination image, whereby the image of the place can be considered the main factor generating expectations for the destination. The relationship of motives and directions of undertaken travel with psychological patterns of individuals has also been studied (Li, 2013; Simkova, 2014).

Other authors have attempted to collect literature treating tourist motivations in relation to travel undertaken (Yousaf, 2018). As a result of progressive changes, numerous original, sometimes extreme and even bizarre forms of tourism are emerging today. Invariably, however, active forms of travel are appreciated, bearing in mind the benefits of an active lifestyle, the formation of health-oriented behavior and valuable leisure activities.

Concepts related to physical activities, outdoors, in the fresh air, have also evolved. Active tourism (Kurek, 2007; Merski, 2009; Stasiak, 2015; Grima *et al.*, 2017; 2018) has become a concept superior to other forms of activity, the types of which are:

- adventure tourism, where the authors emphasize the emotional aspect, insight and deepening of knowledge and skills (Weber, 2001; Fennell, 2004);
- extreme tourism (Baldacchino, 2006; Bujdoso, 2013; Bończak, 2013a; Rahmonov, 2021), understood by the authors as niche tourism in the tourism

- industry involving travel to dangerous places (cold climate zones, mountains, jungles, deserts, caves, canyons, etc.) or participation in dangerous events. Extreme tourism overlaps with extreme sports;
- qualified tourism (Łobożewicz, 1983), a term not found in English terminology, describes the highest form of tourism specialization including possession of formal credentials;
  - sports tourism (Bończak, 2013a; Gibson, 1998; Łuc, 2023), the origins of which scholars trace back to antiquity and wandering to watch the Olympic games in Greece (Zauhar, 2003) or Rome (Coakley, 1990).

Active tourism is a form of tourism in which the dominant motive for the trip is to undertake specific types of recreational or hobby activities (Gibson, 1998b; Durydiwka, 2010). The term recreational activity is understood as activities undertaken to regenerate strength (including participation in various forms of tourism) after hours of obligatory classes (Warszyńska and Jackowski, 1979).

It is characterized primarily by activity (physical, mental, social, emotional), voluntariness, pleasure, contentment and satisfaction (Winiarski, 2011). Active tourism participants do not have to undertake high physical, technical and intellectual preparation (as in the case of qualified tourism) (Bończak, 2013a). The most important motives for undertaking are the cognitive values of the geographical environment, experiencing tourist attractions (Bonetti, 2014) and hiking in the natural environment and economic issues (Bończak, 2013b; Adamopoulos and Thalassinos, 2020).

The elements of the geographic environment mentioned above - culture, history, traditions, architecture, nature and all that is specific to a place - can be referred to as heritage. Large cities have become tourist destinations in recent years, often combining all these elements of the landscape.

The literature on the subject includes publications in the field of cultural heritage, including industrial and historical heritage, and the authors attempt to answer the question of how contemporary cultural attractions affect the perception of tourist attractiveness of cities (Obuchowicz, 2019; Harrison, 2020; Szubert, 2021).

Cultural heritage is also discussed in the context of the cities' riverside location and its unique natural qualities. It combines urban space with the developed space of the river valley, enhancing the aesthetic value of the city (Angiel, 2012; Raszka, 2023).

The contemporary issue is largely turned to the interpretation of heritage, of which Tilden (1957) is a precursor, and is an educational activity through which the knowledge and experience of the past is transmitted. It is a form of communication that aims to create an emotional and intellectual connection between the interest and experience of the recipient and the meaning (message) of an object (Howard, 2003; Hristov, 2018; Mikos and Rohrscheidt, 2019).

### **3. Data and Methods**

The purpose of the study is to identify modern forms of active tourism undertaken by residents and visitors, taking place in the diverse urban space of Szczecin and being at the same time a form of exploring its tourist attractions. This was possible by means of an inventory of available documents of the local tourist offer of the Szczecin Shipping Company.

The selected results are presented in the second part of the study. The theoretical part of the study was based on a literature survey (Snyder, 2019), conducted from October 2023 to November 2023, including peer-reviewed articles on the topic of "active tourism as a form of cultural heritage promotion." The following databases were used to locate relevant literature: Web of Science, Google Scholar, Elsevier.

The search profile was based on the keywords from the title of this article: "active tourism", "nature tourism", "heritage tourism", "agglomeration" and their synonyms. The theoretical part of the paper presents the main determinants of tourism development in the Szczecin agglomeration, along with their functional division (due to forms of active tourism).

The practical part is presented in graphic form (by means of a graph - which is a tool for presentation and analysis of generalized statistical information) and tabular form illustrating the volume and dynamics of tourist traffic in Szczecin over the last 10 years.

The source data are secondary data (Clark, 2005), obtained from the resources of the Statistical Office in Szczecin. The final part of the work is the application of descriptive analysis of the phenomenon (Runge, 2006; Rogacki, 2003).

