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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES IN THE CREATION OF TOURISM POTENTIAL OF SMALL TOWNS IN POLAND

Abstract. Historical sites may be found in nearly all small towns in Poland. Some are listed by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the role of these resources in the broader set of elements shaping the tourism potential of towns, and also to illustrate the regional differences among small towns in Poland in terms of their potential to develop a local or regional tourism sector. The study provides a typology of towns based on local natural and landscape elements, cultural heritage resources as well as hotels and other tourist accommodations. The statistical data discussed in this paper was obtained from the Local Data Bank of Statistics Poland for the period 2012–2014, while historical sites were chosen from the National Heritage Board of Poland. The study covers all small towns in Poland and has shown unequivocally that the presence of a historical site is not necessarily a factor in the overall development of a local tourism sector. The cultural resources appear to be an undervalued asset, which can be used to develop a local tourism sector, especially in towns which are searching for new development paths.

Key words: cultural heritage sites, small towns, tourism potential, site evaluation, Poland

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism potential is a broad term that covers most factors facilitating tourism across a geographic area. It includes structural elements such as potential tourist sites and related tourist infrastructure that serve as the basis for presenting a city/town or region as attractive to tourists. It also includes functional elements associated with the actions of entities directly and indirectly engaged in the tourism

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sector (Bellinger, 1994; Kaczma *et al.*, 2005; Meyer, 2010). In terms of geography, tourism potential can be associated with the attractiveness of the local tourist environment, which includes both culture and nature, enhanced with tourist infrastructure, and easy transportation accessibility (Lijewski *et al.*, 2008; Mamun and Mitra, 2012).

Environmental value serves as a key element determining the position of a city/town or a region in the tourism market, and determines the tourist flow (Knudsen *et al.*, 1995; Macagno *et al.*, 2010). The geographical location determines the availability of both natural and landscape features favouring the development of various forms of tourism and recreation (Collins, 1999; Garrod *et al.*, 2006). Apart from relevant natural features found in urban areas, architectural features and the urban fabric constitute the primary components that determine local tourism potential and tourism attractiveness of an area. A number of features are of particular importance including historical sites such as old city districts, valuable religious sites, facilities associated with the so-called high culture, shopping areas, and sports and recreational facilities (Silberberg, 1995; Bajgier-Kowalska and Rettinger, 2014; Faracik *et al.*, 2015). The material heritage of cities/towns is the most readily observable element that differentiates their main area of tourism potential in the era of global unification and 'uniform' urban structures (Mika, 2011). Cultural and natural heritage is viewed as a leading determinant of tourist choices of travel destination (Ryan, 2002; Poria *et al.*, 2003; Timothy and Boyd, 2006; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012).

The tourism attractiveness of small towns may result from their history, former function, ethnic structure, and the associated cultural heritage resources. It is these features that establish the cultural landscape of cities/towns in Poland, in most cases. This is especially true of small towns, where traditional urban formation mechanisms are weak. Many small towns in Poland are now experiencing a period of stagnation associated with poor municipal financial situation and high unemployment, which manifests itself through the neglecting of the cultural landscape and historical sites. Many of those sites are still relatively unknown to tourists (Kwiatek-Soltys, 2011; Kuśnierz and Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2015).

The role of cultural heritage is often marginalised in the research literature on small towns and their development, especially when their cultural heritage does not yield a direct financial gain (Ashworth, 2003; Hudečková and Ševčíková, 2007; Rudan, 2010). McMorran (2008) noted that heritage is employed as an element that is both profitable and desired by tourists, and not due to the fact that it is a key witness to history and should be maintained for that reason. The role of cultural heritage in local development was also discussed by Murzyn-Kupisz (2012). In addition, the issue of cultural heritage tourism, with the example of small Canadian towns, was examined in the work by Jamieson (1993). The starting point for Jamieson's analysis was the issue of economic crisis and the need to find new development pathways. Jamieson argued that cultural tourism at the local level

may be analysed in terms of heritage, environment, handmade products, local cuisine, language, art, music, technology, religion, education, and dress. However, Jamieson wrote that the analysis of cultural factors is associated with the risk of poor understanding of cultural resources as well as unrealistic expectations.

Matei and Caraba (2010) studied small towns in Romania and noted that the development of the tourism sector is often viewed as the ultimate solution to all problems which towns face. However, many towns do not meet the basic conditions for such growth, including the infrastructure, investors, qualified workers, and a robust service sector. This view was also expressed in the work by Fonseca and Ramos (2012) who studied peripheral areas in Portugal. Steele (2017) wrote that the development of tourism in small towns is currently favoured as never before due to an increasing demand for rural tourism. The demand for locally made products as well as the desire to experience small city life have led to the emergence of many new types of tourism such as slow food, cittaslow, authentic tourism, geotourism, agritourism and heritage tourism (Kwiatek-Sołtys and Mainet, 2015). Steele also noted that many small towns fear becoming 'Aspenized'. To Aspenize is to become – or cause to become – tourist-oriented, especially in such a way as to grow unaffordable or 'unlivable' conditions for workers or native residents.

