

TOURIST POTENTIAL OF A CITY – A CASE STUDY OF TORUŃ (POLAND)

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Annotation

The presented research aims at analysing and evaluating the subjective reception of the tourist potential of a city by its users – residents and tourists, as well as indicating the qualities (places or symbols) through which it is perceived. This is intended as an assessment of the actions taken in the scope of promoting tourism in the city. The research method related to applying the PAPI method was based on the assumption—present in literature on the subject—that assessing the tourist potential from the perspective of recipients' impressions may be an alternative to the currently prevalent methods. The research has shown that a positive reception of tourist potential has to translate into its high rating as compared to other places. It is also important to have a coherent image of a place (through the identification of the main symbols) and indicate its universal nature (it may attract a broad range of recipients). These assessments allow for checking the propriety of the direction in which local policies are led; however, it is pivotal that the opinions expressed by residents be in line with the views of tourists and visitors.

Key words

Toruń, city, urban tourism, tourist economy

JEL classification: R19, Z10, Z32, Z33

1. Introduction

Tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon and it may be discussed at various levels. The regional approach to this issue draws special attention to the evaluation of the tourist potential, as it encapsulates an array of factors which directly or indirectly impact the development of tourism in a given area, and therefore determine the direction of undergoing changes, the economic standing and the character of a given entity (Kurek, 2007; Hołowiecka, Grzelak-Kostulska, 2011; Pandey, Rogerson, 2013; Van der Merwe, 2016). Although the review of publications proves that the notion of tourist potential is quite ambiguous, as indicated by Marciszewska (2010a,b), it may be assumed that it covers “the entirety of elements allowing for the development of tourism in a given area” (Meyer,

2010, p. 9) which are branded resources and characterised by a structural and functional nature. Structural resources are the foundation for all actions taken in relation to the development of tourism in a region, because they comprise elements of a spatial character connected with tourist values, the utilisation of tourist values, as well as infrastructural components. These resources are also a starting point for the development of tourist products. On the other hand, functional resources comprise a set of factors playing a role in the utilisation of structural resources. They include economic conditions (related both to legal and financial arrangements), demographic conditions (including social capital), technological, ecological, political conditions, as well as psychological conditions which are thoroughly analysed in this paper, as those which concern the perception of values and their utilisation. It should be underlined that the weight of psychological conditions and the role they are ascribed results from the need to conduct constant monitoring of the impressions and opinions of recipients and the opportunity to form them through taking actions in the field of broadly understood territorial marketing. Although both indicated groups of elements included in structural and functional resources are indispensable for the development of tourism, its full potential may be fulfilled only when they function together in a synergic manner.

This study draws particular attention to the recognition of the subjectively perceived tourist potential of a city. It attaches importance to the context of the dynamic development of urban tourism and its significance for the functioning of settlements, because tourism is an essential element of the development of modern cities (Hołowiecka et al., 2011; Biegańska et al., 2014; Środa-Murawska et al., 2015), in particular those which tackle the problems of changes in their functional and spatial structure and succession of functions (Gaworecki, 2007). In the broad sense, the phenomenon of tourism entails many positive solutions for cities, and oftentimes becomes a significant element of urban policy. Moreover, the analysed phenomenon drives economic development through increasing the number of jobs directly in this sphere, as well as in other industries indirectly related to it, which creates a multiplier effect (Gołembski, 2002). It should also be noted that tourism has a positive influence on the cultural and historical heritage of cities which, if given proper protection, form a cultural potential which serves to create a tourist product. Tourism improves the aesthetics of cities, contributes to the intensification of activities from the sphere of revitalisation of degraded areas, and strengthens the positive image of places (Gaworecki, 2007).

