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PORTS IN DEVELOPMENT OF MARITIME TOURISM – PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES. THE CASE OF THE POMERANIAN REGION

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Abstract: The paper investigates the question - provocative in some way – can Polish ports in the Pomeranian Region, especially Gdynia and Gdańsk, become centers of maritime tourism in the region? This question is worth to be asked, despite distinct discrepancy - arousing pessimism - between expectations and the real state. The significance of that question is grounded in ports' role in development of passengers transportation – particularly tourist one, and the impact of ports services on regions' economy in Europe. These problems are exposed at the beginning of the paper.

Further parts of the paper – taking advantage of descriptive and statistical comparative analysis of the ports operation - successively present: (1) general condition of the Pomeranian ports regarding their tourist function. It particularly has been related to the location and transport accessibility requirements as well as to ports suprastructure and infrastructure requirements. The presented conditions are compared with standards effective worldwide; (2) passenger traffic in the Pomeranian ports – especially tourist traffic.

General assessment of development conditions, present situation and position of the Pomeranian ports, which have been made on the grounds of the above analysis, lead to the conclusion that these ports, including the main ports of Gdańsk and Gdynia, are far behind a status of important maritime tourism centers.

The last part of the paper – in connection to the former assessment – defines challenges facing the above ports and presents actions to be taken for strengthening their position. In search of ways enabling achievement of an advisable goal, the position of government administration and local authorities have been stressed, as well as the effects of Polish membership in the EU.

Key words: sea ports, tourist traffic, maritime tourism centers.

1. INTRODUCTION

A statement that modern sea port, as an object of a compound technical and organization structure, fulfills different tasks, especially economic ones is a truism. A sea port is also a complicated transport junction, converging different modes of transport. This is also a place of changing transport means in passengers conveyance. When taking into consideration basic ports' functions, one can specify beside main commercial ports also ports of special purposes (such as passenger ports or yacht

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harbours) but the second port's type rarely exists as a separate entity. So it's hard to manage the ports only from the point of view of the tourist needs.

Having in mind the above, it can be stated that:

- first of all - sea ports services, irrespective of port's character – include ship's services (pilotage, towing, mooring, bunkering, waste disposal, etc.), and
- secondly, sea ports, either universal and the specialist ones, offer passenger services, partly or totally (as an embarkation or disembarkation place, as well as a customs clearance and passport checking point in international traffic) – thus fulfilling an important tourist function. In other words, there are the ports (beside ships and their operators) which create material and organizational conditions for development of maritime tourist voyages.

2. PORTS IN DEVELOPMENT OF MARITIME TOURISM – INFLUENCE OF PORT SERVICES ON REGIONAL ECONOMY

A tourist function of ports is obviously more significant in base ports for pleasure boats (including ports serving ferry traffic) than in the indirect ports. But the impact of the second ports on economic and social development in region still matters a lot. It applies particularly to the ports where passenger ships stay more than one day – and the so called “overnight” demand is observed.

The small ports worldwide also attach weight to passenger services: cruise ships, ferries and yachts². The smaller harbours' benefit their clients, either tourist and the operators, likewise in case of the bigger ports. The ports themselves, deriving economic profits from serving the ships, develop not only the infrastructure of their own, but they additionally stimulate development of tourist infrastructure along the coast. Finally, the local population profits in a various way by passengers and crew of the ships calling at the port.

Generally speaking, both ports and port's cities profit by the presence of passenger and ferry lines. The ports make profit out of port dues. In the case of port's cities, the growth of local demand and new jobs influence positively the region's economy.

The above situations can happen only when the ports serving passengers meet few essential requirements. It's usually right indicate on: convenient, attractive for tourists localization, transport accessibility as well as technical and organizational development. These requirements have been undoubtedly met by maritime tourist centers located in such European port's towns as Copenhagen, London, Stockholm or Helsinki, not mentioning many ports in the USA.

In this context, having in mind however the proportion, a principal question arises: do the positive effects of ports and tourist industry are appreciated in such “tourist and maritime” region as the Pomeranian one?

