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**TOURISTIC FUNCTION AN IMPORTANT SPHERE
OF DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIUM SIZE TOWNS LOCATED
IN THE BALTIC REGION
(ILLUSTRATED BY AN EXAMPLE OF LĘBORK)**

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Abstract

Tourism in the Baltic regions is considered an important factor of social and economic development of regions of touristic reception. Undisputable influence of tourism is observed in Baltic locations, especially those connected with providing backpack holiday offers and facilities. However, is it possible that tourism might generate development of local communities located some distance from the sea? This kind of assumption was included in the long-term plans of development of the city of Lębork. The present paper is an attempt to find an answer to the question if there are conditions to make tourism as important as other spheres determining social and economic growth of the city. In order to answer the question the author of the present paper carried out an empiric research into the issue of tourist traffic in Lębork, analyzing perception of the city by the tourists visiting the city. A detailed analysis showed specific concurrence of ideas concerning investment and touristic management plans prepared by the authorities with expectations of tourists. Therefore, one can expect that Lębork will become an important touristic center in the following years.

Key words: tourism, Baltic coastal regions, city management

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is generally considered an important factor of social and economic development of regions of touristic reception (Rydz, Jażewicz 2001). Proper policy of local authorities aimed at developing paratouristic infrastructure (mainly technical, transport, environment protection), directing financial means of private investors to touristic infrastructure connected with touristic qualities of a particular region creates favorable grounds to derive profit of tourism and develop the local markets (Rapacz 2001).

Local development in the process of social and economic transformations of a particular area involves local authorities, institutions, organizations and private inves-

tors and their local capacity and resources to develop activities in various spheres targetted at improving conditions for people who constitute the local community (Gołembski 2002). Local authorities, by proper strategic activities and using available techniques and tools define, launch and create visions of development of their own community. Those visions are reflected in strategies of local development that are the documents determining social and economic activities and initiatives of a particular administrative unit in future.

If tourism is supposed to become a leading sphere of economy, there must exist specified and favorable circumstances and conditions. They should include natural environment qualities and a selection of cultural values of supraregional and even international importance, surplus of labor force, sparse density of population and a specific kind of location near transit routes (Gołembski 2002). If the propitious factors occur, it is reasonable to regard a specific area as a proper location to develop touristic facilities that might attract visitors. On the other hand, in order to initiate any development processes it is crucial to attract the target recipients, the tourists themselves. The present paper is an attempt to define the way the tourists perceive the city of Lębork and to confirm if a concept to make tourism an important factor of social and economic development of the city is the right one.

METHODS

In the course of the research the author used methods of economic sciences, especially those concerning city management, and social sciences – questionnaires that have been used by social and economic geography with great success for many years. The author used an analysis of a basic tool in city management that is a strategy of city development and accepted by the strategy streams of city development. The analysis was used to confront the empiric research results, conducted on the grounds of the described city, within a range of quality of touristic traffic. As a result of the confrontation the author made an attempt to validate if initiatives of the authorities are based only on pure speculation that tourism might become an important factor of local development or if they are confirmed by expectations of tourists visiting the city.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Importance of tourism in the development process of the city of Lębork

Communities of specific natural environment qualities, attractive location and cultural values place tourism on a top position in the hierarchy of important initiatives and activities connected with social and economic development. Tourism is placed on a top in the strategy of development of the city of Lębork. Its unquestionable importance is proved by a vision of the city declared by the city authorities: “The city of a balanced development, favorable conditions for small and medium business in

mutual influence with the Tri-City agglomeration and touristic areas connected with the Baltic Sea” (*Strategia...* 2004).