The tourist potential of a given place or space is an important factor determining its image. Although the notion of tourist attractiveness (Page, 1995; Seweryn, 2003; Szymańska et al., 2005; Balakrishnan, 2009) in subjective terms (as the evaluation through the recipient's own experiences, views and values) also seems comprehensive, the adopted perspective referring to the notion of tourist potential, resulting from seeing tourism as a developmental factor, gives an opportunity for taking the widest approach. It covers the set of elements discussed above which make up the resources because each of them may be significant when developing the brand of a given place. It should be noted that the matters related to urban branding and territorial marketing are reflected in what a given settlement wants to present to the visitors and what it should be associated with according to the local authorities. Such activities are primarily intended to develop or improve the image of a given area and the attractiveness of that place, and to distinguish its offer from that of other settlements (Szromnik, 2008; McKercher, Ho, 2006). The attractiveness of a given area is usually based on the available resources, characteristic physical-geographic features, historical conditions or contemporary characteristics, all contributing to the uniqueness of that place. Another essential element in the creation of the image of a spatial unit is how it is embedded in certain symbols related to the city, both those currently associated with it and new ones, only just discovered or indicated (Gunn, Var, 2002; Grzelak-Kostulska, Hołowiecka, 2011).

The paper intends to analyse and evaluate the subjective reception of the tourist potential of a city by its users – residents and tourists, as well as indicate the qualities (places or symbols) through which it is perceived. It is assumed that clear dominance of one of the elements (or a narrow leading group) affirms the coherent image of the city, what may improve its positive reception. The results obtained may become a starting point for practical actions in the sphere of development policy.

The research was based on the city of Toruń with its Old Town heralded as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The paper intends to answer the following questions: (a) Does the city have its unique, recognisable symbol? (b) How are the city's tourist facilities graded? (c) Who may be interested in visiting Toruń? (d) How is Toruń's tourist potential perceived in comparison with other cities, both Polish and European?

2. Materials and Methods

Following Nowacki (2003), the research assumes that assessing the tourist potential from the perspective of recipients' impressions may be an alternative to the currently prevalent methods in which subjectively selected criteria are often not related to preferences and create artificial restrictions. A survey questionnaire was conducted in order to reach the aim of the paper. It included tourists and people visiting Toruń on the one hand, and the city's residents on the other. The underlying assumption was that a clear distinction of those two groups active in the urban space would help indicate differences in the perception of the city's tourist potential on the basis of the experiences of the respondents. Residents, who spend more time in the city than tourists, may present a completely different view of the surroundings they know, notice other features of the city than tourists or even not notice certain elements due to being accustomed to their presence in the city space. They may also have a totally different picture of the most important symbols of the city, its significant places and events organised in the studied space. The difference in the perception of the city may also arise from experiences related to the respondents' participation in tourism. The authors decided to use the example of Toruń as a city of great significance and unique tourist values and attractions at the national level. The survey questionnaire was carried out using the PAPI method (Paper and Pencil Interview) between August 2016 and January 2017. The research included a total of 526 respondents, including 276 residents and 250 tourists and visitors.

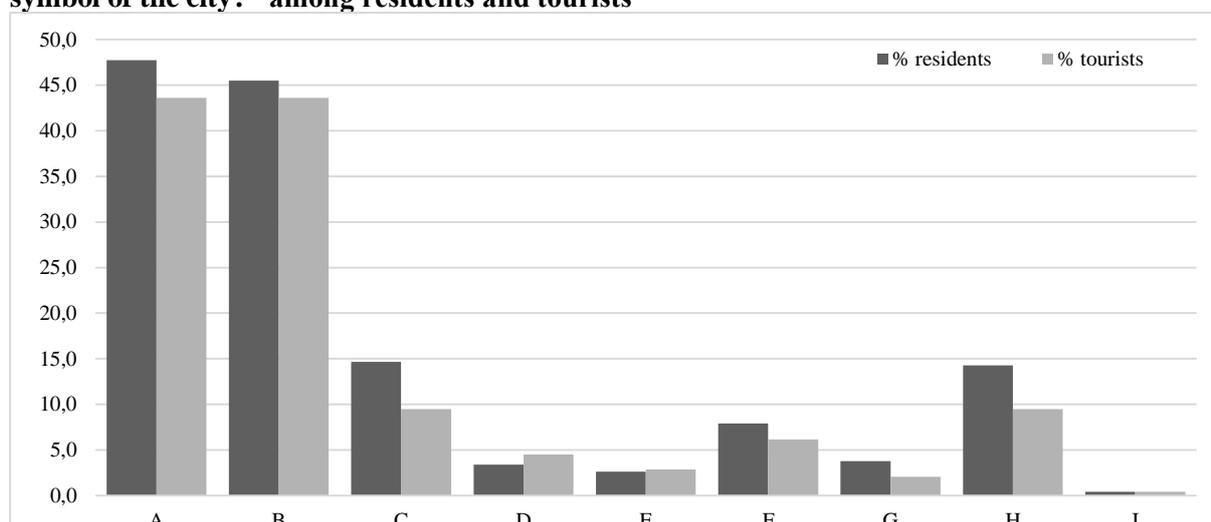
The first group comprised more women (59,4%) than men (represented by 40.6%). The respondents were aged between 17 and 75. The group was composed of 2.5% people with primary education, 12.3% with basic vocational education, 49.3% with secondary education and 35.9% with higher education. Respondents were also marked by varying average net monthly income per family member: 11.2% of the respondents declared earnings lower than PLN 500, 31.9% between PLN 501 and PLN 1000, 33.3% between PLN 1001 and PLN 1500, 10.1% between PLN 1501 and PLN 2000, and 12.3% above that sum.

