

EVALUATION OF TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY OF A TOURIST REGION. EXAMPLE OF THE WESTPOMERANIAN PROVINCE IN POLAND.

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ABSTRACT

Development of tourism in the region (in the aspect of satisfaction of tourists' transport needs) depends on the development of a transport system, first of all with regard to transport accessibility as well as inter-regional transport. The main objective of this study is to assess the availability of transport of a tourist region on the example of the Westpomeranian province in Poland as a significant element affecting the development of tourism in this region. The additional objective is to assess the importance of factors affecting the tourists' choice of a given means of transport as well as to evaluate the travel conditions in the case of people travelling by their own car. The abovementioned research objectives has been accomplished on the basis of the results of conducted surveys.

Key Words: transport accessibility, interregional transport, tourist region, tourist movement.

INTRODUCTION

Transport accessibility of regions is an important factor in development of tourist traffic. The basic functions of transport in tourism include provision of access to tourist destinations and travelling within them (Duval, 2007; Hall (ed.), 1993; Komornicki et al. 2010; Lumdson and Page (Eds.), 2004; Page, 2009; Prideaux, 2000). At present, transport may also constitute the main element of a tourist travel, in the event when it becomes an independent tourist attraction.

The main objective of this study is to assess the availability of transport of a tourist region on the example of the Westpomeranian province in Poland as a significant element affecting the development of tourism in this region. The additional objective is to assess the importance of factors affecting the tourists' choice of a given means of transport (e.g.. cost of travel, duration of travel, travel safety, comfort of travel, timeliness, being able to take more luggage) as well as to evaluate the travel conditions in the case of people travelling by their own car (e.g.. road signage, availability of fuel stations, parking places, roadside restaurants, presence of traffic jams, poor weather conditions).

The following hypothesis research has been assumed in the study: Development of tourism in the region (in the aspect of satisfaction tourists' transport needs) depends on the development of a transport system, first of all with regard to transport accessibility as well as inter-regional transport. The research area is the Westpomeranian province, a region with the largest hotel base in Poland and one of the main tourist destinations in Poland.

The abovementioned research objectives has been accomplished on the basis of the results of conducted surveys. These results can be an important element, which will be able to be used by the regional authorities with regard to development plans and current decisions associated with tourist carriages and functioning of the whole regional transport system. This is insofar important as, in accordance with the development strategy the Westpomeranian province, tourism development is one of the main objectives aimed at improvement in competitiveness of the region.

ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY OF THE WESTPOMERANIAN PROVINCE WITH REGARD TO TOURIST TRAFFIC – RESEARCH RESULTS

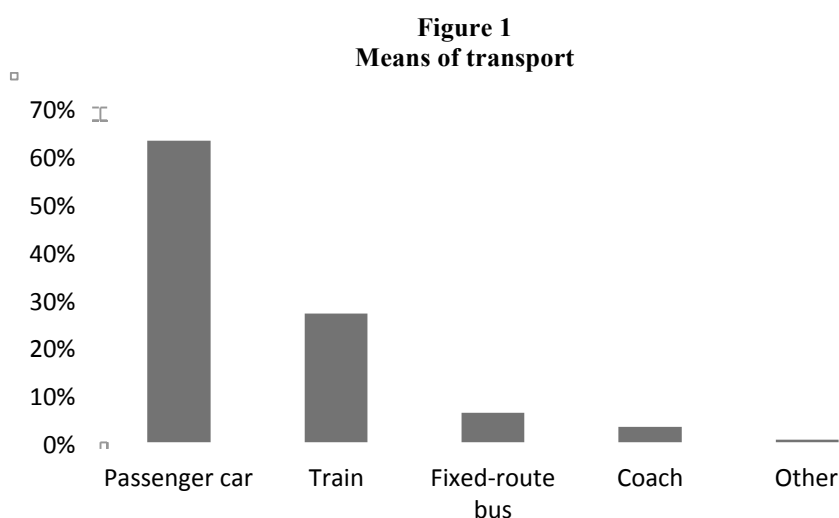
Surveys were carried out in the Westpomeranian province on the basis of a standardised questionnaire on a representative sample of 500 tourists, in August 2011. The survey was implemented as part of a research project entitled: *The concept functioning of the transport system in a tourist region*, funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The group of examined tourists was dominated by women (52%), as well as people aged 26–40 (39%) and 41–60 (29%). Most respondents came from the Greater Poland province (20%), the Lower Silesian province

