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**THE PROBLEMS OF TOURIST
INFORMATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT
IN WEST-POMERANIAN REGION**

Introduction

Tourist information is a significant element of tourist movement service. Its main role is influencing an incoming movement. Particular role of this kind of tourist movement service occurs in two dimensions:

- a) on the one hand it combines many elements of tourist offer at the destination making it easier for tourists to gain knowledge about the structure of tourist product: virtues and tourist attractions, tourist infrastructure, services offered by the entities of direct and indirect tourism economy,
- b) on the other hand it combines activities of commercial entities (tourist entrepreneurs) as well as non-profit ones (self-government units and tourist organizations).

The aim of the article is presentation of issues related to tourist information system management in chosen west-pomeranian municipalities considering results of primal researches of tourist information operation in those municipalities.

1. Tourist information

The concept of tourist information is defined in the literature in two ways. In a wide approach it means a system of organized data serving tourists and tourism organizers, net of tourist information centers and points and methodology of storage, process, verification and access to data related to the organization and realization of tourist excursion, most of all information on virtues and tourism infrastructure¹. In a narrow approach tourist information is transmission of message and a set of activities aiming at efficient movement of tourists in time and space, facilitating optimal utilization of tourist virtues and infrastructure available for tourists².

Tourist information can be served in the one of the following forms:

- traditional (physical) – by means of points and service system, by employees of tourist information centers and points, travel agencies, guides, residents,
- modern (electronic) – by means of electronic media, especially the Internet³ (including special internet portals, websites of territorial self-government

¹ *Turystyka*. Ed. W. Kurek. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2007, p. 181.

² *Obsługa ruchu turystycznego*. Ed. B. Meyer. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 97.

³ S. Choi, X.Y. Lehto, A.M. Morrison: *Destination Image Representative on the Web. Content Analysis of Macau Travel Related Websites*. "Tourism Management" 2007, No. 8, pp. 239-243.

units) and global distribution systems (GDS)⁴ and television, radio, mobile telephony, etc.⁵,

- supplementary – especially editorial, namely press, catalogues, guides, folders, maps, specialized literature, encyclopedias⁶.

2. Tourist information as an element of tourist potential structure

Tourism potential consists of all elements of geographical environment and human's behavior that might be used for doing tourism or dealing with tourism. According to mentioned definition, tourism potential covers all structural and functional resources determining tourism development on the particular area. Structural resources are: tourism virtues, tourism infrastructure and transport availability therefore the elements that create tourist attractiveness. Functional resources are: economic, technologic, ecologic, political, psychological, socio-demographic, cultural elements⁷. From the management point of view, tourism potential are natural, cultural, personnel, capital, localization, financial, organizational and information resources that form the possibility of creation of region's tourist offer (region's, municipality's, city's) and are directed at the size and structure of tourist movement. That way they create the incomes from the incoming tourism. So defined tourism potential possesses its internal structure which comprises the following elements:

a) basic tourism resources:

- tourism virtues (natural, cultural),
- tourism infrastructure (accommodation, gastronomy, accompanying infrastructure),
- transport accessibility,

b) supply resources:

- personnel in tourism,
- capital (including investments),

⁴ R. Ziółkowski: *Zarządzanie informacją regionie turystycznym*. Wydawnictwo Politechniki Białostockiej, Białystok 2007, pp. 41-42.

⁵ D. Buhalis: *eTourism. Information Technology for Strategic Tourism Management*. Prentice Hall, New York 2003; P. O'Connor: *Electronic Information Distribution in Tourism and Hospitality*. CABI Publishing, London 2003, pp. 3-4.

⁶ E. Cohen: *The Tourist Guide, The Origins, Structures and Dynamics of a Role*. "Annals of Tourism Research" 1985, No. 12; N. Scherle: *Touristischen Medien aus Interkultureller Perspektive*. "Tourismus Journal" 2001, No. 3/5.

⁷ J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk: *Produkt turystyczny*. PWE, Warszawa 2005, pp. 51-52.

- localization,
- finance,
- tourism organization,
- information,
- offer (provided services),
- marketing support (eg. image creation),

c) demand resources:

- size and structure of tourist movement,
- level of expenditures on tourism.

Tourist information plays a double role in the structure of tourism potential:

1. On the one hand it is an element of supply – market resource co-creating a set of supply elements.
2. On the other hand it links all elements of potential's structure; without effective tourist information (traditional and electronic) there is no possibility of tourism potential management, in basic resources (e.g. in the aspect of virtues popularizing) as well as supply elements (e.g. information for potential investors), demand elements (directed at the incoming tourist movement).

3. Tourist information system management

Efficiency of tourist information system management is determined by the co-operation between tourism economy entities: tourist companies, territorial self-government units, tourist organizations and associations, other entities (e.g. national parks, cultural, recreational, sport, entertainment, educational, academic entities).