Many small towns in Poland possess a large number of cultural heritage sites. Thus, the main purpose of the paper is to determine the role of such sites in the set of elements shaping the tourism potential of towns. The starting point for the analysis consisted of historical sites protected by the Polish law. The goal was to show the results of a comprehensive analysis of the tourism potential of all small towns in Poland and to show regional differences. The secondary goal of the analysis was to show the relationship between tourism potential and its actual utilisation, as measured via incoming tourist flow including tourist flow from abroad.

2. STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Small towns defined as towns of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants (Mainet, 2011; Vaishar, 2005; Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2011, 2017) constitute a very diverse set of settlements (Bartosiewicz and Marszał, 2013; Heffner and Halama, 2011). They make about 75% of all urban settlements in Poland and are home to almost 5 million people or 21.6% of the urban population in Poland.

In the era of globalisation, many small towns are searching for new ways to grow both in the social and the economic senses. Many small towns are also experiencing a deep social crisis in terms of population loss as well as a deep economic crisis in terms of the decline of some key urban functions associated with the ser-

vicinity of rural areas and the agricultural sector, and an added layer of competition from larger cities. The current situation of small towns may be described as a serious threat to their continuing development (Heffner, 2005). It is precisely those reasons that drive many small towns to seek an economic stimulus in the form of the development of a local or regional tourism sector.

Given the above issues related to the vision for small towns and tourism development, a basic question emerges: Which small towns really possess the potential for the development of tourism, and whether this potential is being used.

The paper introduces and utilizes a new research method. The authors proposed a new method that may be employed to assess the value of selected components of tourism potential in order to use the final outcome in the process of planning tourism development. The comprehensive nature of the work is rooted in a typology of all small towns in Poland. The analysis in this paper may be used as a basis for further research on the relationship between the elements of small-town tourism potential and their applicability in the tourism sector, as well as local and regional government efforts, thus yielding practical applications of the results of this study.

The paper provides a typology of small towns in Poland basing on primary factors affecting the development of the tourism sector. It uses a well-known and relatively frequently used taxonomic method, the so-called natural indicators method by Perkal (1953), which was widely used in later studies, among others Kostrubiec (1965), who transferred it to the field of geographical research. The Perkal method is often used in socio-economic and spatial research (Ilnicki, 2009; Męczyński *et al.*, 2010). In the statistical procedure, the form-based index described by Runge (2006) was used:

$$W_s = 1/p \sum y_{ij} \quad (1)$$

W_s – synthetic index,

T_{ij} – a standardised size of the j characteristic for the i object of particular measures,

p – number of features considered,

$j = 1, 2, 3, \dots, p$.

The comprehensive Index was used to find a group of towns with the highest and lowest potentials for the development of a local or regional tourism sector. This index works in the following manner: the highest value of the index describes a city with the highest potential, while the lowest value describes a city with the lowest potential.

The study covered four main elements important in terms of tourism development: (1) geographical location of each studied town, along with the resulting natural and landscape features, (2) cultural heritage resources, as measured by the number and type of historical sites that are registered with Poland's *National Heritage Institute*, (3) hotels as well as other forms of accommodation, as measured

via the number of year-round occupancy, and (4) occupancy rate for hotels, as measured by the number of hotel stays (all tourists, foreign tourists).

The “valuation method” used in this paper was a modified version of a point method and was employed in the study to determine the rank of small towns located across Poland in terms of their capability to build a tourism sector. Points were assigned per the chosen quality scale to quality features of analysed elements of tourism potential (Warszyńska, 1970). Although this was only an approximated valuation, it did have a specific purpose, in that it enabled a comparison of the tourism resources of the studied group of towns (Warszyńska, 1970; Clay and Daniel, 2000; Dramstad *et al.*, 2006; Lijewski *et al.*, 2008). Each major stage of the study was discussed in the following section. The proposed research method, if applied to another time period, would make it possible to determine changes in the rank of each small town analysed in this particular study of tourism potential.

