
Exploring Tourist Preferences in Regional Coastal Destinations

Submitted 10/10/24, 1st revision 25/10/24, 2nd revision 13/11/24, accepted 25/11/24

Artur Pomianowski¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The article attempts to examine the behavioral preferences of tourists and visitors from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship in relation to the coastal tourism offerings of this region

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article presents a summary of a survey conducted among 129 respondents—residents of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship—alongside a review of professional literature and statistical data from both the Central Statistical Office and Big Data research commissioned by the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.

Findings: Based on the research results, it was possible to determine the typical behaviors and preferences of tourists regarding regional tourism along the coast. The key findings include identifying both the main advantages and disadvantages of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship's coastline, as well as the frequency with which respondents visit and stay overnight in this subregion.

Practical Implications: The study holds significant practical value for stakeholders in the broader tourism industry—such as accommodation providers, dining venues—as well as for regional and, especially, local authorities. It highlights areas that, based on response percentages, should be considered critical and in need of improvement. The study results also allow for an assessment of areas where efforts have proven effective, indicating that the offerings or standards in these areas are satisfactory to customers and contribute to the appeal of the discussed destination..

Originality/Value: The originality and value of the study are given by the fact that this area – correspondence from a large company is poorly researched and not exhaustively discussed in the available literature. Few researchers have addressed this important area of customer communication, especially in the current pandemic situation. The energy company may incorporate the produced recommendations into its customer communication strategy.

Keywords: Coastline tourism, tourism, destination marketing.

JEL codes: D91, R11, R41.

Paper Type: Research article.

¹Ph.D., University of Szczecins, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0001-9051-2701,
e-mail: artur.pomianowski@usz.edu.pl;

1. Introduction

Coastal tourism in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship is not only a prominent aspect of the region's cultural and natural appeal but also a significant contributor to its GDP. Recognizing its importance, "Tourism and Quality of Life" (Inteligentne, 2022) has been designated as one of the six smart specializations of the region, reflecting the strategic focus on sustainable development and high-quality offerings in the tourism sector. Given the Voivodeship's natural landscapes and unique coastal amenities, this area is positioned as a prime destination for both relaxation and recreation.

According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS), the West Pomeranian Voivodeship ranks as the top tourist destination in Poland, attracting a substantial number of both Polish and international visitors. The region offers approximately the highest accommodation facilities, which are utilized at a high occupancy rate. The popularity of this coastal destination is underscored by a consistently high demand for these accommodations, which highlights both the appeal of the area and the importance of strategic improvements to meet growing visitor expectations.

This article aims to investigate the preferences and behaviours of tourists and local visitors within the coastal tourism framework of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Utilizing data gathered from a survey of 129 local residents, alongside an analysis of professional literature and statistical data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and Big Data research commissioned by the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, this study seeks to uncover the factors that influence tourist choices and satisfaction.

The findings provide insights into the main advantages and disadvantages of the region's coastline, as perceived by the respondents, and reveal the frequency of visits and overnight stays. From a practical perspective, the study's results offer valuable information for tourism stakeholders, including accommodation providers, dining establishments, and local authorities.

Identifying critical areas for improvement based on visitor feedback enables targeted enhancements to the local tourism infrastructure. Additionally, recognizing areas where current offerings meet or exceed expectations can help reinforce those elements that contribute positively to the destination's image and appeal.

This research adds to the limited body of literature on tourism preferences specific to the West Pomeranian coast. By examining this understudied area, the study provides a foundation for future research on regional tourism, particularly in the context of post-pandemic travel behaviours and preferences. The insights and recommendations derived from this study have the potential to guide both public and private sector initiatives aimed at optimizing the tourism experience in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.

2. Literature Review

The West Pomeranian Voivodeship is located in northwestern Poland along the Baltic Sea and shares a western border with Germany. It is one of only two regions in Poland, alongside the Pomeranian Voivodeship, with direct access to the Baltic Sea. According to Eurostat's methodology, Poland's coastal areas include a total of 55 municipalities across three voivodeships, 23 in West Pomeranian, 26 in Pomeranian, and 6 in Warmian-Masurian.