The vision subordinates the main issues of social and economic life (ecology, economy, infrastructure, space, population) with defined necessary, priority and secondary goals. In spite of the fact that tourism exists in almost all spheres of the accepted vision of development, it is a domain of economy that concentrates on tourism comprehensively. One of the primary goals is a necessity to create conditions for holistic promotion of the city in order to make the city become more attractive both for the investors and tourists. Next, consecutive primary goal is generating initiatives to develop tourism in the city. It is expected that it might happen by creating and developing a touristic base, improving tourism related services (entertainment and mass culture of the youngsters) and creating a system of bike paths. Secondary goals include revitalization of Plac Pokoju (Peace Square) in the Old Town, improving local and regional road systems connecting Lębork and the Tri-City and shipyards of Lębork and Łeba. The authorities prepared projects of development of tourism connected with other domains of social and economic life. One of those projects is an initiative to create the grounds to implement ecological education and develop recreation area for Lębork’s inhabitants located around the Lubowidz Lake, develop and modernize the recreation area located by the Łeba River and in the Chrobry Park, renovate, expose and promote the most important city monuments, use a favorable geographic location and clean environment in the city development process, create conditions for better integration of the city with the Tri-City agglomeration (such as promoting weekend tourism), creating conditions to develop recreation areas, hotel and lodgings infrastructure and many others.

In reference to the mentioned above goals and directions of development to create the grounds for development of the city of Lębork, tourism seems to be one of the most important developing factors.

Touristic qualities of the city of Lębork

The city of Lębork with a population of about 36 000 people is located in a prevalley of the Łeba and Reda Rivers, adjoins the hills of the Kaszuby Lake District (that belongs to the East Pomeranian Lake District) in the south and the Żarnowiec Upland (that belongs to the Koszalin Sea-shore District) in the north (Kondracki 1988). Geographic location is one of the numerous qualities of the described city. Thanks to its location the city owns satisfactory transport solutions and road system. Lębork is located by an international route E28 Gdańsk–Szczecin (domestic route No. 6). Moreover, it is situated only 30 km from one of the sea resorts of the Łeba town and its shipyard and yacht marina and in the neighborhood of the Słowiński National Park and its unique wandering dunes.

The city boasts an interesting landscape and natural qualities. Lębork is surrounded by partly forested slopes of moraine hills with strongly undulating sculpture of the earth’s surface from the north and south. The forested Czartoryja Hill (50 m above the sea level) adjoining the river’s bed with its characteristic, resembling a castle,

water tower placed on the top of the hill is one of the most picturesque landmarks of the area. Due to its versatile configuration the neighborhood of Lębork provides very attractive conditions for cyclists. Another touristic attraction is the Lubowidzkie Lake surrounded by forests and located about 4 km from the city and the Łeba River flowing through the city with its tributary, the Okalica River. All those fond of water sports will find here very favorable conditions to indulge themselves. A hydrographic network includes a mill channel and few ponds which are remnants of loam excavations – the main mineral resource of Lębork, which were used for producing the ceramic construction materials.

The visitors fond of architecture and the historical culture connoisseurs will find in Lębork numerous, valuable monuments such as:

- St. Jacob's Church from the turn of the 14th century,
- St. Mary's Church from the latter part of the 19th century,
- The remnants of the city defense wall system from the 14th century,
- The Ivy Tower from the 14th century,
- The Teutonic Knights' Castle from the latter part of the 14th century,
- A mill and a so called Miller's House from the turn of the 14th century,
- The Town Hall from 1900,
- A post office building from 1905,
- A group of townspeople's houses from the turn of the 19th century
- The water tower from 1912.

To supplement a description of important touristic qualities of Lębork one cannot possibly take any account of cultural, recreation and sport offer of the city. There are numerous cultural institutions and sport centers, which are appreciated not only by the Lębork's inhabitants but also by the tourists. The Lębork Association Historical Brotherhood and Museum of Lębork popularize local history and culture. They organize annual cultural events within Jacob's Fair Festival and the Feast of Lębork's Patron (such as knights fairs, exhibitions in the St. Jacob's Church, lectures and scientific sessions concerning the nobility that used to live in the land of Lębork etc.). Recreation and sport centers include, popular among Lębork's citizens and tourists: a swimming pool "Rafa", tennis courts and recreation complex with a skate park, a camping site, a canoe-house and a playground. Each year various institutions organize numerous local and regional sport events.

