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The local community perception of tourism development. The case study of Gryfino County – Western Pomerania, Poland

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Abstract. An increasing number of people from various countries have seen tourism as a chance to develop local economy and quality of life. The article presents the results of the analysis of tourism potential of Gryfino County in Western Pomerania in Poland and confronts them with how it is perceived by the residents. Although the county abounds in great tourist attractions, both of natural and cultural nature and is favourably located in geographic terms, tourism is developing very slowly. In order to examine the reasons for the current situation, an attempt to survey the opinion of the local community on this subject was made by applying the method of Focus Group Interviews. The results emphasise the significance of local community for tourism development in a region.

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1. Introduction

Tourism development in various regions is widely perceived as advantageous in multiple aspects (Nieżgoda, 2011): (a) economic – improving residents' quality of life; (b) socio-cultural – associated with establishing relations between residents and tourists; (c) infrastructure-service – improving infrastructure and quality of services offered to residents.

Extensive research on the attitude of local communities to tourism development are being conducted worldwide (Williams et al., 1995; Chandralal, 2010; Andereck, Nyuapane, 2011; Gosh, Sofique, 2012; Hanafiah et al., 2013; Shariff, Abidin, 2013; Gupta, Prakash, 2014; Marković, Klarić, 2015; Zeinali et al., 2015), including Poland (Komorowska, 2003; Niezgoda, 2011; Sikorska-Wolak, Zawadka, 2011; Mika, 2013; Tucki et al., 2013; Głąbiński, 2014).

The results of the research conducted so far indicate that most of the local communities present a positive attitude towards tourism development (Komorowska, 2003; Wang et al., 2006; Chandralal, 2010; Andereck, Nyuapane, 2011; Niezgoda, 2011; Sikorska-Wolak, Zawadka, 2011; Hanafiah et al., 2013; Mika, 2013; Zeinali et al., 2015). There are, however, several factors differentiating the attitudes among the particular representatives of local communities. The researchers mention, among others: (a) the time of residence in a particular area and place of birth; (b) the strength of sense of local and regional identity; (c) the strength of commitment to the local community; (d) the attitude towards the type of tourist attraction (natural or socio-cultural).

Special conditions apply to the development of tourism in protected areas (Nyuapane, Poudel, 2011; Głąbiński, 2014; Brankov et al., 2015), where the level of residents' ecological awareness is of greater significance than other factors.

As the researchers emphasise, there is a growing need to both examine and consider residents' attitudes towards tourism development, especially in those areas that are in its initial phase (Harrill, 2004; Sharpley, 2008; Chandralal, 2010; Niezgoda, 2011; Tucki et al., 2013; Marković, Klarić, 2015). This is particularly important as local communities should not be seen as an obstacle to planning tourism de-

velopment. What is more, residents should be educated since their negative attitude towards tourism development frequently results from prejudices and lack of knowledge.

What should also be taken into consideration in the planning process of tourism development are the specific, local factors that may contribute to various attitudes towards this phenomenon (Harrill, 2004; Sharpley, 2008; Niezgoda, 2011; Brankov et al., 2015; Zeinali et al., 2015). As Marković and Klarić (2015) state, tourism develops primarily in touristically most attractive areas. Therefore, there are situations in which, acting in favour of tourism development, one tends to ignore local social conditions. These phenomena can lead to the excessive development of tourism in touristically attractive areas, without considering the socio-cultural conditions. What ought to be emphasised is the fact that it is the local community that largely determines tourism development in an area and, therefore, without detailed identification of the needs and expectations of its residents, sustainable development of tourism cannot be achieved (Harrill, 2004; Niezgoda, 2011, Mika, 2013). Doxey's Irridex constitutes one of the most common indicators applied to assess the attitudes of residents towards tourism development (Harrill, 2004; Wang et al., 2006; Niezgoda, 2011).

Doxey's Irridex is one of the attempts to present the changes in residents' attitudes towards the development of tourism in a region. It is claimed to prove and justify the need for conducting research on the social determinants related to tourism development. The research results may significantly contribute to the success of measures taken within the planning process of tourism development with the benefit for both the environment and the local community.