The statistical data discussed in this paper was obtained from the Local Database for the period 2012–2014. The Local Database is operated by Statistics Poland. The mean value for each analysed index was calculated for three different years (2012, 2013, 2014) for each studied town in order to eliminate one-year shifts. All 685 small towns in Poland, as defined by the Polish law in 2012, were analysed in the study. The first studied year was 2012 and was selected based on the availability of comparative data for all 685 towns. While the number of small towns increased by five in 2014, the appropriate data for these new small towns were not available for analysis for the period during which they were still classified as rural communities.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

One of the basic factors affecting the development of the tourism sector in a city/town is its geographical location. It determines the presence of natural and landscape features along with a climate and the health benefits associated with it. All of these features may or may not foster the development of various forms of tourism and recreation. The local nature and landscape serve as the basis for the development of tourism, and remain the primary selection criteria in tourist choices of travel destination (Urry, 2002; Garrod *et al.*, 2006; Daugstad, 2008; Holden, 2008; Macagno *et al.*, 2010). The relative importance of these features is illustrated by the concentration of tourist infrastructure in areas deemed most attractive from an environmental point of view. The tourist value of a city/town also increases with a close proximity to protected natural areas that help shape the landscape, as well as climate in a geographical area.

The basic criterion used to divide Poland into tourist regions is the landscape region division of Poland. The landscape classification is used in tandem with a tourist flow distribution map and tourism infrastructure map. The most attractive regions in terms of tourist value were identified based on a review of the environmental assessment of Poland from the perspective of what is known as tourist attractiveness (Mileska, 1963; Rogalewski, 1971; Wyrzykowski, 1986; Lijewski *et al.*, 2008). Those five regions are: the Baltic Sea coast, the Carpathian Mountains as well as the Sudetes, the Mazury Lake District, and the Pomeranian Lake District.

In this paper, the environmental attractiveness of a town was assessed based on its location in one of the above tourist regions. The largest number of points (4) was assigned to towns located in the most attractive regions on the Baltic coast and in mountain regions, the Carpathians as well as the Sudetes. Towns located in the Mazury and Pomeranian Lake Districts were assigned 3 points, while towns located in upland areas and in the Wielkopolska Lake District (with a small number of lakes) were given 2 points. The smallest number of points (1) was assigned to towns spread across the Middle Polish Lowlands and found in the so-called Piedmont Basins, whose landscape value is limited. Towns officially called “spa towns” were assigned 4 points, while towns found close to national parks received 2 points. Finally, towns located on man-made lakes providing some recreational opportunities were given 1 point each. Theoretically, the highest value a given town could be assigned was 11 points.

The analysis of small towns in Poland with respect to environmental resources (Fig. 1) indicated that towns located in less attractive areas of the country also possess natural healing resources or simply put: spa features. Among others, those include the small towns of Uniejów, Ciechocinek and Busko-Zdrój. Those towns are not located on the Baltic coast, in mountain areas or in lake districts. Small towns located close to national parks such as Zwierzyniec, Kostrzyn nad Odrą, Dąbrowa Białostocka and Tykocin were also highly ranked. In addition, selected towns situated on man-made lakes such as Sulejów and Otmuchów were highly ranked as well.

The major elements that determine the potential and attractiveness of towns to tourists are the architectural value and urban areas, especially complexes of historical buildings (Ryan, 2002; Poria *et al.*, 2003; Timothy and Boyd, 2006; Mika, 2011; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012; Faracik *et al.*, 2015).

Many small towns in Poland possess a wealth of cultural heritage sites including urban areas, church complexes, monastery complexes, Orthodox churches, synagogues, outdoor stations of the cross, cemeteries, castles, palaces, former seats of Polish kings and the nobility, historical gardens, defensive structures and landmarks, as well as non-religious historical sites such as city halls, brownstones, granaries, and technological sites from days long gone. The sites listed above may exist in architectural-urban complexes or may stand on their own. Hence, their

ability to yield tourist flow varies. The most valued of those historical sites are recognized by UNESCO as part of its World Cultural Heritage List or the Nature List. Of the 15 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Poland, only 2 sites are located in small towns. These two sites are Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, with its large array of artistic, spatial, and compositional merits, and Łęknica featuring Muskauer Park, a park that spans the Polish-German border.