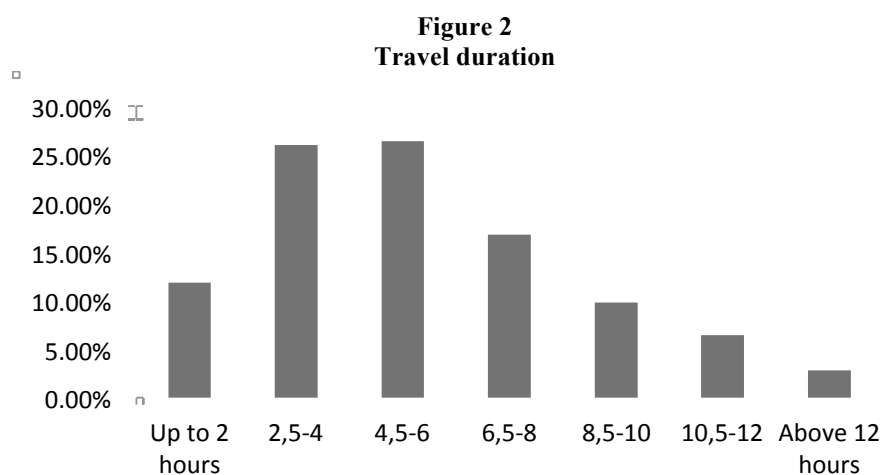
(14%) as well as the remaining regions of the Westpomeranian province (13%). 27% of tourists lived in cities populated by 101–500 000 inhabitants, while people living in towns populated by fewer than 20 000 inhabitants and cities populated by more than 500 000 inhabitants constituted 18% each. The predominant professional groups among the surveyed included white-collar employees (32%), and then students (17%), blue-collar employees (15%) entrepreneurs and retired persons/pensioners (12% each). 45% were people with secondary education and 43% with higher education. Most respondents represented 3-and 4-person (29% each), as well as 2-person (24%) households. 28 of the surveyed people declared the total net income of their household in the range of 3001–5000 PLN, 21% - above 5000 PLN, 19% - 2501–3000 PLN and 15% - 2001–2500 PLN.

The predominant reason for arrival was recreation (53%), then sightseeing and visiting relatives or friends (12% each), active tourism (7%) as well as health-resort tourism (6%). Most often, the respondents were coming to the region for 4-7 days (40%), for 8-14 days (24%) as well as 1-3 days (19%).

The vast majority of the respondents arrived by passenger car (63%), while 27% used a train, while more than 9% used a fixed-route bus or a tourist coach. The results of the research associated with the used means of transport have been presented in Fig. 1.

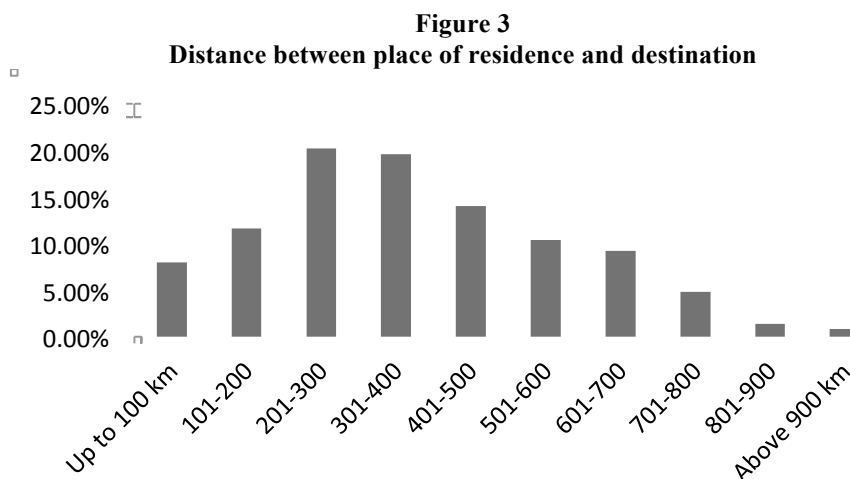


Another question in the conducted study applied to the duration of the travel (Fig. 2).