These are municipalities situated directly on the Baltic coast or within close proximity. The popularity of this destination is evidenced by statistical data from Poland's Central Statistical Office (GUS), which monitors year-round accommodations with more than ten beds. West Pomeranian boasts the highest number of accommodation facilities in Poland, totaling 1,421, compared to 1,380 in Pomeranian and 1,319 in Małopolskie (southern Poland, known for mountain tourism). In no other region does this number exceed 1,000.

Additionally, West Pomeranian has the largest number of available overnight accommodations, with 146,800 beds in 2023, compared to 108,900 in Pomeranian and a national average of 73,000 beds per voivodeship.

In 2023, the average density of accommodation facilities in Poland was 2.5 beds per km², with higher-than-average values recorded in five voivodeships, led by Małopolskie (6.6 beds per km²), West Pomeranian (6.4 beds per km²), and Pomeranian (5.6 beds per km²). West Pomeranian also reported the highest annual increase in domestic tourists in the first half of 2023, with a growth rate of 11.4%, providing 5.14 million overnight stays.

For years, West Pomeranian has led Poland in the total number of overnight stays, with 15.2 million in 2022, followed by Małopolskie (13.7 million), Mazowieckie (10.3 million), and Pomeranian (10.0 million) (GUS, Tourism 2024; GUS, Accommodation Database 2023; GUS, Accommodation Database 2024).

These data clearly highlight the significance of tourism in this region. Big Data analysis further supports this trend, leveraging mobile device user accounts identified by Google Advertising IDs (GAID) and Apple's ID for Advertisers (IDFA) for Android and iOS, respectively. The user account remains constant as long as users are logged into their Google or iOS accounts. This Big Data study, capturing real user behaviors, was conducted on a sample of over 3.8 million users, providing a reliable representation of visitor flows in the West Pomeranian region.

The study follows precise definitions established by the researcher, distinguishing between tourists and day visitors for the purposes of this analysis. Regional tourists are defined as mobile device users residing within the West Pomeranian Voivodeship who spend at least two days (including overnight) within the region,

moving between different counties. An overnight stay is recorded if the user spends at least four hours in the region between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., with a maximum stay of 22 days in the study period. Regional day visitors, on the other hand, are mobile device users who reside in West Pomeranian and spend a day (without an overnight stay) within the voivodeship, moving between different counties.

These visitors are recorded if they spend a minimum of three hours in the region between 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., excluding those who travel frequently for work or education (limited to a maximum of two trips per month). In 2022, the coastal subregion recorded 341,690 regional tourists out of a total of 646,678 for the voivodeship, while regional day visitors numbered 714,059 out of a total of 1,824,411 (Selectivv Tourist Traffic, 2023). This data underscores the importance of the coastal subregion for the tourism sector and the need for further investigation into the behaviors and preferences of regional tourists and day visitors.

The coastal tourism offerings are extensive, featuring health and wellness tourism and active tourism, which early researchers identified as typical forms of tourism in this area (Różycki, 2022). Active tourism in this region includes cycling, with Eurovelo R10 and R13, known as the Velo Baltica and Iron Curtain Trail (ICT), supporting low-emission, slow, and sustainable tourism by reviving abandoned railway routes and distributing tourist traffic (Davies, Lumsdon, and McGrath, 2012).

Health tourism, especially spa tourism, has seen a resurgence across Europe since the late 20th century. Demographic shifts, such as an aging population, increased leisure time and income, and growing health awareness, have all contributed to this trend (Królak, 2021; Makala, 2016). Many traditional spa towns are now expanding their offerings beyond traditional treatments to include wellness and holistic services, focusing on mental and physical health, work-life balance, and practices aimed at promoting not only longevity but also an enhanced quality of life.

Tourist preferences for choosing coastal regions and their duration of stay are complex and influenced by factors such as infrastructure quality, natural attractions, climate, and safety. Studies indicate that access to amenities like beaches, nature reserves, and water sports facilities often contributes significantly to the popularity of a tourist destination.

Furthermore, there is a growing trend among tourists to seek sustainable travel options, reflecting an increased environmental awareness and a desire to minimize their ecological impact on visited regions (Adamopoulos and Thalassinou, 2020). The length of stay also varies depending on the tourist profile and the characteristics of the coastal area. Regions that offer a wide range of attractions and activities tend to attract visitors for extended stays. In some cases, longer stays are encouraged by accessible transportation and long-stay promotional packages.