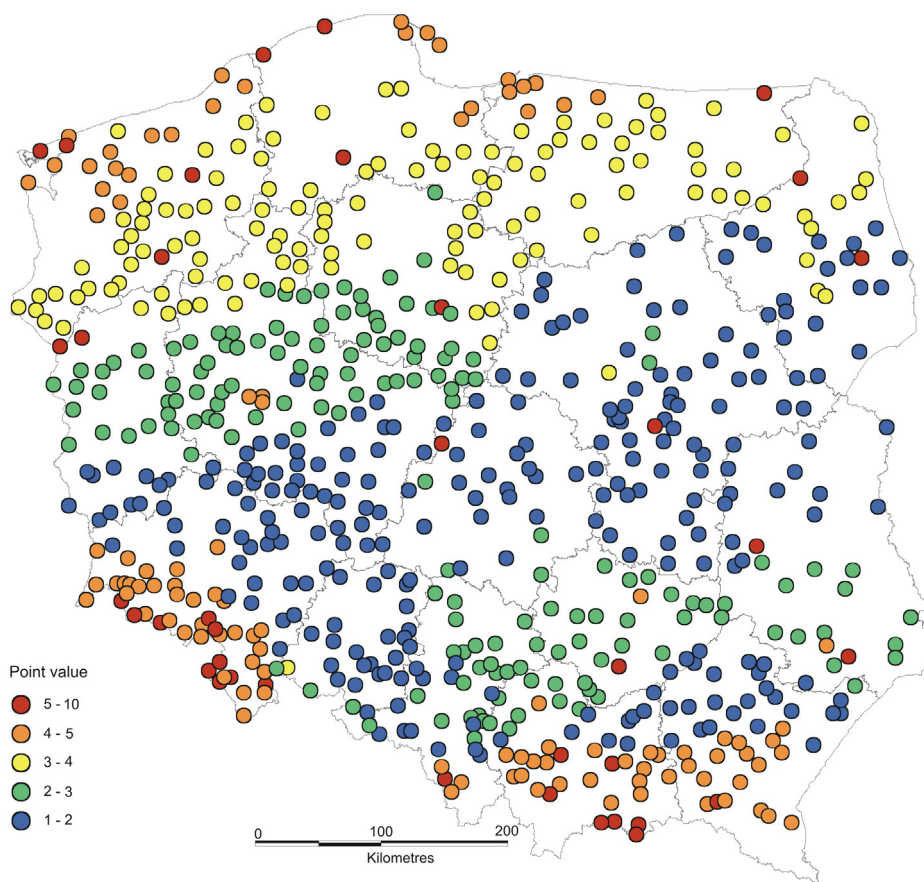


Fig. 1. Attractiveness of the geographical location of small towns in Poland.

Source: own work.

In this study, all small towns in Poland were analysed in terms of the number and type of historical sites officially registered as such with Poland's national heritage organizations (National Inventory..., 2016). Five points were assigned to small towns featuring historical urban complexes, church or monastery complexes, as well as castle or palace complexes that normally attract the largest number of tourists. A maximum of 15 points were assigned per town for architectural

complexes. One additional point was assigned for historical sites within a category of historical sites identified by the National Heritage Institute: religious sites, defensive structures, castles, public use facilities, palaces and manors, farmhouses, business facilities, homes and apartments, industrial facilities, green areas, cemeteries, and more.

The presence of historical sites in each category may produce 12 points for each studied town, which would yield a maximum of 27 points.

The research has shown that 24 small towns in Poland (3.5%) do not possess any historical sites registered in the national historical site registry. Most of these towns are young towns, whose urban statuses had been granted at some point in the 20th century. Many of those towns include mines, industrial facilities, or transportation hubs – mainly railway hubs. The origins of some of those towns reach the Middle Ages, but later history including World War II has not been kind to them. Old urban areas were often destroyed, and historical sites were turned to rubble by war. Some of those 24 towns include new towns emerging as a result of the recent process of suburbanisation occurring across Poland (e.g. Siechnice near Wrocław). The distribution of towns with the largest supply of cultural heritage resources is fairly even across Poland. Yet, the largest number of towns with a wealth of historical sites tends to concentrate in areas most affected by urbanisation. The first city type generated in this study, one where towns accumulated the largest number of points in the process of city evaluation, included 124 small towns, the history of 64% of which date back to the Middle Ages (Fig. 2).

Apart from 79 of the oldest towns, this type also includes a large number of towns that are still relatively young, whose urban history is rooted only in the 20th century, but still possess a number of different types of architecture, including palace and manor complexes, as well as churches and monasteries and spa facilities. Some of these small towns are well-known tourist hubs with a regional reach. This includes the small city of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, whose Mannerist architecture and landscape, as well as the pilgrimage park were listed as UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites in 1999.

The number of hotel beds serves as a measure of the tourist capacity of a city/town, as well as an important factor driving the development of the tourism sector. The number of beds may be analysed using three groups: (1) from 20 to 400 beds, (2) from 400 to 2,000 beds, and (3) over 2,000 beds (Wysocka, 1975). The first group covers towns with some historical sites. The second group covers towns characterised by a developed tourism sector, while the third group covers towns with a well-developed tourism sector that serves as a fundamental factor driving social and economic growth (Wysocka, 1975). The statistics of Statistics Poland for the period 2012–2014 were used to analyse the accommodations sector in the studied towns. The study covered year-round accommodations. The mean value for each index used in the study was calculated for three years and towns were classified based on the above hotel bed number categories.