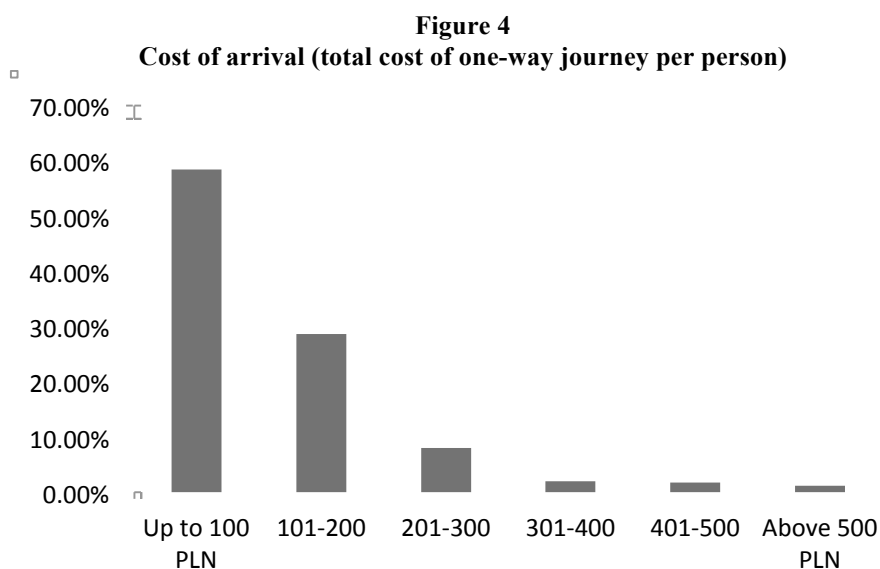
More than 52% tourists indicated that the duration of the travel from the place of their residence to the destination in the Westpomeranian province ranged between 2–6 hours. In the case of 17% of the surveyed, this duration amounted to 6.5–8 hours and for 12% - it was less than 2 hours.

An important element associated with studies on transport accessibility of a tourist region is also the distance between tourists' place of residence and the destination (Fig. 3).



The conducted research implies that in the case of 40% of the respondents this distance was 201–400 km, while 24% of the surveyed had to cover the distance of 401–600 km, 20% - up to 200 and 16% - above 600 km.

The surveyed tourists also specified the estimated cost of travel (total cost of one-way journey per person). These results have been presented in Fig. 4.

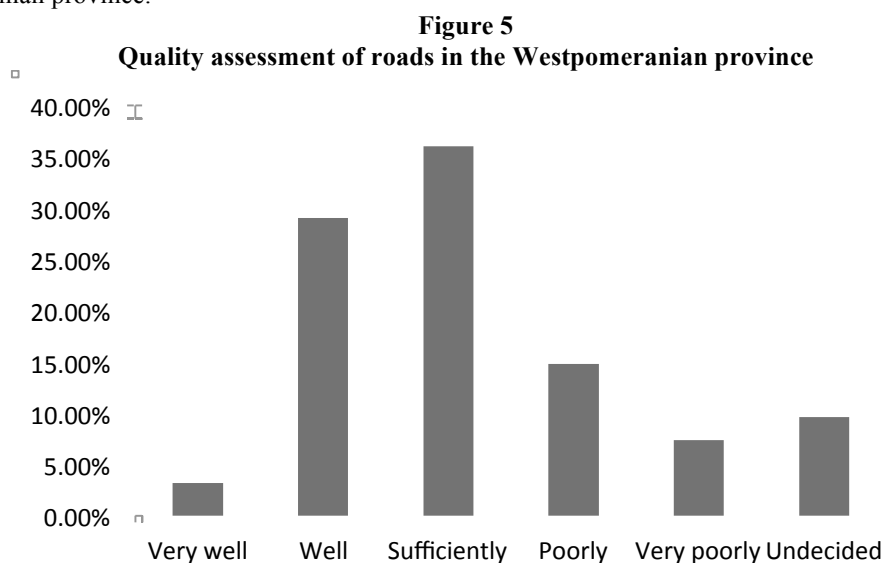


The vast majority of the respondents estimated that the cost of arrival from the place of residence to the destination was less or equal to 100 PLN per person. In the case of 29% of the surveyed this cost amounted to 101–200 PLN and for 13% - more than 200 PLN.