² They have also some tourist purpose in view during the voyage: circuitous maritime trips, passenger ferry and coastal trips, as well as the tourist maritime yachting which become more and more popular.

3. THE ADVISIBLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POMERANIAN PORTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR TOURIST FUNCTION ; PROBLEMS OF LOCALIZATION AND TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY IN PORTS

Four big sea ports, over 20 the so called small harbours and almost 50 single-function maritime havens are located along Polish coast. Despite the fact that great majority of these harbours is placed in the Pomeranian Region, only two ports – Gdańsk and Gdynia – have a great significance for national economy (fig. 1).

Figure 1. The Pomeranian Region



And that's not all, the macroeconomic reasons recommend further concentration of not only cargo turnover but also passenger traffic in these ports - as it's not advisable to dissipate international traffic in many ports of local significance.

Geographic position of the Pomeranian ports seems to be a great trump – especially localization along the north-south transport corridor (a significant factor in ferry traffic). Moreover, the localization in the region is attractive for tourism and leisure³. Furthermore, these ports are situated in the only developed east-west transport corridor – with Hungary, Austria, Czech and Slovak Republics as the potential hinterland for passenger traffic⁴. While emphasizing advantages of geographical position, some weak points should still be mentioned. These are peripheral ports in the EU, thus it's more difficult for them to matter as important tourism centers – especially cruising centers.

³ Quite apart from not too favourable climate condition in the Pomeranian, alike in the whole Baltic Sea region.

⁴ These aspects are emphasized e.g. in D. Rucińska: Transport pasażerski w regionie gdańskim w warunkach gospodarki rynkowej Gdańsk 1994, p. 31-36.

A convenient land-side access is a crucial factor in port's development, also in case of port as a tourist center. Having in mind road, air and rail connections between the two above mentioned ports and their hinterlands, it should be stressed that rail infrastructure linking these ports with national and international hinterland have not principally differ from European parameters; it also refers to rather convenient transport connections between Gdańsk Airport and the Three City agglomeration. The road connections in turn leave a lot to be desired. It refers to: lack of highways to south of Poland and central Europe, "separation" from important national roads as well as low safety of traffic. Such situation do not favor development of passenger traffic, particularly ferry traffic. However, some hopes on improving the access to the ports could be connected with complete implementation of road connection between A1 highway and the Gdańsk city and port. The same requirement has to be met in the port of Gdynia. In that case the road connection between Gdynia and Gdańsk – as the main destinations in most tourist trips – still builds a barrier in increasing passenger trips.

Now, few words should be devoted to **smaller ports** and their position at the map of tourist "flows" in the Pomeranian Region.

There is no doubt that a **localization** becomes a factor mostly determining dissimilarity and specific character of small ports and harbors. Localizations of such ports as Puck, Jastarnia and Hel are based on natural hinterland of the Puck and Gdańsk Bays. The other small ports as Łeba and Ustka also have a favorable in spite of slightly different conditions (eg. microclimate or sea shore configuration which makes construction of yacht harbors difficult).

Similarly to big ports, the land access to these ports is still a present-day problem. It refers specially to roads' quality and number of parking places. It is important that despite those unquestionable weak points, the localization's trumps predestinate also the smaller ports in the region to become not only the centers of see-shore tourism (eg. yachting or the so called "white fleet") but also a deep sea tourist centers.

4. PORTS' INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPRASTRUCTURE

Sea ports are not only a fixed element of national transport systems, they also should be treated as the elements of tourism's technical infrastructure.

Although special infrastructure and suprastructure are not necessary for serving passenger trips in large ports, the competition forces them to improve conditions of passenger service, particularly to build passenger terminals – specialistic, functional and fulfilling high security requirements. Moreover, the existing berths are equipped with all devices and objects necessary for serving not only passengers of voyage ships; these ports have also ferry terminals, coastal shipping terminals and yacht havens (eg. port in Copenhagen and other Scandinavian

ports)⁵. It should be strongly stressed, that nature of these ports is not strictly passenger – just opposite – these are the commercial ports differentiating their services thus attaching great importance to the tourist voyages.