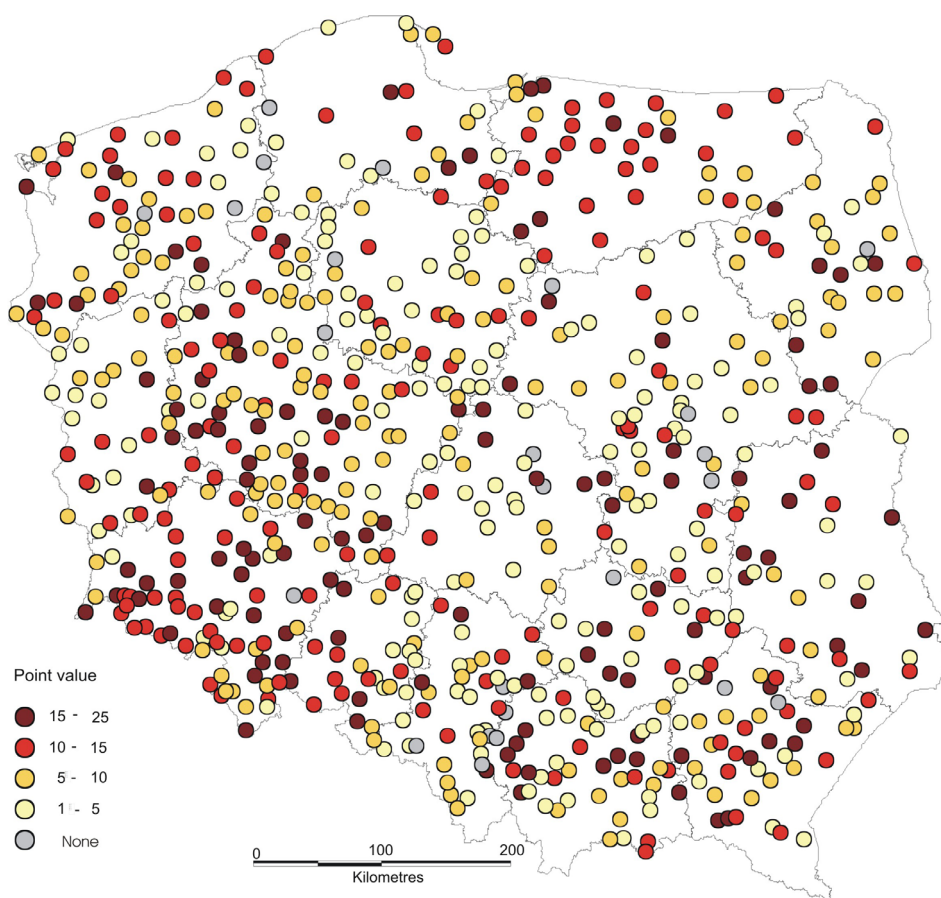


Fig. 2. Ranking of small towns by historical sites.

Source: own work.

the statistical analysis of year-round accommodations at tourist facilities indicated that small towns in Poland differ significantly in this respect. Many small towns have been tourist destinations for a long-time including spa towns such as Krynica-Zdrój, Ustroń, Ciechocinek, Kudowa-Zdrój, and Świeradów-Zdrój. Some small towns are strong tourist destinations due to their strong tourism and recreation offers. This includes Karpacz, Szklarska Poręba, Wisła, Szczyrk, Międzyzdroje, Ustka, and Władysławowo. The number of year-round hotel beds in those towns ranges from more over 2,000 to over 5,000. According to Statistics Poland, there are only 12 small towns in Poland offering over 2,000 year-round hotel beds. A total of 28 towns were identified in the group of developed tourist centres – with from 400 to 2,000 hotel beds. This group includes towns located in the most attractive regions of Poland and towns which part of large

metropolitan areas such as Warsaw, Łódź, and Krakow. Those small towns are located close to major cities but offer cheaper accommodations than their parent urban centres.

A total of 645 towns were found to possess less than 400 year-round hotel beds. Those include 257 small towns with no year-round hotel accommodation. This means that the towns are not developed tourist centres, and business activity associated with tourism does not substantially impact their overall development. Inadequate tourist infrastructure including a small number of hotel beds is a significant problem in many small towns in Poland. This problem is discussed in most documents published on development strategies for towns specifically in the area of tourism. The mean number of year-round hotel beds at tourist facilities calculated for all small towns in Poland is 175.

The next stage of the analysis consisted of the creation of a typology of small towns in Poland using a comprehensive index produced using the method proposed by Perkal (1953). The structuring of the index considers the full tourism potential of the examined small towns. Five groups of small towns were identified for Poland based on a comprehensive assessment of natural conditions, cultural heritage resources, and the number of hotel beds.

Groups I and II (Perkal index value: group I 0.01–0.99, group II 0.99 or more) consist of small towns with a large or very large potential for the growth of a tourism sector. First and foremost, those include spa towns and towns with a specialised and permanent role in the realm of tourism and recreation located along the Baltic coast, in the Carpathians and the Sudetes, and across the Mazury Lake District (Fig. 3).

Those towns are usually associated with successful local economies, where work is easily available compared with neighbouring towns, and the economic structure is also quite different (Kantor-Pietraga *et al.*, 2012).