Tourist information system in Poland is still being organized. It is assumed that the system is going to consist of four kinds of information places:

- voivodeship's tourist information centers,
- local tourist information centers,
- tourist information points (constant, seasonal, occasional) organized by territorial self-government units and information points organized and operating in the places of accommodation, travel agencies, tourist associations,
- multimedia tourist information points located at the tourist information centers and points or beyond their seats⁸.

⁸ P. Gryszel: *Propozycja systemu kategoryzacji i rekomendacji punktów informacji turystycznej*. Ekonomiczne Problemy Turystyki No. 7, Informacja turystyczna. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2006, pp. 121-129.

Polish Tourist Organization created the Internet System of Tourist Information and Poland Promotion (ISIT). The system is available in a several language versions and it operates on two grounds: presentation and information. The system is based on the Poland-wide multi-level net of administrators. The lowest level is created by the local informers, on the level of municipality, municipalities association, district and districts association. Intermediate level consists of regional administrators⁹, that unite information on their area. Polish Tourist Information System coordinates information on the domestic level¹⁰.

Basic issue in tourist information system management is a way of its financing. In practice, there are the following ways of tourist information system financing:

1. Public:
 - a) central – on the national level from the central units' funds,
 - b) regional – financed by regional self-government, from own funds or subsidy,
 - c) municipal – on the lower levels from the funds of territorial self-government units.
2. Public-private (mixed) – on the regional and local level, financed mostly from the public funds with a partial co-financing by the main entities of tourism economy.
3. Private (commercial) – alternative and independent of existing public and public-private systems, operating mainly on a local level by independent economic entity.

Minding that tourist information system cross with the utilization of instruments of area's tourism promotion, some activities in public financing could be occasionally co-financed by private entities. System of cooperation between public and private entities and the way of tourist information financing is a basic issue in creation of tourist units' tourist potential.

4. Tourist information system management in West-Pomeranian Voivodeship's municipalities

On the basis of researches led in the years 2008-2010 it is possible to indicate chosen issues related to the tourist information system management in West-Pomeranian Voivodeship's municipalities. Estimation of tourist information system management was presented on the basis of researches in all voivode-

⁹ J. Merski: *Informacja turystyczna*. Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomiczna, Warszawa 2002, pp. 86-87.

¹⁰ W.W. Gaworecki: *Turystyka*. PWE, Warszawa 2007, p. 275.

ship's municipalities. Range of cooperation between territorial self-government and entities of direct tourism economy was described on the basis of information on the municipalities' official websites. Next, on the basis of constructed synthetic indicator of tourist attractiveness level (namely basic resources of tourism potential and measure of cooperation between local self-government and tourist entrepreneurs in the field of tourist information) there were chosen municipalities for deepen researches. As it results from the conducted researches, high level of tourist attractiveness is not correlated to the activities related to the creation of tourist information system. Municipalities with lower level of tourist attractiveness often apply higher support for tourism development by means of the range of operation of tourist information. Municipalities with higher level of tourist attractiveness give lower support for tourism development, leaving part of the information activities to the commercial entities that create alternative forms of tourist information.

There should be mentioned the following issues characterizing system of tourist information management:

- a) identification of operation of tourist information points by the entities of tourism economy,
- b) generic structure of the points,
- c) applied technologies,
- d) human resources management instruments (the number and qualifications of personnel),
- e) distribution management system (localization and marking of tourist points),
- f) financing management system,
- g) communication system.

Significant element of conducted researches was an evaluation of activities in the field of tourist information taken up by the economic entities operating directly in tourist movement service. That analysis indicates identification of tourist service providers with local tourist potential. Tourist information was available in 27 of 30 researched municipalities.

The question about existence of tourist information points was asked also to the tourist entrepreneurs. In mentioned 3 municipalities that didn't have tourist information, among 12 enterprises, in 4 cases questioned people stated that there existed a tourist information in the particular municipality. In the rest of municipalities the majority of entrepreneurs knew about the existence of tourist information (98 of 107), only 6 entrepreneurs didn't know about the information point and 3 entrepreneurs stated that this kind of point definitely didn't exist in

their municipality. Information above indicates a low level of identification of local tourism economy's entities with tourist information system.

Tourist information in researched municipalities most often had a form of tourist information center (48%) or tourist information point (45%). Only 7% had a different form – it was a point that operated beside another object or point that operated commercially. In most cases, tourist information points are open through the whole year.

All tourist information points were equipped with computer and the Internet access. In 76% of places, the computer had the Internet permanent connections, in 9% computer had connection via the modem and radio connection was in 15% of places. In 89% of municipalities information points had their own e-mail box and in 52% they had their own website. Almost all of tourist information points were equipped with telephone and fax. All places had a small library available for tourists containing publications related to the region's tourist product.