An important feature of modern ports as maritime tourism centers is a strong pressure on connections with port's city, through railways, roads, parking places, telecommunication, etc. Moreover, when it's possible, the passenger terminals are located nearby city centers. Similarly, investigating **smaller ports and marinas** located in regions of maritime tourism, it should be stressed that the requirements putting on them, not as high as in large tourism centers, shouldn't differ from the accepted standards of ports' development.

The port in Gdańsk, with diverse infrastructure putting a universal nature on it, has two ferry terminals in operation⁶. The yacht haven seems to be a city trump card, especially in case of modern marina, located in the city center, which has been entered into operation in 1997.

The port in Gdynia, better adapted to serving large passenger ships (maximum draught up to 12,5 m) offers berths at the French Berth and at attractively located Skwer Kosciuszki. Services for ferry traffic are offered at Helskie Berth, where the Stena Line have its own terminal. Moreover, Gdynia has a very well prepared unit for yachting – a city yacht port of European standards, located in the neighborhood of the city center.

In the Pomeranian Region, the already mentioned numerous **small ports**, offering usually the yachts' havens, serve also the tourist traffic⁷. Unfortunately, the nature of southern Baltic's coast make the access for yachts difficult. Moreover, the construction and maintenance of port's objects calls for large infrastructural costs⁸. Generally speaking, it should be stated that adaptation of the Pomeranian ports, either the large ones and the smaller havens, leaves a lot to be desired.

5. TOURIST TRAFFIC IN PORTS

The most important external factor of ports development as tourism centers is the demand on ports' services, visible in the ships' calls and passenger traffic. The number of ships and passengers profits by port services in Gdynia or Gdańsk is rather modest while compared with world "stars"⁹. The more so as the Polish statistics include not only number of cruise ships and their passengers but also ferry traffic and passenger service in other sea transport. The data in Table 1 presents international passenger traffic in main Pomeranian ports.

⁵ More information in: S. Szwankowski. *Funkcjonowanie i rozwój portów morskich*. Gdańsk 2000, p. 65.

⁶ A ferry terminal at Westerplatte – favourable located, nearby the port's entry and close to the city center ; well connected with the domestic and international road network, adapted for serving cruise ships. The second ferry terminal in a New Port – operated by the PZB Polferries – of less favourable characteristics.

⁷ On the basis of: W. Liskiewicz: *Porty i przystanie polskiego wybrzeża: przewodnik żeglarski*. Gdańsk 2001, p. 49.

⁸ These ports are characterized by quite different type of sea yachting which calls for the back up facilities of shipyard, hotels and gastronomic.

⁹ More information in : J. Miotke – Dzięgiel. *Turystyka morska*. Gdańsk 2002, p.37.

Table 1. International passenger traffic in selected Pomeranian ports in 2000-2004

A port	Year	No. of passengers	A port	Year	No. of passengers	A port	Year	No. of passengers
Gdańsk	2000	141,881	Gdynia	2000	264,470	Ustka	2000	3,700
	2001	139,651		2001	289,010		2001	3,700
	2002	175,729		2002	391,384		2002	6,423
	2003	273,663		2003	444,553		2003	3,288
			2004	490,119				

Source: based at Rocznik statystyczny Gdańska 2003, tabl. 10(29); Rocznik statystyczny Woj. Pomorskiego, Gdańsk 2003 tabl. 8 (283); Porty morskie i żegluga morska w Polsce w latach 1999-2001, Szczecin 2002, p. 46; „Porty i Spedycja”, no. 1/2005, p. 3

However at the first sight these values are optimistic because of the growing trend they show, Polish ports have lost a vast number of passengers who chose other European ports. It has also to be noted that passenger traffic in Gdynia was about twice as much as in Gdańsk, and also the dynamics of this traffic was relatively high, likewise in the small port in Ustka (until 2002).