A review of recent literature on the research on attitudes of residents towards tourism development leads to the conclusion that it is the quantitative approach that is most commonly applied and the data are collected through surveys (Williams et al., 1995; Komorowska, 2003; Harrill, 2004; Chandralal, 2010; Niezgoda, 2011; Andereck, Nyuapane, 2011; Hanafiah et al., 2013; Mika 2013; Shariff, Abidin, 2013; Tucki et al., 2013; Głąbiński, 2014; Brankov et al., 2015; Marković, Klarić, 2015; Zeinali et al., 2015). The qualitative approach is, on the contrary, very

rarely used, and involves individual interviews, focus group interviews and participant observation (Gupta, Prakash, 2014; Maneenet, Tran, 2014).

When conducting their studies on social phenomena related to tourism, some researchers emphasise the need to use various research approaches, both quantitative and qualitative (Walle, 1997; Aleziak, 2008; Głabiński, 2015). Trutkowski (1999) pre-

sents an interesting opinion which constitutes the justification for conducting qualitative research. As he states, “in order to understand why people make certain choices, you should ask them about it and allow them to use their own categories when responding – let them show us the reasons for their behaviours and their own interpretations of the expected results.”

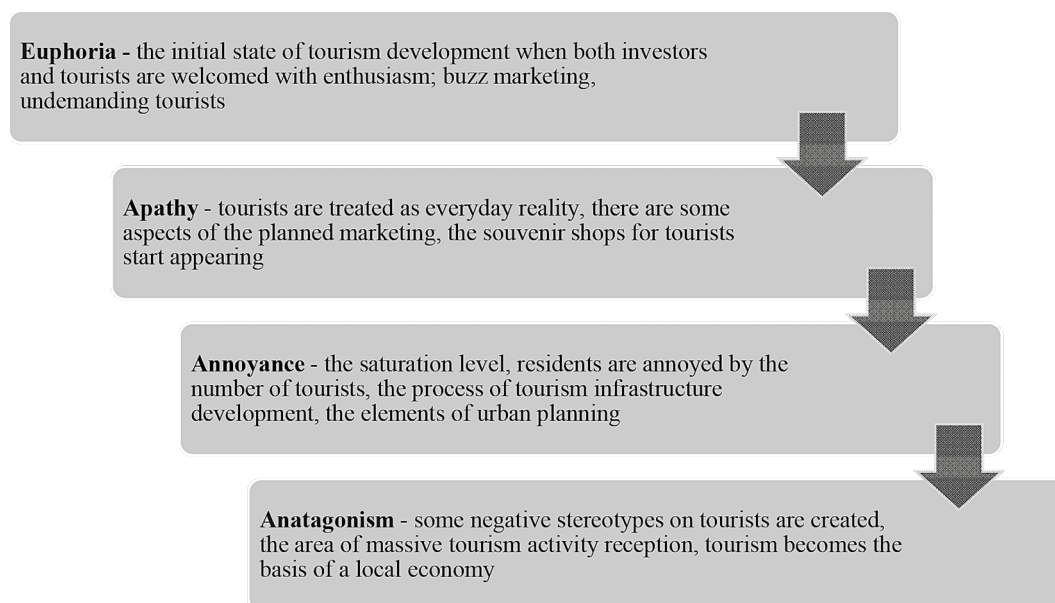


Fig. 1. Doxy's Irridex

Source: Own elaboration based on: Harrill, R., 2004: 6-7; Wang, Y., Pfister, R. and Morais, D., 2006: 412; Niezgoda, A., 2011: 111

Focus Group Interviews (FGI) belong to one of the more frequently used qualitative research methods. A focus group interview, commonly known as a 'focus', is “an informal discussion led by a group of selected people on a chosen topic that refers to specific situations which are familiar to these people” (Lisek-Michalska, Daniłowicz, 2007: 16). The method involves gathering a few (from 6 to 9) people in one place and conducting discussions on a particular topic in the presence of a moderator. As emphasised by the researchers, the study results are characterised by the so-called typological representativeness (Lisek-Michalska, Daniłowicz, 2007; Maison, 2010; Lisek-Michalska, 2013). This means that the results can be generalised for a group of people who meet certain criteria that a 'focus' determines. Lisek-Michalska (2013) points out that

'focuses' should be applied in those situations in which a researcher seeks the responses to 'Why' questions.