Younger tourists often prefer shorter visits, while older travelers lean toward extended stays to fully benefit from leisure and wellness opportunities (Global trends, 2007)

3. Research Methods

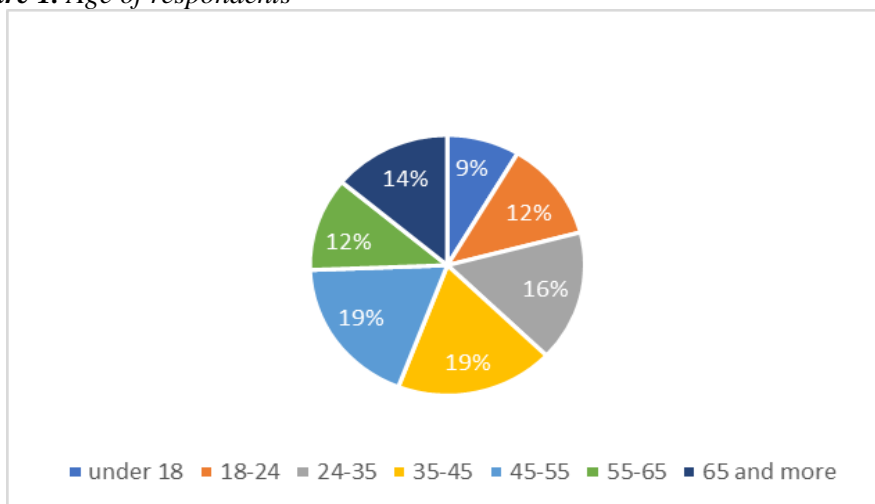
This study employed a multi-method approach to explore recreational preferences. Initial steps included an extensive literature review, providing theoretical insights into key concepts and trends within recreational studies. Statistical data analysis was then performed using existing datasets, supplemented with findings from the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) and Big Data analyses commissioned by the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. These sources provided valuable contextual data.

Primary data was collected through a survey using direct interviews and Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). Together, these methodologies offered a robust and comprehensive understanding of preferences across various demographic groups.

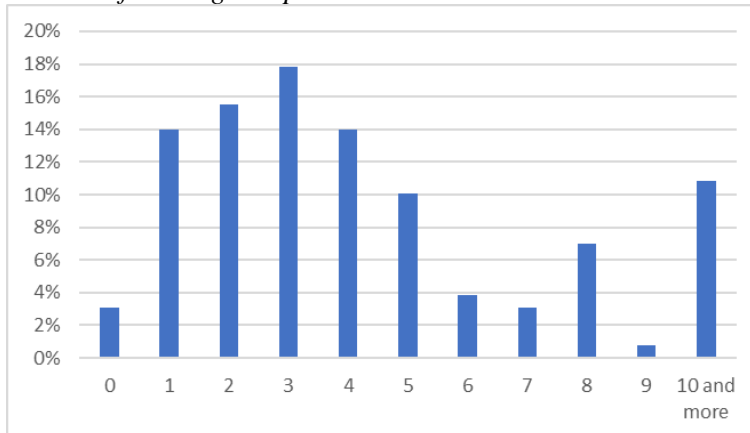
4. Research Results

The survey was conducted with a sample of 129 residents from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Both the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method and direct interviews using a survey questionnaire were employed. A relatively balanced representation of age groups was achieved, as shown in Figure 1. This distribution suggests that the results are likely to be reliable and not biased by the preferences of specific age groups among respondents.

Figure 1. Age of respondents



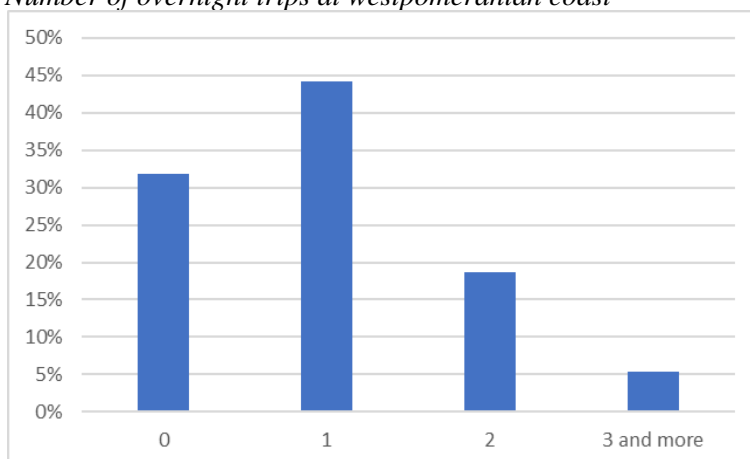
Source: Own study.