A touristic base includes hotels of various standard. The most popular hotels are: "Tina" and "Vega" hotels, the rooms at the Knights' Inn and a School Youth Hostel. There is also a great number of restaurants and bars located mainly in the center of the city and at important cultural, recreation and sport centers.

Evaluation by tourists of the Lębork's touristic function

The fact that tourism is considered to be an important developing factor of social and economic spheres by the gmina authorities resulted in creating a specific social and economic policy, emphasizing a particular image of the city and connecting various elements of global activities in order to achieve a holistic development of the

city and local community. This kind of attitude proves that the authorities feel strongly about tourism being an economic generator on a local scale. In this kind of situation one can doubt if a concept of regarding tourism as an important factor of a social and economic development of the city of Lębork is the right one and if the perception of the city by tourists is concurrent with the lines of development policy of the local authorities.

An attempt to answer the above questions made the author of the present paper to carry out an empiric research of touristic traffic in the city of Lębork in July 2003. The research group included 196 people who were not citizens of Lębork. 97.5% of the respondents were Polish citizens. The tourists coming from Pomeranian, Mazowieckie, Dolnośląskie and Śląskie voievodships constituted over 50% of respondents (Fig. 1). Foreign tourists came from Germany and Belgium and made up only 2,5% of the total number of tourists visiting Lębork.

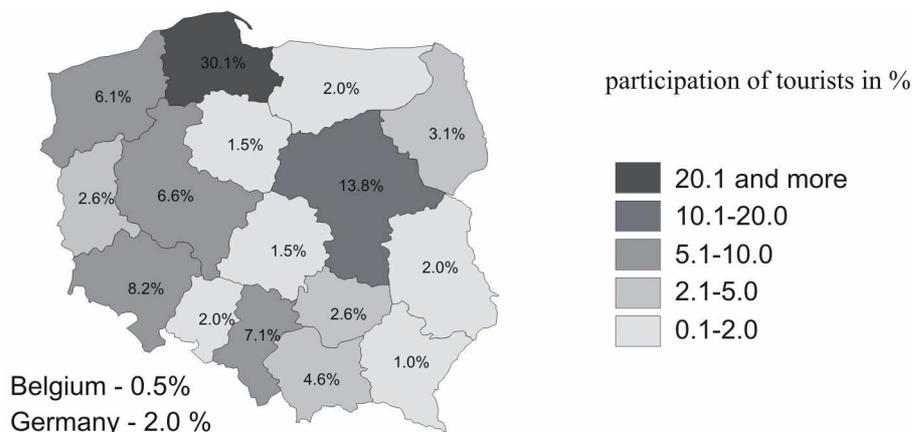


Fig. 1. Origins of tourist visiting Lębork in July 2003

Source: Own research based on questionnaire research done in July 2003

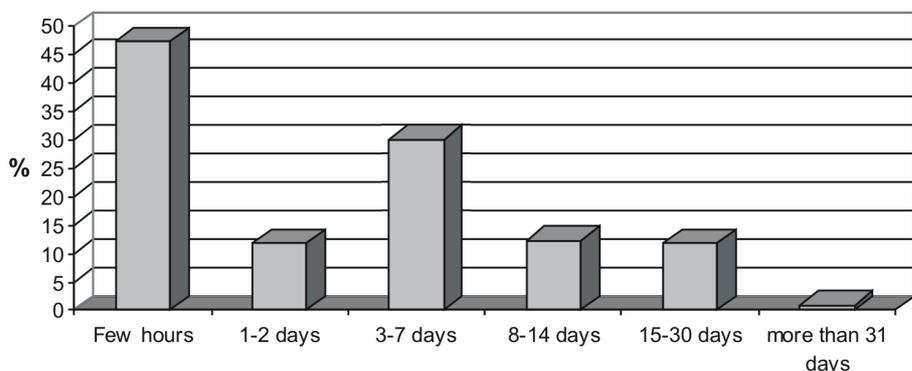


Fig. 2. Length of visit of the respondents visiting Lębork in July 2003

Source: Own research based on questionnaire research done in July 2003

Results of the research showed that tourists visiting Lębork tend to choose a short-term visit. Almost 50% of the respondents declared they spent just few hours in Lębork. This situation is a result of a transit location of the city, which is a stopping place for people who travel from Gdańsk to Szczecin and tourists who go to the sea resort Łeba to spend their vacation there. 27% of the respondents indicated this kind of contact with the city. Over 30% of tourists spend up to one week in Lębork and slightly over 10% of the respondents spend two up to three weeks in the city (Fig. 2).