Gryfino County, located in western Poland near the border with Germany, is the area of considerable tourism value. Local authorities, interested in the further development of tourism in the region, are seeking answers to the question why, despite such considerable tourist potential, tourism economy has remained in the early stages of development for a long time. This article is an attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What tourist potential does Gryfino County represent?
2. How is this potential assessed by the residents?
3. Why is the county tourism economy developing so slowly despite such significant tourist potential?

The research questions posed in that way led to the conclusion that the Focus Group Interview should be one of the methods to be applied.

2. Identification of the county tourist potential

Gryfino County with an area of 1,869.1 km² is the largest county in the West Pomerania Province. It includes the areas of Wełtyń Plain, Beech Forest, Lower Oder Valley and the western part of Myślibórz Lake District, which is located in the so-called ‘Oder’s knee’ – the westernmost region of Poland. The county combines both valuable natural assets, mainly in the form of the unique areas of Międzyodrze, and as many as three (out of seven in the region) landscape parks (Szczecin Landscape Park, Cedynia Landscape Park and Lower Oder Valley Landscape Park), as well as rich history, reflected in a number of exceptional historical buildings (Duda, Duda, 2008; Duda, 2011). It was in this area where several significant European orders like the Templars, the Hospitallers, the Cistercians and the Augustinians were operating in the past. It is also a land of stone churches of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, unusual secrets about the legendary treasure of the Knights Templar and courts founded by old noble families. At the end of World War II the area also witnessed heavy battles that are commemorated in the form of war cemeteries, memorials and museums.

The current West Pomerania Province, including Gryfino County, covers the lands which the Danes, the Swedes, the Germans and the Poles were fighting for throughout centuries. Each of these nations have left their mark on the contemporary image of this land, which is visible in the material heritage that has survived the storms of history (architecture, urban systems, road network). What, however, defines the culture and tradition of a place is inseparably connected with the people who are able to create such a substance. As a result of the peace resolutions ending World War II, the sites were incorporated into Poland and, what followed, the population was nearly completely replaced. The settlers, who came from various regions of Poland, took the place of the Germans who had lived there before.

It is therefore difficult to define regional identity of its inhabitants that would be supported by specific habits or sense of separate traditions (Głabiński, 2008).

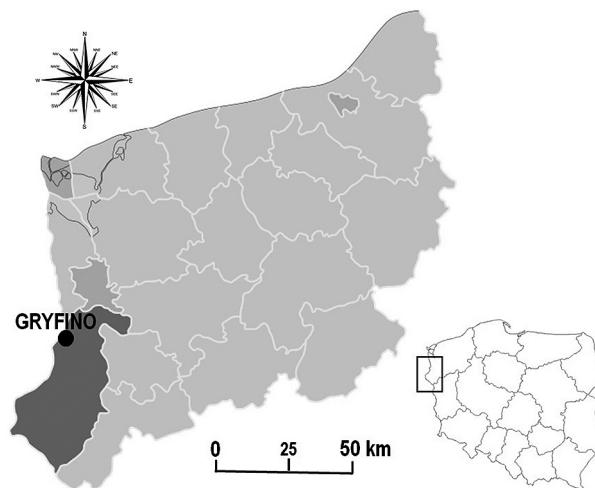


Fig. 2. Location of Gryfino County

Source: Own elaboration

2.1. The inventory of sightseeing resources – methodology and allocation of resources

In order to achieve an indexation and analysis of the county's tourist potential, a detailed inventory of sightseeing resources located within the analysed region has been taken. The inventory included all kinds of sights (both natural and historical-cultural ones, as well as infrastructural and organisational ones) that contribute to the tourist potential of the county and may be of interest to visitors.

The inventory work was mostly carried out outdoors and each sight got its own inventory card. The list of resources was then completed with a reference to the listing conducted by the Office for the Conservation of Historical Monuments and Sites (the list of historic buildings, as well as historic settlements) and, in the case of natural objects, by the Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection and the Landscape Park Complex in Western Pomerania (the list of both animate and inanimate natural monuments, nature reserves and other forms of nature).