The second of the analysed respondent groups was composed of tourists and people visiting Toruń. This set included 56% of women and 44% of men, aged between 16 and 74. One of the vital characteristics of this group of survey participants was their place of residence. 41.2% of the participants resided in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship (voivodeship is an administrative region of the first order in Poland), 11.6% in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, 9.6% in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, 8% in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship, 6.8% in the Pomorskie Voivodeship; there were also less numerous representatives of other regions. When divided by city of residence, the surveyed tourists resided in cities and towns within the region (mainly in Bydgoszcz, Włocławek, Inowrocław), and neighbouring regions (including Warsaw, Poznań, Gdańsk, Elbląg). With respect to the level of education, the respondents visiting Toruń reported primary education (4.4%), basic vocational education (11.6%), secondary education (42.8%) and higher education (40.8%). The most prevalent range of average net monthly income per family member was PLN 501-1000, indicated by 38% of the respondents, and PLN 1001-1500 (22%). The vast majority of people visiting Toruń were there at least for the sixth time (41.2%), every third respondent came to Toruń for the second/third time (32.4%), 8.8% of the respondents for the fourth/fifth time, and less than one in five came there for the first time (17.6%). Moreover, over 90% of visits were organised individually, and only over 5% by tourist agencies. The motivation for coming to the city was also varied, the prevailing reasons were visiting friends and family (ca. 40%), sightseeing (ca. 30%), participating in a cultural event (ca. 10%), shopping (ca. 10%), business trip (ca. 10%) and others.

3. Results

In an attempt to analyse how Toruń's tourist potential is perceived, the first step was to determine what can be the branded products of the city. Therefore, residents and tourists were asked to state the most recognisable symbol associated with the city. The most stand-out responses included gingerbread, which was indicated as the most popular symbol of the city by 47.7% of residents and 43.6% of tourists, and the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus with 45.5% and 43.6% answers, respectively. Among the most recognised symbols, the respondents also named: the Panorama of the Old Town (14.7% of answers from residents and 9.5% from tourists), and Radio Maryja (14.3% and 9.5%, respectively) (Fig. 1). The distribution of responses shows larger shares of residents' answers in most cases, which indicates that they have a better knowledge of the city and its most prominent symbols. One of the cases where there is a slight advantage in the popularity of a place among tourists, as compared to residents, is Szeroka street with adjacent buildings. This may be attributed to the role played by this space for both of these groups: tourists see it primarily as the main pedestrian route with historic tenement houses, while residents perceive it as a main road in the city centre with different types of shops and facilities. This may lead them to regard it more as an element of the urban functional-spatial structure, and less as a tourist attraction.