Development of lodging and hotel base and their adjustment to expectations of tourists is strongly connected with the character and length of the visit. Extremely scant lodging and hotel base causes that over 56% of tourists do not stay in Lębork for the night. Among people who stay for a night in Lębork 25.2% stay at their relatives' and 16.2% live in lodgings that should be identified with living at friends' or distant relatives'. Considerably popular solution was renting hotel rooms (9.9%) and looking for cheaper options such as school hostels (9.9%). Students who spend their packed holiday in Lębork tend to choose school hostels while the adults over 30 years of age who come down to Lębork on business prefer staying in a hotel.

An important element of planning development of touristic and paratouristic base is defining purposes of tourists' visits. The results of the research showed the main purposes of visiting Lębork (Tab. 1). There are two kinds of purposes for visiting Lębork. Over 30% of the respondents confirmed the purpose of their visit was to spend their holidays here, to get to know the city and its neighborhood. 27% of the respondents said they were just passing through Lębork on their way to the sea re-

Table 1

Purpose of visiting Lębork in July 2003

Purpose of visit	Number of people	Participation %*
Touristic (visiting the city and its neighborhood)	59	30.1
Recreation and holidays (using recreation base, restaurants, bars)	19	9.7
Sentimental	21	10.7
Passing through	53	27.0
Other	48	24.5
Including:	including:	including:
– visiting relatives and friends	13	6.6
– work, business	8	4.1
– shopping, trade	14	7.1
– summer language camp	11	5.6

* Sum of percentage share does not indicate 100, because the respondents more than once declared more than one purpose of their visit

Source: Own research based on questionnaire research done in July 2003

sorts of Łeba and Ustka (60%). Considerably high percent of respondents (7.1%) came down to do their shopping or some kind of business and 6.6% of respondents came to meet their relatives and friends. A group of people came to Lębork on business or to work.

In the opinion of the author of the present paper it was a good idea to ask tourists to analyze hotels and lodgings, restaurants and bars, culture and entertainment base available in Lębork, indicate shortcomings and bad sides of touristic base in general and its advantages and qualities that should be launched in order to achieve expected economic and social results generated by development of tourism.

Conditions offered by hotels and lodgings in evaluation of tourists were very satisfactory. Over 80% of respondents considered the conditions very good and good with domination of very good opinions (Tab. 2). It is important to mention that

Table 2
Evaluation of touristic base standard by tourists in Lębork in July 2003 (in %)

Categories	Very good	Good	Average	Bad	Very bad
Hotels/lodgings	44.4	37.0	13.6	2.5	2.5
Restaurants/bars	25.5	53.1	10.2	3.6	1.0
Shops	34.7	40.8	15.3	3.6	0.5
Culture and entertainment	6.6	26.5	39.8	11.2	2.0

Source: see Table 1

100% of the respondents who spent a night in a hotel and the majority of the respondents who stayed at their relatives' or lodgings indicated and confirmed that conditions were very good. The lowest marks got school hostels with general opinion of providing average, bad or very bad conditions. The presented opinion seems to be obvious since the school hostels offer very fair and reasonably cheap prices, therefore the standard must be proportional to economic calculations.

Restaurants, bars and shops, in evaluation by tourists, provide satisfactory offer (correspondingly 53.1% and 40.8% indications), however, reasonably big groups of respondents consider them very good. Culture and entertaining in evaluation of tourists provide an average (almost 40% of respondents) and unsatisfactory (11% of respondents) offer.