Towns with little or very little potential for the development of the tourism sector (Groups IV and V Perkal index value: group IV -0.53 – (-0.22) and group V -0.93 or less) are located mostly in the central lowland part of Poland where agriculture still remains dominant. At the same time, those areas are still affected by the history of the region or more precisely the so-called partitions of Poland in the late 18th century. Towns with the lowest rank or comprehensive index value are located across the former Russian partition or most areas in eastern Poland.

An important research question is the following: How tourism potential is utilised by towns. The degree to which the tourism sector is developed is often measured based on the number of hotel beds (Sharpley, 2000; Szromek, 2012). This appears to be a gross simplification and may lead to erroneous conclusions in the case of small towns. It is tourist volume and its reach in terms of geography, which is beyond the scope of this paper, that serve as good measures of the rank of a small town in comparison with all towns experiencing the influx of tourists. In this context, the study focused on the number of overnight stays in general, and

with respect to foreign tourists in particular. In addition, the mean length of tourist stays in each city was also measured. The number of stays is an accurate measure of tourist flow and shows real tourist volume per city/town.

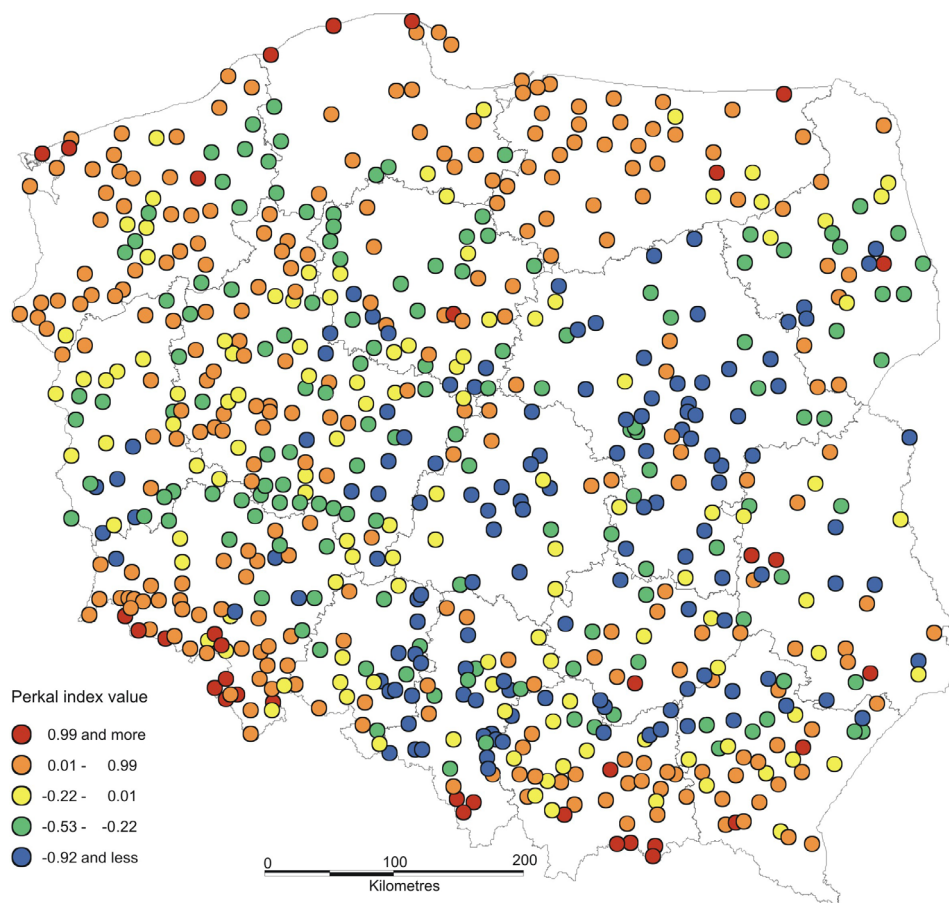


Fig. 3. Tourism development potential in small towns in Poland.

Source: own work.

209 towns recorded no tourist stays during the study period, while in 285 towns the number of foreign tourists was found to be zero. This does not mean that no tourists visited those towns. In many cases, tourists arrived on day trips to visit local cultural sites and events. The largest number of overnight stays was recorded for towns with the highest estimated potential in the area of tourism development. Those included towns situated close to major metropolitan areas and other major tourist hubs in Poland that offer cheaper accommodations (Fig. 4). Research on small towns in Poland has shown that there does not exist a relationship between

the presence of historical sites and the number of overnight stays, including foreign tourists. This pattern ought to be relevant to local governments shaping the image of their cities/towns in the sense that more decisive promotion of local cultural heritage is warranted.