Figure 2. Number of overnight trips

Source: Own study.

The next question posed to the group of respondents concerned the frequency of overnight trips taken throughout the year, based on their experiences over the past twelve months. The survey was conducted just after the peak summer holiday season in 2024. the distribution of responses is shown in Figure 2.

Respondents were also asked to indicate how many times during this period they stayed overnight on the West Pomeranian coast. Only three respondents reported a frequency higher than three times, so they were collectively grouped into the “three or more” category, the answers are shown in Figure 3.

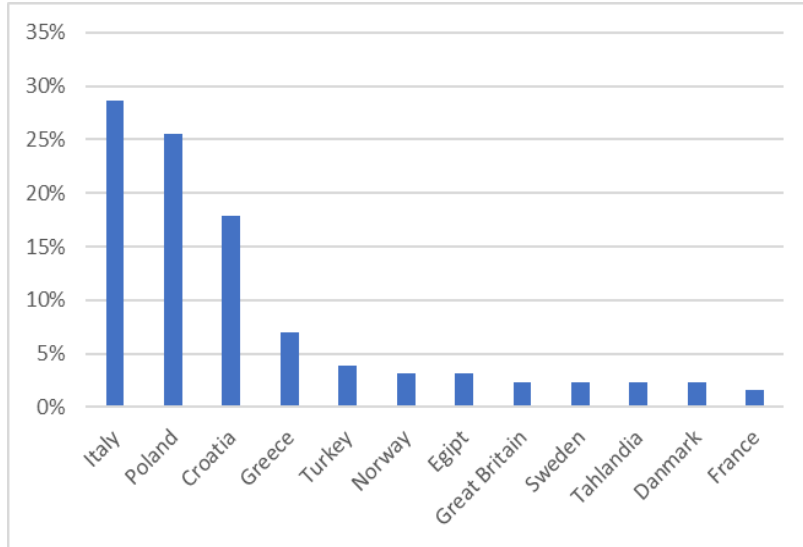
Figure 3. Number of overnight trips at westpomeranian coast

Source: Own study.

Respondents were also asked to identify their top-choice tourist destination abroad. Given the location of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and its transportation

options, it is assumed that these responses refer to trips involving overnight stays. The distribution of responses is presented in Figure 4.

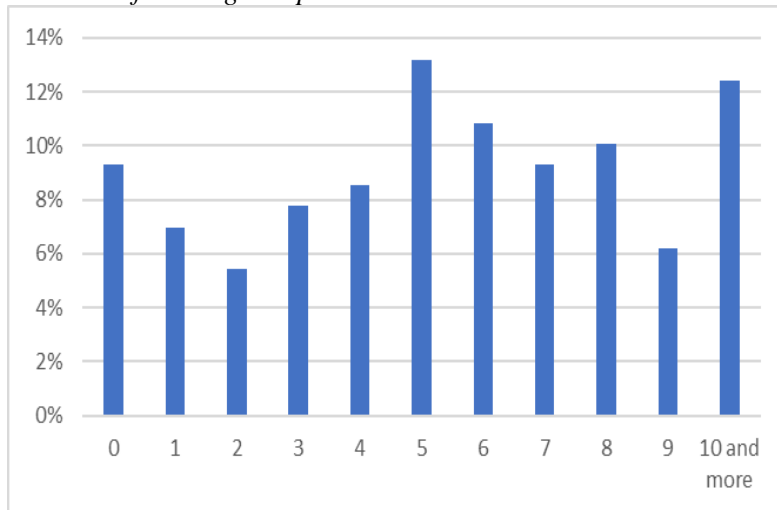
Figure 4. Favourite tourist destination



Source: Own study.