Fig. 1: Distribution of answers to the question “What do you think is the most recognisable symbol of the city?” among residents and tourists



Note: A – gingerbread, B – Nicolaus Copernicus, C – Panorama of the Old Town, D – Szeroka Street with adjacent tenement houses, E – Planetarium, F – Nicolaus Copernicus University, G – Motoarena, H – Radio Maryja, I – other

Source: own work based on questionnaire surveys (N=526)

Tab. 4: Distribution of answers to the question “How do you rate Toruń’s attractiveness?” among residents and tourists

	% of residents	% of tourists
Very attractive	15.6	22.4
Attractive	77.2	73.6
Rather unattractive	6.9	4.0
Completely unattractive	0.0	0.0

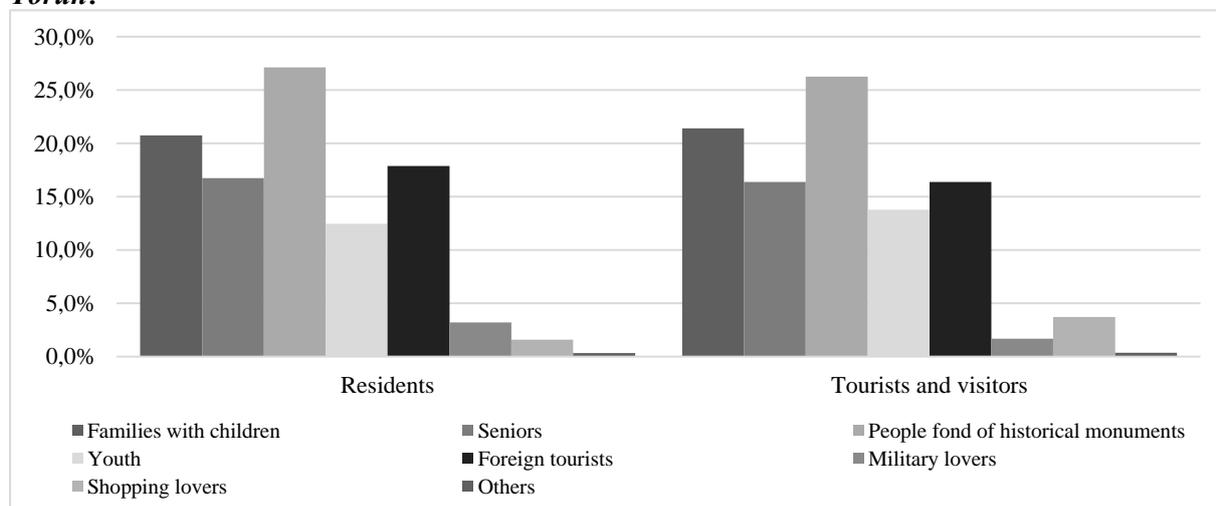
Source: own work based on questionnaire surveys (N=526)

Apart from the specifically indicated symbols of the city, it is also important how Toruń's attractiveness was rated in general in the context of tourism development. Most of the respondents in both analysed groups regarded the city as attractive: residents in 77.2% of cases, tourists in 73.6% of cases. Tourists (22.4%) perceived the city as very attractive more often than residents (15.6%). Toruń and its tourist facilities were graded as rather unattractive by 6.9% of residents and 4.0% of tourists

and people visiting the city. Not a single respondent reported it as completely unattractive (Tab. 1). Toruń is generally perceived by both groups of respondents as an attractive city. The differences in answers are most clearly visible between “rather unattractive” and “very attractive”, with more positive results in the group of tourists and visitors. The distribution of responses may result from the amount of time people spend in the city and move around it. Therefore, it may be argued that residents are more likely to notice certain imperfections than tourists.

The city's tourist potential was also assessed through the respondents' attempt to indicate who could be particularly interested in visiting Toruń. They did not unequivocally pinpoint the group that could be particularly targeted by the city's tourist offer. Both residents and tourists stated that the attractions and values of Toruń could be addressed to people fond of historical monuments (27.1% and 26.3% of answers, respectively), families with children (20.7% and 21.4%) and foreign tourists (17.9% and 16.4%) (Fig. 2). Thus, the views of residents and tourists indicate that the tourist offer of Toruń is perceived as universal, directed at different social groups, and it may therefore successfully gather a wide range of recipients.

Fig. 2: Distribution of answers to the question “Who do you think may be interested in visiting Toruń?”