The paper mentions the allocation of resources that was made with reference to the criteria proposed

by Kruczek et al. (2003) and the criteria introduced by Mikos von Rohrscheidt (2010) and supplemented by Duda (2014) that were specifically adapted to cultural resources. As the authors had assumed, in order to obtain a clear picture of the potential, the analysed resources were divided into types, groups and subgroups. The basis was formed by six main types of resources and objects: natural and scenic ones, historical and cultural ones, historical memo-

rabia, culinary heritage resources and other forms of cultural life, tourist facilities and hiking trails. Each of these types was, additionally, internally divided into groups and subgroups which comprised the specific types of spots (Table 1). The inventory results were finally presented graphically in the form of cartograms which show the intensity of the phenomenon (the number of sights in a particular category, in this case) in terms of the county (Fig. 3–5).

Table 1. The summary of an inventory list of tourist resources of Gryfino County

No.	Type of resources	Kind of resources	Types of objects to be evaluated	Total number in the county
1	Natural and landscape resources	Natural resources	- lakes	66
			- forest areas (closed)	34
		Protected areas	- national parks	67
			- landscape parks	
			- other forms of nature protection - geoparks	
Parks and gardens	- manorial parks, urban parks and others - botanical and dendrochronology gardens - nature trails	62		
Animate and inanimate nature peculiarities	- natural monuments - boulders - viewpoints - others	340		
2	Historical-cultural resources	Thirteenth and fourteenth-century stone buildings	- stone churches - stone elements of fortifications	75
		Monuments of architecture, construction and urban planning	- religious monuments - secular monuments - historical urban and rural settlements - historical cemeteries or graves - palaces, mansions and palace settlements	235
		Archaeological sites	- boroughs - tombs, burial mounds, megaliths - other collections	18
		Monuments of technology		27
		Museums and chambers of memory		11
		National Remembrance Sights	- places associated with the Route of National Remembrance – fights held during the operation of forcing the Oder in April 1945.	14
		3	Resources of culinary heritage and cultural events	Culinary tourism resources
Cultural-tourist events	- staging / historical events - occasional fairs - religious events - sports events - other events			64

4	Tourist infrastructure	Accommodation	- hotels - motels, guest houses, recreation centres - shelters, hostels, private rooms - camp sites	52
		Catering	- restaurants - bars, pubs, clubs - coffee houses, cafes	66
		Tourist base	- bathing resort, swimming pools - sailing clubs - horse stables - tourist equipment rentals	22
		Marked tourist trails	- marked walking, cycling, horse riding trails - marked theme trails	11

Source: Own elaboration

2.1.1. Natural-landscape resources

The Gryfino County area is characterised by an extremely diversified wealth of animate and inanimate nature. Its landscape was formed during the last Ice Age several thousand years ago. Its well-preserved glacial forms, numerous lakes, river valleys and a big number of boulders that have been left behind make the region one of the most picturesque ones in the whole province. What may confirm the uniqueness and high value of the county is the existence of three landscape parks, 14 nature reserves, 12 landscape complexes and up to 219 monuments of nature (including inanimate nature – boulders) within its area (Duda, 2014). The inventory list, however, comprises not only the sights that are subject to protection, but also other peculiarities of nature, viewpoints, nature trails, dendrochronological and botanical gardens, as well as park complexes once located mostly nearby palaces and courts. Afforestation and lacustrine rate, which significantly affect the tourist attractiveness of a place, were the two additional elements subjected to analysis.

By and large, all communes of Gryfino County abound in both natural and landscape tourist attractions. The inventory makes it possible, however, to point out these areas where the value surpasses other areas in this respect (Fig. 3).