Another issue concerned the evaluation of the importance of particular transport postulates. Travel safety was important or very important for 95% of the respondents, availability of means of transport – for 90%, directness of connection – for 85%, comfort of travel – for 84%, duration of travel – for 69%, being able to take more luggage – for 63%, cost of travel – for 62%, and timeliness of means of transport – for 52%.

The respondents also specified types of means of transport they had been using which travelling within the Westpomeranian province. The conducted research implies that 58% used their own passenger car, 9% - fixed-route buses, 19% - municipal transport, 6% - minibuses, 8% - trains, 13% - bikes, while 5% of tourists was not travelling within the area of the province using of any means of transport at all.

On the other hand, Fig. 5 presents the results of assessment of the quality of roads in the Westpomeranian province.

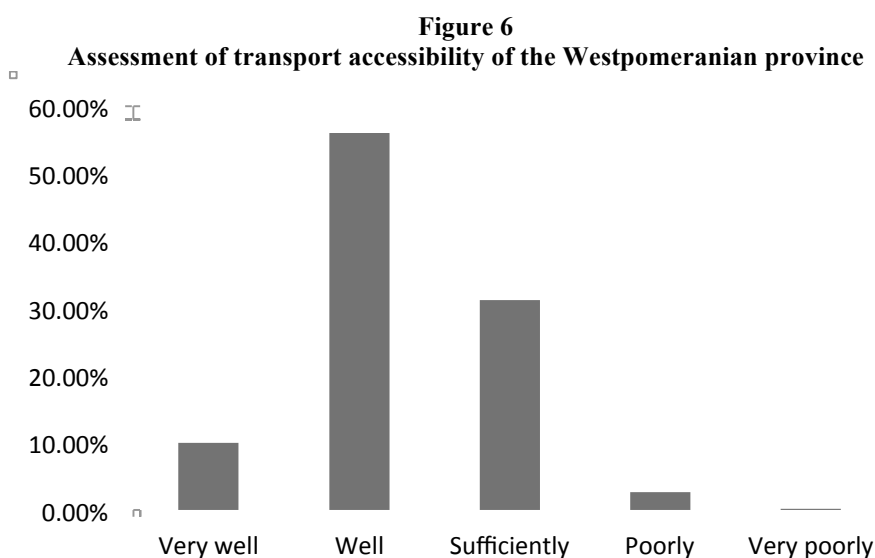


Most often, the surveyed tourists assessed the quality of roads in the Westpomeranian province at a sufficient or a good level – 36% and 29% respectively. On the other hand, 22% of the respondents indicated that the quality of roads was poor or very poor.

The surveyed tourists also assessed functioning of public transport in the Westpomeranian province. In the opinion of 24% of the respondents public transport operated well or extremely well, according to 16% - sufficiently and in the opinion of only 4% - poorly or very poorly.

Some means of transport in a tourist region may also constitute an independent tourist attraction. In the Westpomeranian province tourists can also use this kind of offer. Among the surveyed people, 39% used such services, 23% used services provided by tourist ships and about 10% - various kinds of floating equipment.

The general assessment of transport accessibility of the Westpomeranian province has been presented in Fig. 6.