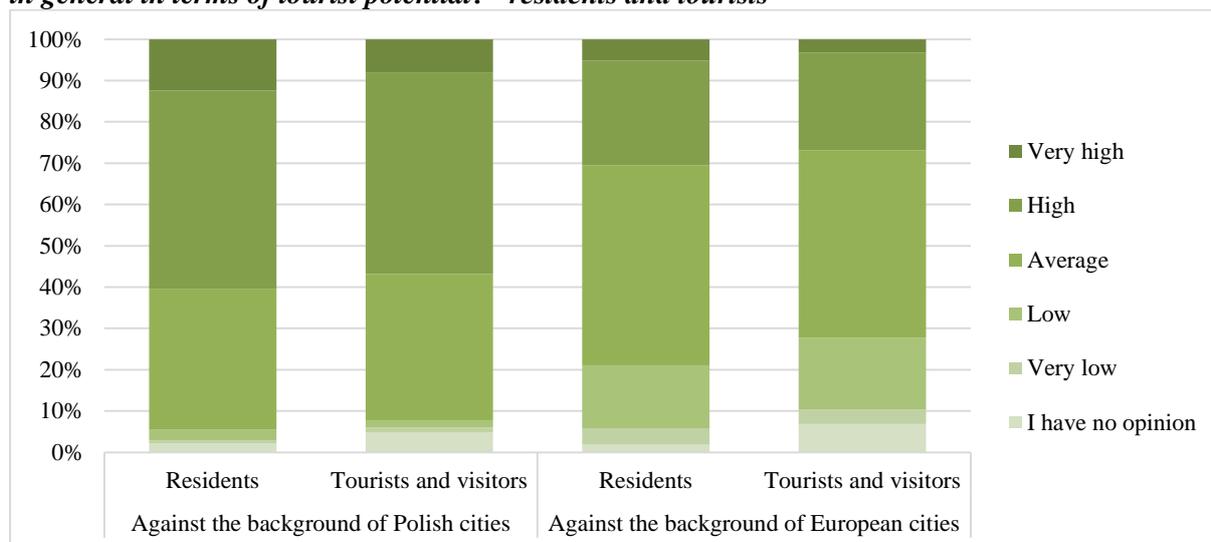
Source: own work based on questionnaire surveys (N=526)

Conclusion

To summarise, the results of the research indicate above all that the image of the city is perceived as coherent. Symbols associated with the city are identified unequivocally (although they concern two elements) both by tourists and residents. Therefore, the perception of the city translates into its affirmation as an attractive place. This conclusion is confirmed by the assessment of the general tourist potential as compared to other settlements in Poland and Europe expressed by residents, as well as tourists and visitors.

The opinions given are marked by certain differences depending on the nature of the analysed group (residents vs. tourists) (cf. Fig. 3). However, in both cases the tourist potential of Toruń in comparison with other Polish cities is rated as high and a very high by around 60% of the respondents, but by only about 30% in the European context. Residents gave the highest marks more often than tourists and visitors. When comparing Toruń to other units in Poland, 12.4% of people residing in the city rated its tourist potential as very high, while among visitors and tourists that number was 8%. As mentioned above, lower ratings regarded the comparison with European cities. In this case, both residents and tourists were more eager to give average and low grades, although residents were still more positive in their views.

Fig. 3: Distribution of answers to the question “How do you rate Toruń as compared to other cities in general in terms of tourist potential?” residents and tourists



Source: own work based on questionnaire surveys (N=526)

The comparison of results obtained from residents with those provided by tourists and visitors shows a certain difference in perception of the urban space between the representatives of both groups. The issues more often indicated by residents are related to their perception of the city on a broader spatial and temporal scale than in the case of tourists whose valuation is based on a significantly smaller, briefly-known area and a far shorter penetration time.

The obtained results point to the relevance of using subjective assessments of the tourist potential in verifying the extent to which existing tourist resources of a given place are utilised. These assessments allow for checking the propriety of the direction in which local policies are led. The positive reception, expressed in a high rating of the tourist potential of the place, and the reception (through identification of main symbols) of a coherent image, clearly confirm this fact.

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