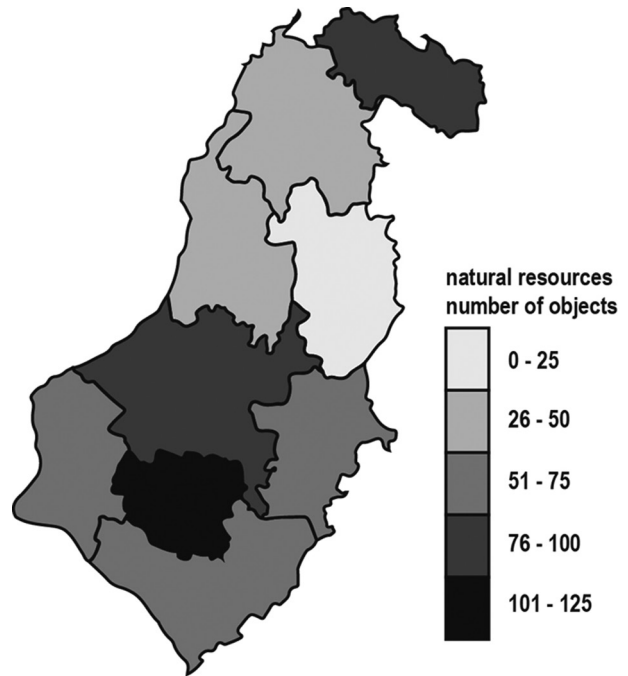


Fig. 3. Natural resources in Gryfino County (by number of objects)

Source: Own elaboration

2.1.2. Historical-cultural resources

The area of Gryfino County has been a long-time border land (formerly of the Duchy of Pomerania and Neumark, now of Poland and Germany), whose shape was affected by various nationalities, cultures and chivalric orders that had arrived from Western Europe. The region is famous for a large number of old park and palace settlements, many monuments

commemorating important historical events (particularly the commonly known ones like the Battle of Cedynia and operations during World War II related to forcing the Oder), technical monuments and places of archaeological discoveries (Fig. 4). The historical architecture of the region is particularly represented by a large number of stone (not quite correctly called granite) churches of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. Their number (74), as well as their state of preservation, are an exception in the whole Western Pomerania and form an informal 'Trail of stone churches in the county of Gryfino'. Some valuable equipment and medieval wall paintings have been preserved in many of them (including Weltyń, Mętno, Czachów).

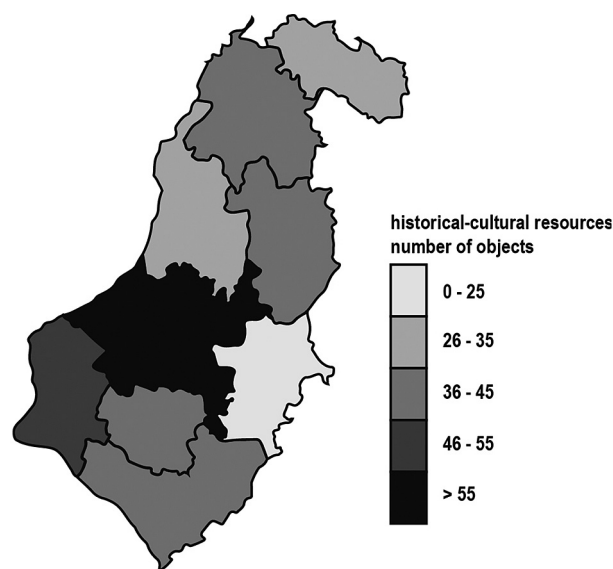


Fig. 4. Historical-cultural resources in Gryfino County (by numbers of objects)

Source: Own elaboration

The activities of former orders largely resulted in cultural and economic development of the region of Gryfino (Duda, 2010, 2011). The Cistercians, who built one of the largest monastery complexes and religious settlements in Kołbacz (commune of Stare Czarnowo) as early as in the 12th century, were of the greatest significance. The preserved buildings are still among the most valuable sights of not only the county, but entire Pomerania and northern Poland. The Cistercian complex in Kołbacz has been entered in the Register of Historical Monuments (as the third in the province, after Kamień Pomorski

and Stargard). The county area also abounds in the relics of the Knights Templar and Hospitallers (including Swobnica, Banie, Rurka).

The sights associated with the events of World War II certainly belong to the important and particularly unique historical-cultural resources of the region. As many as 14 sights, including war cemeteries, museums, monuments and places have been mentioned within the so-called National Remembrance Trail. The site of the Battle of Cedynia fought in the 10th century is also commonly known. A large part of the resources are places associated with historical legends. Moryń, to mention one of them, is famous for the Trail of Moryń Legends leading along the shores of Morzycko Lake.