In the opinion of about 50% of tourists there is a strong need to invest the means into various enterprises in order to improve the image and attractiveness of Lębork. The respondents mentioned their suggestions such as making cultural life of the city more interesting, opening new cafes, discos and places of entertainment. They also suggest to organize and promote more regional-scale events meant for the general public. They also think that the city needs new hotels, motels and boarding houses. Another problem that must be solved is providing a decent information for tourists who visit the city since there are too few tourist information centers and they do not provide information about the qualities of the city and region with full particulars.

However, the described city can boast numerous touristic qualities, which thanks to their attractiveness might become a valuable element of tourism development. 45% of the respondents appreciate the cleanness of the city that makes it more attractive for tourists. Over 30% of the respondents think that friendly Lębork's inhabitants make the city special and worth visiting, and about 20% of the respondents think that historical, natural and microclimatic qualities are the most important features of the city. However, on the other hand there are some disadvantages limiting the city's attractiveness, such as shortcomings of cultural offer and unsatisfactory offer provided by fitness and recreation centers. Almost 15% of the respondents think that noise and traffic are very unfavorable to the development of tourism in Lębork.

The respondents were asked if they were going to visit the city again. 56% of the respondents firmly declared they would visit the city again, 36% of the respondents could not decide if they were interested in visiting the city and only 7% of the respondents had no intention to visit Lębork in future.

RECAPITULATION

In the Poznań Academy of Economics, studies concerning touristic and investment attractiveness of gminas located in the region of the Baltic Sea, the city of Lębork was placed 11th as regards its investment attractiveness, and only 76th considering its touristic attractiveness (Gołębski 2002). Therefore, it seems that the development of tourism in Lębork expected by the authorities is not possible. However, according to analysis of social and economic development strategies of Lębork it is tourism that should stimulate and activate the city. Those assumptions were based on touristic potential that includes various touristic qualities and advantages concerning both the natural environment and culture values.

The empiric research conducted in Lębork confirmed an assumption towards considering tourism a factor generating local development. The city is visited by a great number of tourists who are fond of the city's historical monuments, and visit its restaurants, bars, entertainment, health and fitness centers. As a transit city, Lębork is visited by tourists for a short time. However, improving the city's cultural, entertainment and sport offers is considered that a great number of tourist would be tempted to check the offer, contributing to development of local community and economy. The image of the city has been improved by some architectural modernizations such as its new promenade or restaurants skillfully introduced into architectural style of the old town. The authorities are also praised for keeping the city clean and taken care about. The authorities plan to modernize and renovate other buildings and parts of the city especially the old town. The effort of the local authorities tends towards attracting tourists and improving the image of the city.

In the opinion of the author of the present paper, the strategy of the city development and the accepted goals and long-term projects meet expectations of tourists visiting the city.

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FUNKCJA TURYSTYCZNA JEDNĄ Z WAŻNIEJSZYCH DZIEDZIN
ROZWOJU MIAST ŚREDNIEJ WIELKOŚCI W STREFIE NADBAŁTYCKIEJ
(NA PRZYKŁADZIE LĘBORKA)

Streszczenie

Powszechnie uznaje się, że turystyka stanowi ważny czynnik rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego obszarów recepcji turystycznej. Władze samorządowe poprzez podejmowanie działań strategicznych przy wykorzystaniu dostępnych technik i narzędzi nakreślają, promują i kreują wizję rozwoju własnej społeczności, umiejscawiając często turystykę na priorytetowym miejscu planu strategicznego. W prezentowanym opracowaniu podjęto próbę określenia, czy słuszna jest koncepcja przypisywania ogromnej roli turystyki w rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczym Lęborka, poprzez zweryfikowanie jej z opinią prezentowaną przez samych uczestników ruchu turystycznego – przybywających do miasta turystów. Empiryczne badania jakości ruchu turystycznego w Lęborku oraz ukazanie postrzegania miasta przez badanych turystów skonfrontowano z celami przyjętymi w *Strategii rozwoju miasta Lęborka na lata 2004-2012*. Szczegółowa analiza ukazała ogromną zbieżność proponowanych przez władze planów inwestycyjnych i zagospodarowania turystycznego z oczekiwaniami turystów. Należy zatem spodziewać się w najbliższych latach wzrostu znaczenia turystycznego Lęborka.