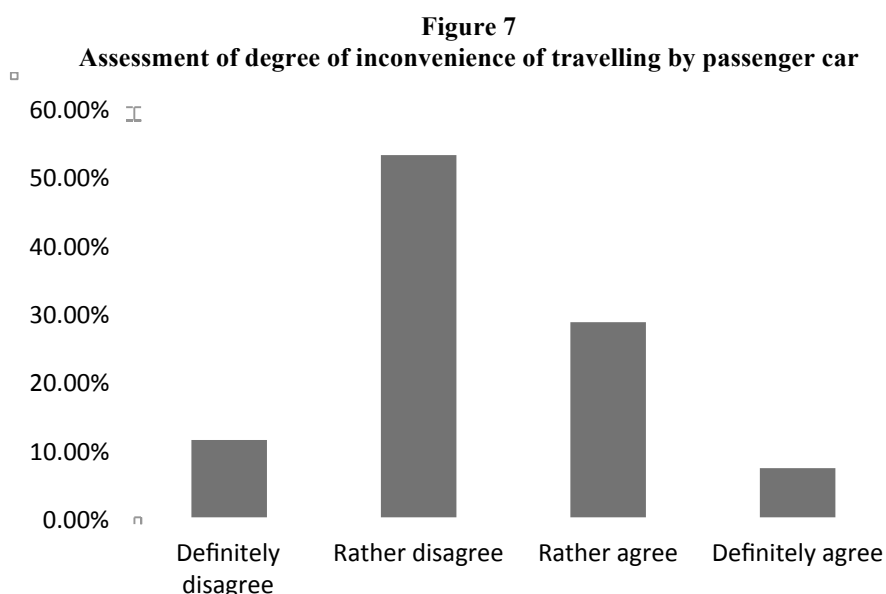
The conducted research implies that, in the opinion of the majority of tourists, the Westpomeranian province features good or very good transport accessibility (66%), 31% assessed it as sufficient. Poor or very poor opinions amounted only to 3%.

As part of the conducted surveys, several questions concerning only those people who were travelling by passenger car (they constituted 63% of all respondents) were also asked. When travelling, these tourists used fuel stations (57%), restaurant services (35%), while 23% of them did not take advantage of this type of services. 58% followed direction and town road signs, 44% travellers used satellite navigation system and 27% - a map.

According to 81% of the surveyed, road signage in the Westpomeranian province is sufficient. In the opinion of 68% of the respondents, the province provides sufficient availability of parking places, however, the opposite opinion is held by 32% of the surveyed.

The conducted research implies that every third tourist travelling by their own car encountered traffic jams during his/her journey, 30% of the respondents encountered detours, 37% - poor condition of roads, 10% - poor signage and 11% - adverse weather conditions.

In the opinion of the majority of the surveyed tourists, travelling by their own car was not tiring (64%), while 36% held a different opinion. The responses associated with inconvenience of travelling by car have been presented in Fig. 7.



CONCLUSION

The results of the conducted surveys indicate that, from the point of view of tourist traffic, the Westpomeranian province generally provides good transport accessibility. Most tourists arrive by their own passenger car, cover distances amounting to a few hundred km, it takes them a few hours to arrive and the cost is less than 100 PLN per person in one direction. When travelling, every third respondent encountered different inconveniences, such as traffic jams, detours or poor condition of roads. Therefore, 36% tourists have found travelling by their own car to be tiring. Bearing in mind this fact as well as that 37% of the respondents have taken advantage of public transport (railway, coach), it appears that, in total, more than half of the tourists coming to the Westpomeranian province would be willing to take advantage of the offer of well-functioning collective public transport. At this point it is worth adding that transport postulates found to be the most important for the respondents included safety, availability of means of transport, directness of connections and comfort of travel. Actions in within the province aimed at improvement in the quality of roads and availability of parking places also seem necessary.

More than 40% of tourists travelled within the area of the province using regional public transportation (railway, municipal transport, coach, bus), most of them positively assessed its functioning. It suggests the need for further development of this type of transport in terms of the needs of tourist traffic. The research implies that the development of the cycling road network is also important. A considerable part of tourists also used the

means of transport as a tourist attraction, which seems to be an important premise for improvement in this type of offer in the Westpomeranian province.

To sum up, the results of the research should constitute an important guideline for all entities interested in the development of tourism in the Westpomeranian province, i.e.. local government units (responsible, among others, for the functioning of public transportation in the region), tourist entrepreneurs (with regard to the transport offer meeting the needs of tourist traffic) as well as tourist organisations.

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