The urban systems preserved in the county, along with their medieval fortifications (walls, gates, towers and observation points), belong to the most exceptional ones in the whole province. The most important and best-preserved ones include the settlements in Trzcińsko-Zdrój (one of the three full rings of medieval stone ramparts in the county), Moryń, Chojna, Mieszkowice and Gryfino.

2.1.3. The potential of culinary tourism and cultural events

Gryfino County is one of the several ones in the province that has its products listed in the ministerial list of traditional products and its regional products entered in the Culinary Heritage web (www.minrol.gov.pl). The first group includes honeys: the acacia honey of Cedynia from the area of Cedynia and Moryń communes, as well as the honeys of Chojna from the commune of Chojna.

The communes that are rich in both regional products and places where this type of food can be tasted, are: Banie (2 products, including wines from the 'Turnau' vineyard – the only vineyard in Western Pomerania), Cedynia (1 product), Gryfino (1 product), Mieszkowice (1 restaurant), Moryń (1 product), Stare Czarnowo (2 products) and Widuchowa (1 product). The above-mentioned communes, additionally, abound in organic farms and farm tourism cottages that deal with, among others, creating and selling regional products.

Events, fairs and regional events largely contribute to the tourist attractiveness of a place. More than 70 different kinds of events are organised in

the county of Gryfino. These mainly include sports events (31 events – mainly in the communes of Gryfino – 12, Chojna – 6, Moryń – 6, Trzcińsko-Zdrój – 5 and Widuchowa – 2). Historical re-enactments, which can be seen in the communes of Cedynia – 2, Banie – 2, Gryfino – 1 and Mieszkowice – 3, constitute an interesting tourist attraction. The communes of Chojna, Gryfino and Moryń, which hold the largest number of attractive events, tend to dominate in this regard.

2.2. Tourism development

Gryfino County area, due to its proximity to Szczecin and Germany, as well as its richness in natural and historical sites, is characterised by quite intensive tourism activity, especially during the periods of summer, spring and autumn. However, the accommodation facilities are not well developed, which may mean rather short stays of tourists in the region. The communes which have the biggest number of such facilities are Gryfino (14) and Moryń (9). Facilities classified as hotels are located only in Cedynia and Moryń. The majority of the remaining ones are guesthouses, private rooms and farmhouses (mostly in the communes of Gryfino – 14, Moryń – 8 and Mieszkowice – 7) (Fig. 5).

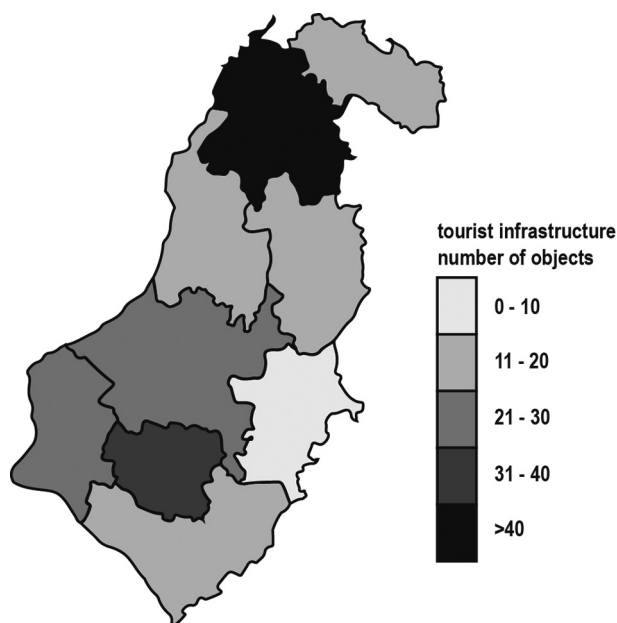


Fig. 5. Tourist infrastructure in Gryfino County (by number of objects)

Source: Own elaboration

The pro-tourism activity infrastructure, such as all kinds of labelled trails, well-organised bathing resorts, tourist centres and equipment rentals, can be encountered in all communes of Gryfino County. Their frequency and number, however, is not equal and it varies greatly among communes.