An average number of employed in researched places oscillated between 1,6 offseason to 2,19 during tourist season. Figure 1 presents the number of employees in the researched information points. In all researched points there were employed 70 employees during the season and only 47 offseason.

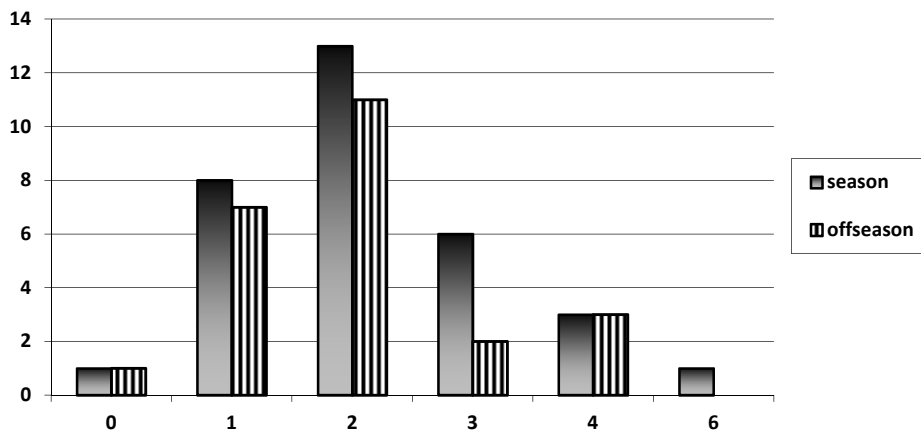


Figure 1. Number of tourist information points employing particular number of personnel in season and offseason (n = 32)

Employees of tourist information points were often educated in the field of tourism. Only in 40% of researched places, personnel's education wasn't related to the tourism (e.g. technician in the field of hospitality, technician in the field of tourist movement service, master of science in the field of tourism and recrea-

tion, etc.). In 60% of places, the number of employees educated in the field of tourism was 1 (in 9 tourist information points) or 2 (in 9 tourist information points). Only in one information point in Rewal 4 employees had specialized education.

One of the most important and the most easy to measure skills is a knowledge of foreign languages. The level of knowledge of foreign languages in the research was subjectively assessed by researched representatives of territorial self-government and tourist entrepreneurs. Representatives of territorial self-government pointed the number of employees knowing (speaking) English, German and Russian language and the number of employees knowing mentioned languages on an advanced, intermediate and basic level.

Only in 3 of 32 questioned tourist information points there was no employee with the knowledge of English. In the rest of the places the number of English speaking employees was 58, where 25% of them knew the language on an advanced level, 50% on an intermediate level and 25% on a basic level. Representatives of territorial self-government declared the knowledge of German language by 45 employees, 15 on an advanced level, 18 on an intermediate level, 12 on a basic level. Knowledge of Russian language was declared for 14 employees and other languages only for 4 employees of tourist information points.

In the field of system of information distribution management there was estimated: place's marking, localization, opening hours and a quality of information materials. In all cases, the representatives of self-government gave higher marks in every aspect of tourist information points operation (Figure 2).

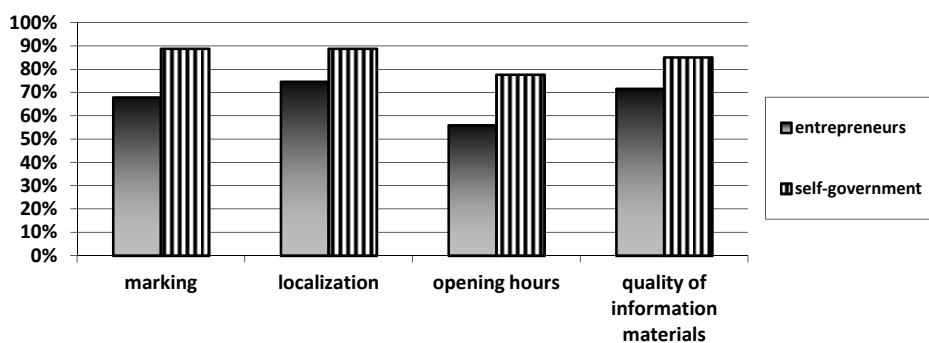


Figure 2. Percentage of researched entrepreneurs and territorial self-government representatives who positively estimated the particular elements of tourist information points operation

In the opinion of representatives of territorial self-governments almost all elements of tourist information points' operation, operates well or very well. Entrepreneurs, although generally have good opinion on the operation of the places, have some strictures about opening hours (only 56% gave a good or very good mark) and marking.

Tourist information points are mostly financed with public funds. In 70% of municipalities there was stated a full financing by public funds. In the rest of the cases (except of one place managed by non-governmental organization) participation of public funds in financing exceeded 50%.