In the last few years the growing trend in passenger traffic of **excursion nature** is visible, with a domination of the port in Gdynia. In 2000-2004, 55,355, 56,422, 26,666, 58,411 and 72,977 passengers came here by sea on the passenger ships. The number of calls was adequately: 68, 73, 53, 95 and 82¹⁰. Thus these numbers, particularly the ones in 2004, are promising. One also has to remember that only some excursion ships of a large fleet entering the Baltic Sea call at the Pomeranian seaports, and, statistically, only one third of them have in their schedules visits in Pomeranian ports (calls at the port of Gdynia or – much rarely – Gdańsk).

And now some words about the **statistics of ferry traffic**. Passenger traffic in Pomeranian ports reached as much as: over 355 thousands of passengers in 2002 (till Sept.) and over 344 thousands passengers in 2003 (till Oct.). The position of Polish ferry carrier (PŻB “Polferries”), whose vessels enter Gdańsk, also weakens in favor of foreign carriers¹¹, first of all “Stena Line” in Gdynia. It is worth to be stressed that forecasts on passenger traffic, particularly to the ports of southern Sweden, indicate high growth dynamics.

Looking at passenger traffic statistics one cannot exclude short-sea traffic – by ships of Żegluga Gdańska (particularly in so-called the small trans-border traffic), Żegluga Gdynska and other small operators, on sea yachts as well. And thus, ships of Żegluga Gdańska carried 247,955 passengers in domestic traffic and 90,191 passengers in international traffic in 2002. In turn, in the port o Gdynia app. 183 thousands passengers benefited from voyagers offered by Żegluga Gdańska and Żegluga Gdynska, either inside the port, to Baltiysk (duty-free shopping) and to

¹⁰ Data of the port of Gdynia.

¹¹ In 2003 also DFDS Seaways

Hel¹². To sum up there are a few numbers typical for traffic in yachting basins: 1,516 sailing and motor yachts, incl. 150 foreign in Gdynia in 2003, almost 1000 vessels in Gdańsk, incl. numerous foreign ships: German, Swedish and Finnish¹³.

It is important that during the last few years a boom in **small ports** was noted, particularly as far as such tourist services are concerned: various kinds of passenger transports, sea yachting, windsurfing and other water sports. And despite the fact that the most important role in tourist traffic services belongs with no doubts to large ports in Gdynia and Gdańsk, the other ports, at least some of them, also look for their chances in offering “fashionable” tourist services.

6. PERSPECTIVES OF POMERANIAN PORTS AS PASSENGER-TOURIST TRAFFIC CENTERS. DIRECTIONS OF ACTIVITIES

The time of economic, social and political changes, we are facing now, despite numerous threats, offers new chances and challenges. With no doubts one should account to the second group the geographic location of the Baltic Sea Region, which has become in practice an internal sea of the EU. There are also other “traditional” tourist values of the Pomeranian region, like: historical monuments in cities located in Hanseatic, amber or castle routes. At last there are effects of economic-political transformations in a form of not only many private and under privatization domestic shipping companies, but first of all in establishing strong foreign operators. It is important that despite rather bad state of some infrastructure objects (both port’s and access to ports and harbors), the overall situation in passenger-tourist traffic is improving and the directions of actions are included into development trends of contemporary maritime tourism. However new ways of economic operations of port activation have to be pursued, aimed to a larger extent at passenger traffic services, particularly tourist services.

First of all one should expect that the demand for maritime travels will increase owing to:

1. utilization of niche markets,
2. enlarging a scope of maritime tourism products.