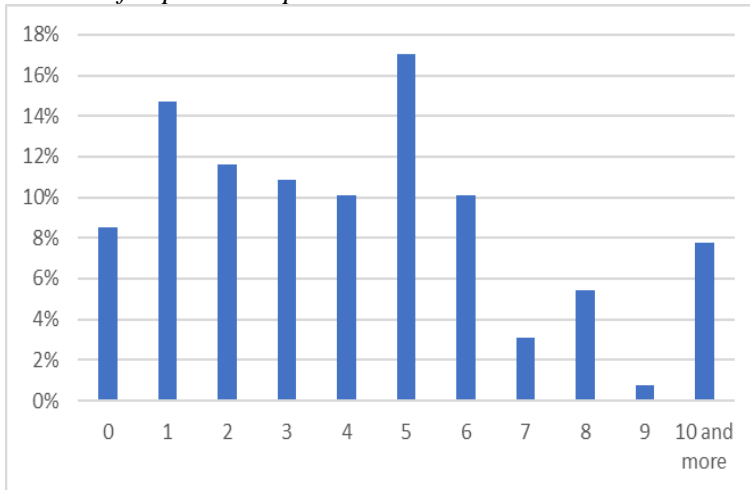
Participants also shared their preferences for non-overnight travel in terms of frequency and destination. The results are presented in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5. Number of overnight trips



Source: Own study.

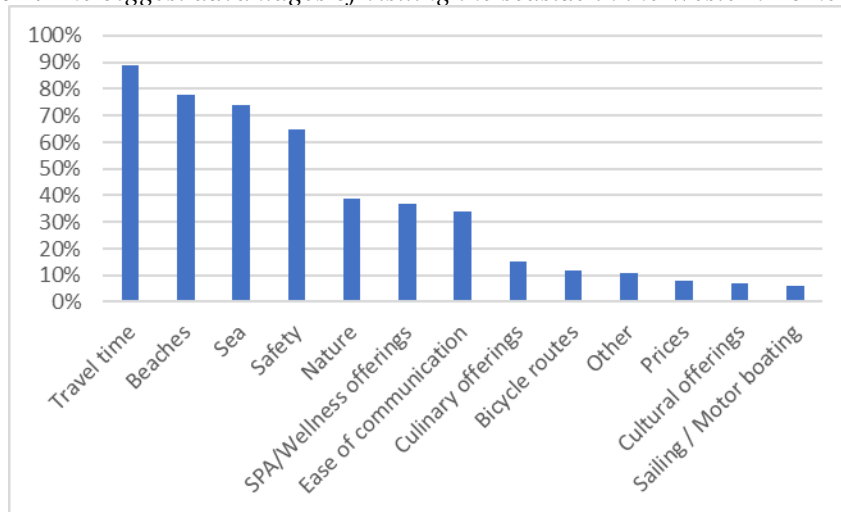
Figure 6. Number of trips at Westpomeranian coast



Source: Own study.

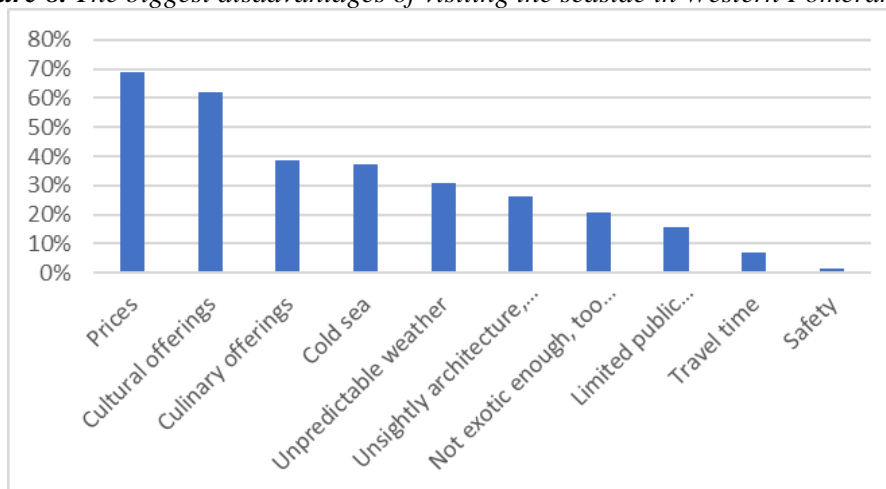
An effort was also made to determine what tourists and visitors consider the main advantages and the most significant drawbacks of vacationing on the West Pomeranian coast. The results of this survey are presented in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7. The biggest advantages of visiting the seaside in the Western Pomerania?



Source: Own study.