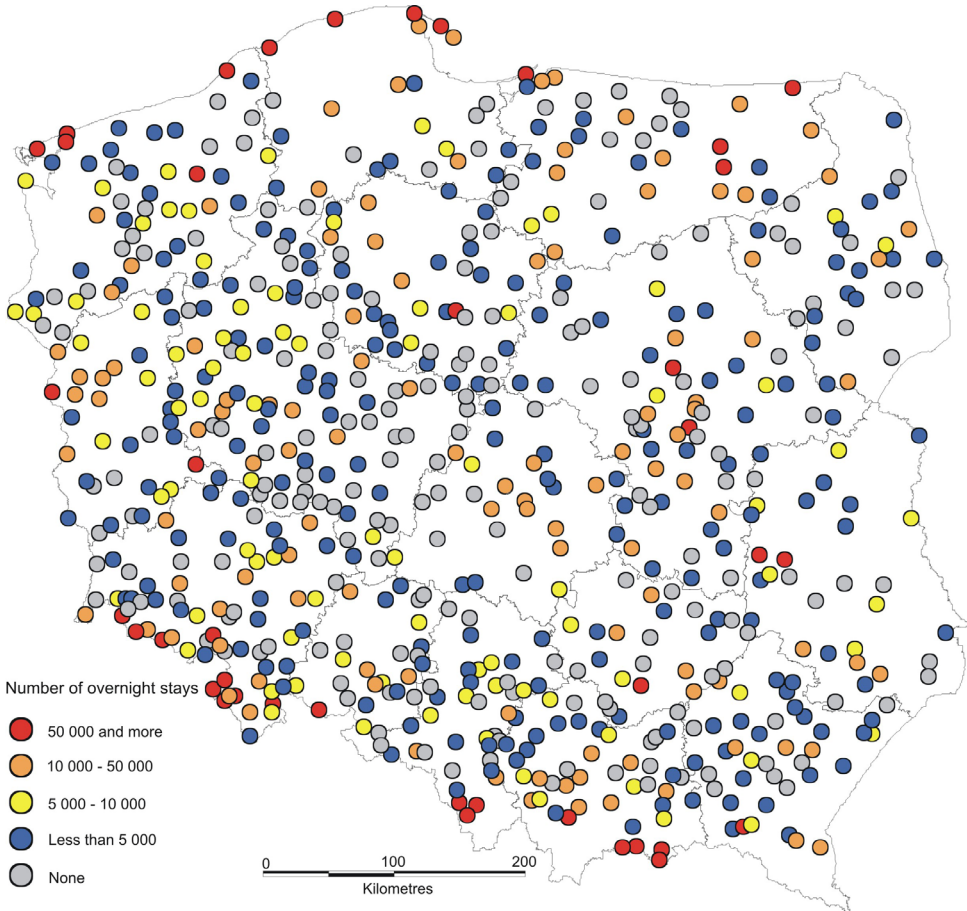


Fig. 4. Average number of all overnight tourist stays in small towns in 2012–2014

Source: own work.

The mean length of tourist stays in the examined towns in the three years of the study period was 2.8 days. This value is similar to that obtained for other cities including values for cultural heritage (Borg van der *et al.*, 1996). However, in the context of all small towns in Poland, this value is significantly increased by spa towns, where the mean tourist stay is about 10 days. The highest mean length of stay was recorded for the town of Sulejówek at 21 days, which is likely to be closely tied to its proximity to Warsaw. The town of Sulejówek is

home to a relatively large number of low-cost private accommodations such as “employee hotels” and apartments, as well as regular hotels serving the greater Warsaw area.

4. DISCUSSION

The tourist attractiveness of a small town is determined by a variety of factors that may result from its geographical location, natural environment, local history, former function, as well as cultural heritage resources associated with it. Architectural value as well as local urban spaces are also unique and may enhance the tourist attractiveness of a city/town. Yet, in the modern world, the ability to draw tourists to a city/town results from a larger array of pull factors (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Cellini, 2011; Faracik *et al.*, 2015). Currently, many small towns benefit from new tourist attractions created by local entrepreneurs, including all types of entertainment parks, theme parks, spa and wellness facilities, street festivals, music concerts, film festivals, sporting events, fairs, wholesaling centres, and business meetings and conventions. All of the above are also served by supplementary facilities and hotels, as well as restaurants that may sometimes constitute tourist attractions in themselves.

One of the basic problems with the protection of cultural heritage is the fact that not everything that is valuable can be protected (Smith, 1996). The protection of cultural heritage is delegated to local governments, which catalogue existing sites, register new sites, manage protection programs formulated at the national level, and maintain historical sites when needed. The transformation of historical sites into the so-called tourism products may help stimulate the development of tourism in a small town.