### **4. Results**

In shaping the tourist space of Szczecin, a special role is played by the natural and thematic diversity presented by the preserved objects of historical heritage of the city, the capital of West Pomerania. They are significant assets in tourism, fitting perfectly into the thematic narrative of sightseeing.

Over the past decade, Szczecin has become a city increasingly popular with tourists (Figure 1), not only as a short stop on the route to the seaside, but also as a holiday destination.

The group of foreign tourists is dominated by Germans and Danes, and in recent years also Czechs and Ukrainians, for whom local tour programs are being linguistically adapted.

**Figure 1.** Number of tourists in Szczecin from 2012 to 2022

*Source:* Own work based on [www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl](http://www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl).

The rate of change in the volume of tourist traffic is increasing, to reach almost 10% increase in the number of tourists in 2022 compared to 2012 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Dynamics of changes in tourist movement in Szczecin in 2012-2022

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
total number of tourists	100	102,978	104,403	104,403	104,787	105,753	104,193	107,561	59,596	68,627	109,586

*Source:* Based on [www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl](http://www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl)

An increased number of overnight stays is also observed, which affects the possibility of exploring the most interesting corners of the city (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Number of overnight stays in Szczecin in 2012-2022

*Source:* Own work basen on [www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl](http://www.szczecin.stat.gov.pl).

The most important forms of active tourism that influence the exploration of the values of Szczecin's tourist space include:

- **sports water tourism** - takes place in the form of sailing, motorboat and kayaking tourism. The background for practicing it are: internal sea waters and inland waters of Szczecin, i.e., the Odra River with its quays and the waters and islands of Lake Dąbie along with marinas and sports clubs in its southern part.

Residents and tourists have at their disposal water equipment rentals, white fleet cruises, motorboats, river barges, and passenger cruise ships, the so-called cruisers, fishing and relaxing on natural and artificial beaches and bathing areas within the city limits of Szczecin. The Explore Oder application can help in orienting the city's water space, which is a collection of over 100 water attractions located in Szczecin and Międzyzdrze (Szczecin Shipping Company, 2023a).

- **adventure and nature tourism** - takes place in the form of city games, orienteering games or questing in urban green areas (Kazior, 2008). It is a way of exploring previously beleaguered destinations, such as the centers of large cities, in an alternative way. It is a hike off the beaten track, to places that are often forgotten. Another way of spending leisure time in Szczecin's green landscape is to follow a thematic nature trail in the necropolis of the Central Cemetery, where the mysteries of hundreds of native and exotic plantings are uncovered with a guide.

The green areas are also a dedicated place for horse and bicycle tourism. Western Pomerania, together with Szczecin, is implementing a concept unique in the country and Europe for building a network of bicycle routes. It includes long-distance routes: the Velo Baltica, Blue Velo, the Western Lakes Route, the Old Railway Route and the Route around the Szczecin Lagoon.

More than 150 km of bicycle paths are prepared within the city limits as well as on the outskirts of the city (Bicycle Report, 2023). It is possible to use Bike\_S, or Szczecin City Bicycle, all year round. Bicycle tour routes can be planned with the "West Pomerania" mobile application or on the West Pomeranian Voivodeship website (Bicycles of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, 2023).

- **urban cultural tourism**, implemented multithreaded in the form of thematic trails, under the name: Cross-border city walks (Table 2), (Shipping Szczecin Company, 2023b).

The offer is implemented in several language versions. In 2022, 121 people took part in the walks in the Ukrainian language version, in 2023. 127 people; the English-language version was used by 32 people in 2022 and 87 in 2023; the German version was implemented for 40 people in 2022 and 85 this year (Shipping Szczecin Company, 2003c).

**Table 2.** List of Cross-border city walks and number of participants

No.	Topic	Characteristic	Tourists 2022	Tourists 2023
1	<b>Oriental walk</b>	On the trail of oriental plants brought by water by the sailors of the port city	–	39
2	<b>Little Explorer</b>	walk with maps to explore the city on your own along three trails full of riddles and interesting stories	26	19
3	<b>Musical Szczecin</b>	A walk full of musical curiosities, fascinating personalities from the world of music and architectural gems	39	42
4	<b>The legends of Szczecin and Pomerania</b>	a story about Pomeranian griffins , dwellings and customs of the princes and wanderers of Pomerania	37	39
5	<b>The bloody stories of Szczecin</b>	a route of unsolved mysteries, bloody events and places associated with the city's villains	41	41
6	<b>Tastes of Szczecin</b>	a story about the culinary tastes of past and present residents, a walk around famous pre-war restaurants	40	42
7	<b>On the Griffin trail</b>	a walk around Gryf Castle with elements of an urban game, searching for griffins hidden in urban space	–	36
8	<b>Multi-religious Szczecin</b>	a multicultural history of the city with French tenement houses, Swedish lions, works of architects from the south of Europe	26	35
9	<b>Szczecin murals</b>	huge colorful street art works often incorporated into neglected tenement houses of the city waiting for revitalization	24	34
10	<b>In the footsteps of Szczecin Baroque</b>	Szczecin from the 17th and 18th centuries with guides in period costumes	69	41
11	<b>Szczecin mosaics</b>	a trail of several dozen mosaic works and collages referring to the symbols of the city, the places where they were created, as well as completely abstract ones	34	39
12	<b>Miracles on facades</b>	discovering the shapes and details of the facades of buildings from the end of the 19th century, their meaning and functions, not only aesthetic ones	25	38
13	<b>Extraordinary inhabitants of Szczecin and their tenement houses</b>	places of residence (private apartments) of pre-war and post-war famous figures from the history, culture or politics of Szczecin	36	–
14	<b>Southern scenic trail</b>	a route through the nature of the Beech Forest and in the footsteps of the Toepffer family industrialists	–	39
15	<b>Through Szczecin to the sea</b>	the city's maritime history best recorded on Szczecin's boulevards	63	47