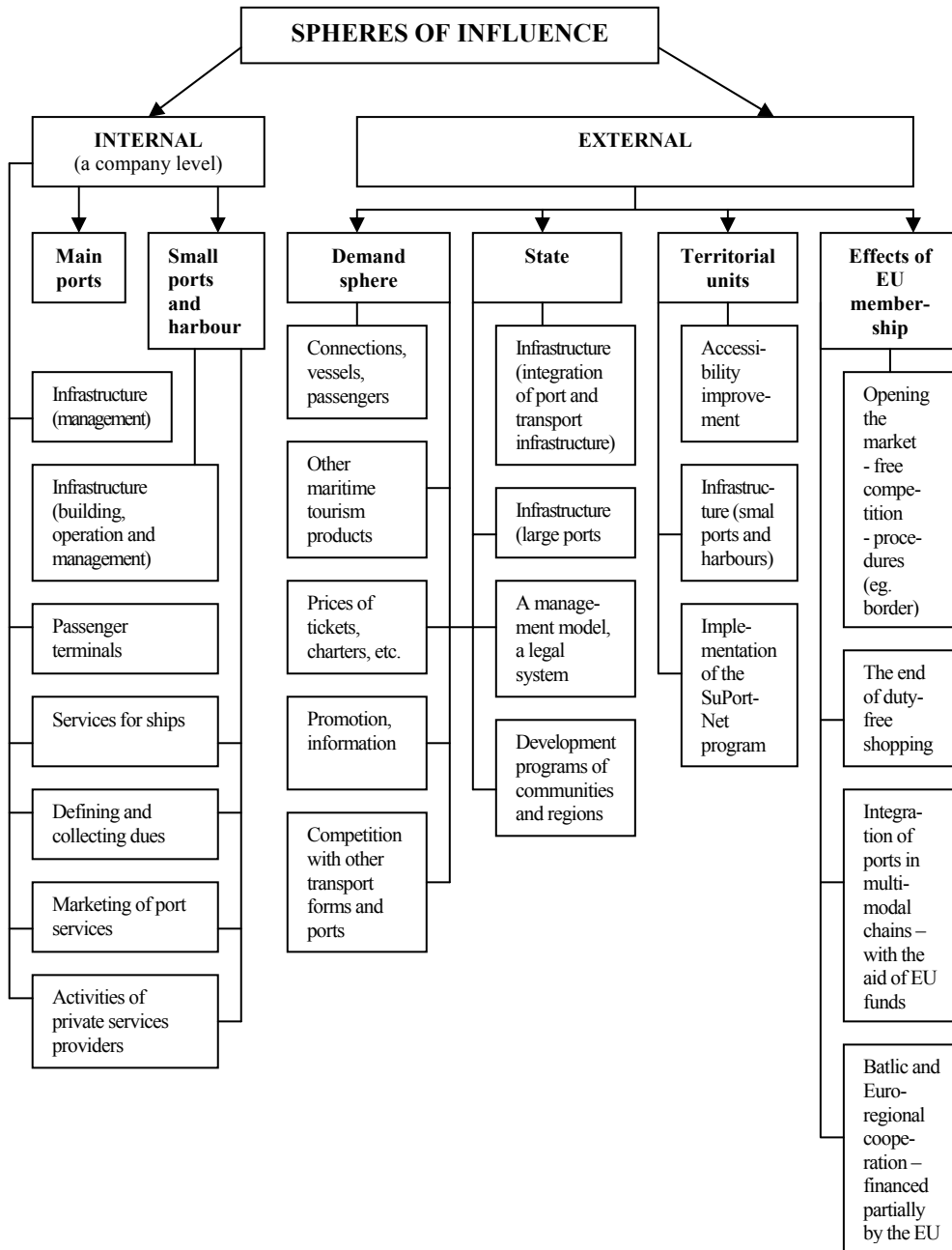
In addition, considering numerous different premises of creating maritime tourism centers on the Polish coast, one is able to indicate areas and main directions of operations. The Figure 1 presents a proposal of such.

Thinking about the future one cannot avoid fundamental issues of the EU development. Integration processes of market structures with the Euromarket – also the tourist market of the Pomeranian Region – will be submitted to concepts of developing unified internal EU market. Among other things, the full liberalization of an access to the market of services will provide full competition among its participants.

¹² Author’s own calculations based on data of Żegluga Gdynńska and Żegluga Gdańska; in 2003 the fleet of the second one carried 220,588 passenger in domestic traffic and 90,191 in international traffic.