Many valuable sites do not receive government funding for maintenance. Certain sites are managed by their private owners, while many are awaiting any type of funding. In a sense, tourists can also decide what is maintained and what is not (Silvestrelli, 2012). The renovation of historical sites is often associated with a change in their original function. Some historical sites are updated to suit tourist tastes, which allows them to function in a new economic reality. This is also related to the growing demand to discover heritage as well as find authenticity in the tourist experience (Taylor, 2001; MacCannell, 2002; Purchla, 2013).

Tourism products associated with cultural heritage play an important role in urban and cultural tourism. However, such products in themselves are not sufficiently attractive to draw tourists – for whom pretty urban landscapes and the aesthetic beauty of historical sites no longer suffice. The limiting of urban tourism to cultural heritage sites is not justified given what is observed contemporarily in

terms of social processes (Richards and Wilson, 2006; Kurek, 2007). It is unclear whether cultural heritage sites can attract tourists (Cellini, 2011). This suggests that what may be needed is an integrated approach to the promotion of cultural sites that are less well-known, as opposed to the concentration of efforts of well-known towns with a strong cultural heritage brand (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2010).

The challenge for small towns that wish to become *cultural tourism destinations* is to find a balance between the identification of unique cultural assets and a refined way of selling them to the general public, as well as a means of linking them with the business strategies of major international tour operators (Russo and Van der Borg, 2002; Rizzo and Throsby, 2006; Peacock and Rizzo, 2008). A city/town is not merely a sum of its historical sites – there are other important sites such as museums, galleries, sporting arenas, shopping centres, entertainment centres, and events associated with the local culture and traditions. These additional attractions may serve as key reasons to visit a city/town.

The combination of urban tradition and contemporary use by constructing new facilities and offering new services alters the identity of a city/town and its image, while at the same time it helps create a climate that attracts tourists. Urban tourism may also be generated through tourism infrastructure oriented towards the key needs and expectations of modern tourists (Law, 2002; Kaczmarek and Kaczmarek, 2009). Yet advanced services and facilities associated with these types of needs and expectations are rarely available in small towns. The concentration of sites related to culture, sports, recreation, entertainment, lodging, and restaurant services suggests that a city is more than a regional city. In the case of small towns, the combination of the sites listed above with accommodations suggests the presence of tourists, as shown in this study. The development of the tourism sector affects the general activity level and attractiveness of towns (Kwiatek-Sołtys *et al.*, 2014). It also helps spark outside interest in the local culture and traditional arts and crafts, thus increasing the local sense of the local value and the need to preserve it (Mika, 2007).

Hence, it is necessary to properly utilise the existing resources and transform them into factors stimulating the tourism competitiveness of towns. The success of the effort lies first and foremost in the efficiency of the functioning of the social and economic systems in a city/town, as well as their ability to multiply local resources. The level of competitiveness is also determined by a city's/town's relationship with the surrounding area and a proper selection of development strategies (Wojdacki, 2004; Burnett *et al.*, 2007). The level of tourist satisfaction may also be used to indirectly measure the competitiveness of a city/town. Empirical research by Cracolici and Nijkamp (2008) in tourist regions in southern Italy showed that tourist volume is not always correlated with tourist satisfaction. Poor service quality may threaten a city's rank in the tourism sector in the long run. Hence, small towns need to be a key part of the regional policy in cases where they possess the potential to develop a tourism sector and promote local products deemed highly attractive.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Small towns possess multiple resources associated with what is often known as tourism potential. The study has shown that environmental resources are the most valued of resources in the case of small towns. These are due to the geographical location of a city/town in a region rich in natural value and this includes things such as spa waters. Tourist infrastructure including hotels and other accommodations are driven by attractive geographical location. Research has shown that many small towns do possess a wealth of cultural heritage resources, which could be used to support the growth of their local tourism sectors. However, other elements such as infrastructure, potential investors, local entrepreneurship, and properly trained workers are often not readily available in small towns. In this study, the given typology of small towns in Poland based on their potential to develop a local tourism sector suggested that cultural heritage sites in themselves are not sufficient drivers of development pathways for tourism in small towns. This fact is further confirmed by the lack of a correlation between the presence of historical sites and the number of tourist overnight stays. Hence, historical sites appear to be an undervalued asset, which may be due to inadequate marketing or poor physical condition due to the lack of site maintenance. Many sites in Poland's national historical site registry require immediate renovation. Only then can they start to attract tourists in larger numbers.

The research indicated that most small towns do not experience a permanent tourist boom simply due to the arrival of 'new' attractions unless there is at least one of three other factors in play: an attractive natural environment, good tourist infrastructure, or key historical sites.

The study has showed that small towns in Poland vary substantially in terms of each aspect of tourism examined herein. The study confirmed that spa towns rank high in the area of tourism potential. The same was confirmed for physically attractive areas such as the seacoast as well as mountain areas and lake districts. The point assignment method used in the study appeared to be a good method for research on the distribution and rank of small towns in the sense of small towns serving the role of tourist hubs.

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