The main mean of communication between organizations responsible for territorial marketing and potential tourists is the Internet¹¹. Conducted researches have shown that all municipalities of West-Pomeranian Voivodeship have their own websites, nevertheless only few municipalities have information useful for potential tourists (Figure 3).

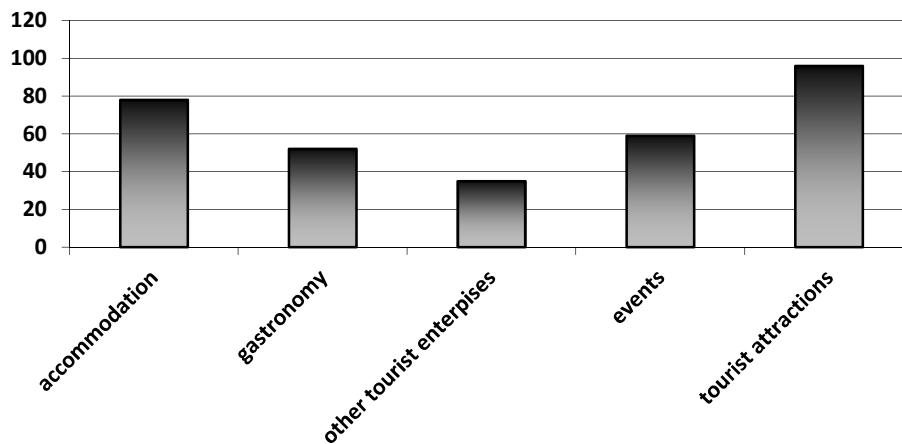


Figure 3. Availability of information on tourist services events and tourist attractions on the websites of municipalities of West-Pomeranian Voivodeship (n = 114)

Questioned representatives of territorial self-government were aware that information related to the tourism in their municipalities was available also on the other websites. Researches among tourist entrepreneurs indicated that the majority of them use the Internet in the promotion of their products. Approximately 80% entrepreneurs declared using the Internet in their economic activity.

¹¹ P. Kotler, J. Bowen, J. Makens: *Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism*. Prentice Hall, New York 2006, p. 683.

The most popular forms of using the Internet by researched entrepreneurs were: creation of their own websites, using the websites of other companies (tourism intermediaries) and e-mailing (Figure 4).

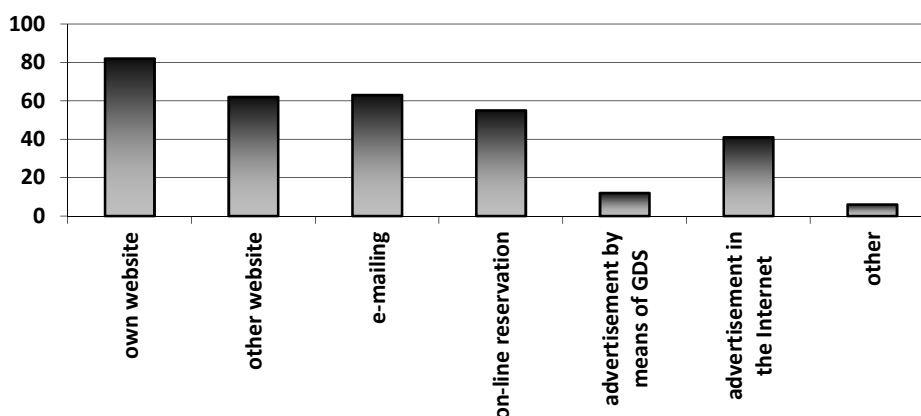


Figure 4. Using of the Internet in the operation of tourist companies (n = 95)

For most enterprises, the Internet is mostly ‘one way’ medium of communication, namely for passing message from the entrepreneur to the client. Feedback is passed only by means of e-mail. Low level of utilization of GDS (global distribution systems) and a low percentage of companies assigning funds for advertisement in the Internet should be explained by a small size of the most of researched companies belonging mainly to the micro (68%) and small enterprises (26%).

Conclusions

Issues considered above present chosen aspects of tourist information system management in municipalities and indicate the possibility of creation of tourism potential and tourist attractiveness of municipal areas. On the basis of conducted researches it can be stated that tourist information system however directly influences the creation of tourist potential of region, but this influence is not directly proportional to the level of development of municipality’s potential and thus is not significantly correlated with the level of other (especially basic ones) tourist resources.

One of the basic problems deciding on better utilization of management functions in the tourist information system is deepening a range of cooperation between interested entities (entrepreneurs and territorial self-government units).

In this place, public-private undertakings should be indicated. Also significant is creation of institutional (local tourist organizations) and not fully institutional (clusters) bases of cooperation. Important premise is also a problem of leadership which should be a domain of municipal unit or local tourist organization.

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