It should be noted that 81.4% of West Pomeranian residents plan to vacation in the region over the next 12 months, while an additional 2.3% of respondents are undecided on this matter.

Figure 8. *The biggest disadvantages of visiting the seaside in Western Pomerania?*

Source: Own study.

5. Conclusions

The survey, conducted with 129 residents of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, provides valuable insights into the travel behaviors and preferences of regional residents, especially concerning coastal tourism. A balanced representation across age groups suggests that the findings are reliable and not skewed by age-based biases.

Frequency of Overnight Trips: Most respondents took overnight trips within the past twelve months, with the survey taking place after the peak summer season of 2024. While overnight travel was common, only a few respondents stayed on the West Pomeranian coast more than three times, indicating that local residents may seek diversity in their travel destinations beyond the immediate coastal region.

Non-Overnight Travel: For shorter, non-overnight trips, respondents highlighted destinations within the region, indicating a strong preference for local tourism for day trips. This suggests a high level of engagement with regional attractions for shorter visits, contributing to the local tourism economy.

Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of the West Pomeranian Coast: Respondents identified several key strengths and weaknesses of vacationing on the West Pomeranian coast. The main advantages included travel time, wide sandy beaches, sea and sense of safety.

Drawbacks includes prices, the cold sea, unpredictable weather, unattractive culinary offerings, not many cultural opportunities and lack of exotic appeal. These

perceptions could inform future regional development strategies to enhance visitor satisfaction.

Future Travel Plans: Notably, 81.4% of respondents expressed plans to vacation within the West Pomeranian region over the next 12 months, demonstrating strong local loyalty. This high percentage suggests a steady demand for coastal tourism within the region, with only a small percentage of undecided respondents.

These findings reflect the importance of regional tourism infrastructure and suggest potential areas for improvement to enhance the attractiveness of the West Pomeranian coast. For policymakers and tourism operators, addressing identified weaknesses could help retain and attract both local and external visitors, boosting the region's tourism industry.

6. Conflicts of Interest

Author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References:

- Accommodation 2023. 2024. Turystyczne obiekty noclegowe na obszarach 16.11.2023 r. nadmorskich w lipcu i sierpniu 2023 r. Statistical Office Rzeszów, Rzeszów.
- Accommodation 2024. 2024. Turystyczna baza noclegowa i jej wykorzystanie w I półroczu 2024 r. Statistical Office Rzeszów, Rzeszów.
- Adamopoulos, A., Thalassinos, E.I. 2020. Tourism Development and Economic Growth: A Comparative Study for the G-6 Leaders. *European Research Studies Journal*, 23(1), 368-380.
- Global Trends in Marine-Oriented Tourism and Strategies for Sustainable Development Interventions developed by CESD for the World Wildlife Fund. 2007. Center on Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: A Nonprofit Research Organization. Stanford University, Washington, D.C.
- Inteligentne Specjalizacje Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego. 2022. Centrum Inicjatyw Gospodarczych, Wydział Zarządzania Strategicznego. Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Zachodniopomorskiego, Szczecin.
- Królak, S. 2021. Turystyka uzdrowiskowa w Polsce – rozważania nad istotą, determinantami i przyszłością. *Rozwój Regionalny i Polityka Regionalna*, (53), 125-146. <https://doi.org/10.14746/rrpr.2021.53.09>.
- Lumsdon, L., Weston, R., McGrath, P., Davies, N., Peeters, P., Eijgelaar, E., Piket, P. 2009. The European Cycle Route Network, Eurovelo Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism. Study, Brussels, European Parliament.
- Makała, A. 2016. Health Tourism in Poland, *Zeszyty Naukowe. Turystyka i Rekreacja*, 2(18), 119-130.
- Mihai, V.C., Dumitras, D.E., Oroian, C., Chiciudean, G.O., Arion, F.H., Mureşan, I.C. 2023. Exploring the Factors Involved in Tourists' Decision-Making and Determinants of Length of Stay. *Adm. Sci.*, 13, 215. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13100215>.

- Różycki, P. 2022. *Geneza i teoria turystyki*. Red., Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.53271/2022.082>.
- Selectivv. 2023. *Tourist traffic research for Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Region – Poland*.
- Tourism in 2023. 2024. *Statistics Poland, Statistical Office Rzeszów, Warszawa, Rzeszów*.