Tourist trails (hiking and biking) are among the infrastructural elements of the so-called tourist facilities that are most attractive to tourists. When it comes to the county, most of them are located in the areas of landscape parks and Szczecin Landscape Park “Beech Forest” (the commune of Stare Czarnowo) which belongs to the richest in marked trails one. What constitutes an important and unique element of the county’s tourist area are also thematic cultural routes, some of which are parts of the large international track systems, for example the European Route of Brick Gothic, the Cistercian Route and the Trail of the Hospitallers and the Knights Templar.

3. The possibility of tourism development as perceived by the residents of Gryfino County

The research, which applied the method of Focus Groups Interviews, was held in September 2015. According to Maison (2010), in order to obtain reliable results, at least 2 ‘focuses’ should be carried out. One of them took place in Gryfino (7 persons) and the second one in Moryń (9 persons). The invited participants were professionally connected with, or otherwise interested in, the development of tourism in the county of Gryfino. In Gryfino, the meeting was attended by two members of NGO tourist associations, two tourism entrepreneurs and 3 municipal officials responsible for tourism. In Moryń, in turn, the meeting was attended by 2 entrepreneurs, 3 activists of local associations and 4 employees of municipalities. This was the way in which the researchers met the typological representativeness criteria. Having applied the FGI, the researchers tried to clarify three main issues related to the development of tourism in the county:

1. How do those people, involved in tourism development in the county, evaluate the tourist assets and infrastructure as well as the way of using them?

2. What is their assessment of cooperation of public administration, associations and entrepreneurs in developing tourism in the county?
3. How do these people evaluate the role of tourism in the economy of the county?

The tourist values were highly rated by the interviewed participants, regardless of the type of their commitment to tourism. *“Gryfino County is hugely attractive, ranging from its landscape and nature to history, traditions, architecture and monuments.”; “We have some of the best assets in Poland.”; “Within our county, there are indeed tourist attractions of both nature and history.”; “Probably every commune has its own assets of tourism.”; “When it comes to such tourist attractions, natural ones, well then we are really in the lead.”*

This particularly concerns the southern and western part of the county (Moryń, Cedynia, Mieszkowice, Chojna, Cedynia Landscape Park, The Valley of Love, Bielinek reserve, The Oder Valley Landscape Park). *“The Commune of Moryń has an excess of natural and historical assets.”; “We are located in the area of the Oder, so surely the River Oder.”; “We have beautiful lakes, we have the River Oder. These are wonderful assets. The nature reserves, the bird reserves, Bielinek”; “It is a beautifully shaped, attractive landscape. We have the Valley of Love. The entire Lower Oder Valley.”; “These are thought to be some of the most beautiful tracks. Yellow-brown in autumn, beautiful fresh green in spring. Simply madness, madness. You can really fall in love.”* The quoted opinions were presented by the participants of the FGI (Focused Group Interview) in Moryń located in the southern part of the area. These views are confirmed by the analysis of the values of Gryfino county, which indicates that it is there precisely where the largest concentration of values is located (Fig. 3, 4).

The respondents emphasise the fact that various types of natural assets can be found within the area of the county. *“We mainly have natural assets and it is both animate and inanimate nature. Well, the landform itself, which is associated with the last glaciation, large differences in height.”; “The assets are great, yes, because there is, for example, the Beech Forest, there is this Szczecin Landscape Park.”; “Morzycko Lake is certainly the attraction here and, in general, that whole geopark.”; “The biggest stronghold of cranes in Marwice.”*

They also draw attention to the cultural aspects (urban systems, city walls, churches marked with chessboards, Swobnica castle, the site of the battle of Cedynia, Czelin, Gozdowice, Siekierki). *“When I came here I was lost in admiration. Here, every second village has a church from the twelfth or thirteenth century.”; “Beautiful defensive walls above all else.”; “We have the architectural treasures of European significance, if not global. Gothic architecture, which is actually Gothic of the highest rank, is one of the examples.”*

What is of a particular significance for the residents are the sites of some historical events. *“The assets are historical ones, linked to the history of this region, of national remembrance.”; “I’ll mention the process of birth of the Polish state, i.e. the Battle of Cedynia fought by the troops of Mieszko I and his brother Czcibór.”*