16	<b>Szczecin from a different perspective</b>	a city from the perspective of its unique tradition of wine production and sale	–	38
17	<b>Lasztownia in the past and today</b>	the history of one of Szczecin's islands overlooking the city center, its industrial function and a film set	26	38
18	<b>Szczecin, the city of floating gardens</b>	a walk among the greenery of nature and the blue of water, thanks to which you can see that the city deserves to be called the Venice of the north	20	40
19	<b>Residential West End</b>	the British modeled district established at the 19th and 20th century, inhabited by the wealthiest of the pre-war city	38	–
20	<b>Szczecin, fortress city</b>	trail along fortifications that surrounded the city for over 200 years until the end of the 19th century	70	40
21	<b>Central Cemetery - garden of memory</b>	a world-unique necropolis with park layouts, hiding the stories of extraordinary characters from the pre-war and post-war city	67	40

*Source: Own work based on <https://zstw.szczecin.pl/pl/turystyka/centrum-informacyjnej>.*

- **industrial tourism** - for enthusiasts, so-called urbex, refers to the port areas of the former shipyard and the now defunct factories largely located along the Oder River waterfront, but also in other parts of the city dominated in the 19th and 20th centuries by shipbuilding and heavy industry, ceramic and cement production and paper making. Another example is fully organized industrial tourism at Szczecin's brewery plants and the Starka factory.

- **event tourism** - associated primarily with large-scale events of a mass character, related to water, the sea, i.e. annual Sea Days, occasional rallies of great sailing ships The Tall Ship Races or others, i.e., Review of Small Form Theaters "Kontrapunkt", Jacob's Fair and Picnic on the Oder River.

## 5. Summary and Discussion

Like the whole of Pomerania with its German part, i.e., Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as well as the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, Szczecin, being its capital, is the area where long-stay tourism develops most rapidly. For domestic and foreign tourists, the motive for arrival is primarily cognitive and recreational.

The collected statistical secondary data from the last 10 years, i.e., 2012-2022, gave a picture of the changing tourist traffic in the urban agglomeration. Every year, Szczecin increases the number of visiting tourists, including foreign tourists, also increasing the number of nights provided. The rate of change in tourism is positive. In 2022 it reached almost 10% growth in the number of tourists compared to 2012.

The exception is the years 2020-2021 when there was a sharp decline in the number of tourists compared to the base year of 2012 (Table 1). This was the period of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic announced by the World Health Organization and measures introduced to prevent the spread and minimize the effects of the epidemic, including to the hotel industry, where limits or bans were imposed to prevent the provision of hotel services and free movement (Iustitia, 2020).

The observed changes in the volume of tourist traffic are so significant from the point of view of tourism development that the city is no longer associated with a short stop on the way to the Baltic Sea, becoming a tourist destination.

## **6. Conclusion**

The forms of tourism, the tourist equipment used and the ways of spending leisure time must follow the spirit of the dynamically changing times. The location of Szczecin in the center of the Euroregion Pomerania provides many opportunities for the development of tourism, not only domestic, but also international.

A stay of several days gives the opportunity to get to know the culturally diverse capital of West Pomerania. The city, which within its administrative boundaries contains some of the country's largest forested areas, water areas and architecturally and urbanistically interesting urban solutions, also fuses all forms of outdoor activities.

The main tourist potential of Szczecin is inextricably linked with its proximity to the sea and its natural wealth. When practicing selected forms of active tourism in the area of the city of Szczecin, one spends time here in the intermingled urban, forest, water space, and additionally in the natural landscape are integrated elements of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) of various historical periods starting from medieval times.

Proximity to the border, greater ability to obtain foreign funds for promotional activities, implementation of a diversified tourist offer, highlighting the greatest assets of the port city bathed in greenery, dedicated to an international group of tourists, are assets that attract tourists to the center of Szczecin, and the quality of their implementation translates into a larger and longer presence every year.

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