¹³ Based on data of municipal sport and recreation centers in Gdynia and Gdańsk

Figure 2. Spheres of impact at Polish ports position in servicing future passenger (tourist) traffic



Source: prepared by the author

In this context, it is significant that a nature of port economy, and a long-term impact of globalization processes, offer relatively good perspectives to large Pomeranian ports. In fact the existence of these ports in themselves, even in a present form, should constitute an advantage as far as conditions necessary for maritime tourism development are concerned¹⁴.

Meeting this conditions is not in fact sufficient. Since a long time one knows that ports do not function without the State involvement (particularly in legislative and financial spheres)¹⁵. If large Pomeranian ports are to play an important role in the economy of not only the region but also the whole country, the authorities, particularly on the highest level, have to be aware of this important task. So much the more, they cannot ignore perspectives of ports becoming centers of maritime tourism.

Some hopes arise from a growing involvement of local authorities. It is a result of a growing awareness of the fact that the seaports have to be considered as important parts of port cities, and their authorities have to influence the development of ports located in them. Only well-prepared and coordinated administrative actions of authorities' representatives may, facing a competition with the EU countries - and not only (Russian ports !!!), provide a flow of foreign investments and an acquisition of the EU support funds.

Generally speaking, in large Pomeranian ports, where the State Treasury still has a right to manage, a weaker influence of local authorities at development directions of seaports may make optimal investment decisions difficult. It concerns not only the ports themselves. Considering the EU markets, Polish ports are located peripherally, which means that without better access to the hinterland they will be also deprived of passenger flows¹⁶.

Some **smaller ports and harbours** are suited to a role of "lesser centers" of maritime tourism. However, their development to a large extent depends on domestic tourists. Because tourists' preferences have changed a lot during the last few years¹⁷, it does not mean a stable trend. So much the more, one cannot ignore the growing interest of foreign tourists in the Polish coast, sailors in particular. Smaller ports are granted new development opportunities – in cooperation with community authorities – by the Act on seaports and harbors, many times novelized. It separates a property management from the port commercial sphere, available also, owing to a scope of operations and invested capitals, to domestic investors¹⁸. However, the question whether communities, as hosts of smaller seaports, owning their territories, will manage to develop maritime tourism and international sea sailing, remains open. A lack of own capital of

¹⁴ The efficient servicing of passenger traffic in seaports requires, among other things, large space. While planning the development of ports as prospective maritime tourism centers the authorities should enlarge borders both of land and water territories.

¹⁵ The state must be involved in economic processes in the infrastructure sector.

¹⁶ In ferry transports, particularly by ro-pax vessels, the large part of tasks would go also to passenger transport. Implementation of development policy of port and land infrastructure enables to hope for growing development of passenger traffic, also tourist, owing to investments and organizational solutions.

¹⁷ Many Polish sailors during the last few years go to the Croatian and Greek coasts.

¹⁸ These are also investments into floating equipment. A high cost of building and chartering yachts slow down the development of sailing.

communities, very often poor, can constitute a barrier on the way to the EU funds that may turn out to be difficult to overcome.

An the last but not the least postulate – because of a significant values of Pomeranian tourist products, also as far as maritime tourism is concerned, it is necessary to promote the region among defined market segments and to create its image. It means that achieving the right position by Pomeranian seaports on the Baltic maritime tourism sub-market constitutes a serious challenge for numerous participants of economic life, and also for economic and tourist organizations.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis and comments on a development position and perspective of Polish Pomeranian seaports on the maritime tourism map of the country enable to formulate the following general conclusions:

- development trends in maritime tourism predestinate seaports to play a role of important tourist centers,
- the analyzed Pomeranian seaports are on a way to gain a role of such centers in the region; to a largest extent main ports of the region are suited to this role, particularly as far as ferry shipping and cruises are concerned; passenger traffic shows a growing trend;
- location of seaport is a main value of them, a lesser one – a state of infra- and suprastructure development;
- the land communication accessibility of seaports is the main development barrier;
- coordinated actions of port authorities and central administration on all levels, in particular local authorities is necessary to meet serious challenges facing the ports of Pomeranian Region. Thus, it will enable for ports and tourism taking benefits of the positive aspects of the EU membership.

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