The participants of the FGI also highlight the links between natural and cultural assets. *“The history is kind of woven in nature here.”* As an example, they state that, among others, *“the advantage of the county are its medieval urban layouts (...), which are, by the way, associated with the geological history of the region, for example these stone outbuildings, stone churches.”*

The respondents, moreover, point out the cultural assets arising from the participation of residents *“Just the cuisine that is slowly appearing here. Traditional products such as these honeys precisely. We have a vineyard in Baniewice.”; “People are such assets either, these enthusiasts who are more and more interested in the history of their little motherland. They are seeking some oddities.”*

The lack of significant industrialisation of the county is perceived as a value, not just a tourist one. *“We have peace and quiet here, no industry, we have no pollution.”; “What I’m most into is the fact that it is peaceful here.”; “They live here, they do not leave. Those who do not leave know that it is fun to live here.”*

Despite all these very good ratings, the respondents perceive some deficiencies that affect the overall image of the tourist attractiveness of the county. *“A terribly neglected town and it is like that till this day, as these our small towns do not look like the ones from the fairy tale on the other side of the Oder, no. They are simply neglected.”; “Of course, these monuments are not in a very good condition.”*

As the respondents claim, what constitutes one of the most problematic contemporary issues related to tourism in the county is its really poorly developed tourism infrastructure. *“There is a huge potential, which is completely undeveloped.”*; *“Touristically speaking, there are black holes here. When you fall into them, you will not come out.”* The participants of the study are aware of the fact that simply having assets is not sufficient. *“We must first fix the bench in order to invite a guest.”* They also draw attention to the inadequate manner of their use. *“The infrastructure that already exists is, for example, misused.”* These views were presented by all the respondents, regardless of a place of their residence and professional commitment.

The main shortcoming that is signalled by the respondents is the lack of developed accommodation and catering facilities. *“There are not enough accommodation places. Poor accommodation services. There is no parking, accommodation, catering base.”*; *“No accommodation facilities. This is also a drawback. Quite serious here. There are also not too many dining options.”*; *“We lack such places where you can sit, eat; there are, but few, there are no beds.”*; *“We do not have accommodation places as such.”*

Even if a particular area is open to tourists, the above-mentioned drawbacks still constitute a recurring opinion. *“They have a blue flag, a lakeside promenade, bicycle lanes, a path for Nordic walking, but suddenly it turns out that there is nowhere to eat or to stay.”* Moreover, if there is accommodation, it presents a low standard. *“Today, well, I as a tourist, do not any longer want to live in a caravan. Another standard is already looked for. And this is what we are missing.”* It should be emphasised that these shortcomings were pointed out primarily by the representatives of municipal offices and NGOs.

What constitutes a significant way to explore the tourist attractions of the county are its cycle routes. The respondents, however, claim that their network is insufficient. *“There are some cycle routes, but for me, there are far too few of them. There are Nordic walking paths.”*; *“I miss the bike paths within the area of Gryfino itself.”* If the routes do exist, they are in a poor condition, or do not come together in a cohesive network or do not meet the expectations of tourists. *“These cycle routes are in a terrible condition. There is no infrastructure, you just cycle along a bike path and, at some point, find yourself*

on a forest path.”; *“As for cycle paths, we do not have them at all. Thematic ones either.”*; *“If only these bike paths were a successful idea, as such. I know the bike paths that were built for a lot of money and they are now overgrown with grass.”* Such remarks were mainly reported by the representatives of NGOs from Gryfino and Moryń who were involved in cycling. They point to the imperfections of the routes for cycling tourism purposes. It is municipal offices who are almost always investors with this type of infrastructure. Unfortunately, those officials who are responsible for such actions do not always have appropriate expertise and, due to their insufficient consultation with the community, they often take wrong decisions.

The respondents also indicate very difficult access to the main tourist attractions of the county. *“Even the “Crooked Forest” is poorly marked.”*; *“We have beautiful canals with the rich animal and vegetation resource, and we are not able move around this area.”*

What the respondents point out in addition to the elements related to cognitive tourism are the deficiencies connected with leisure facilities. *“There is no such infrastructure, here by the water.”*; *“There is Gądn, which is simply neglected. There is a hopeless beach.”*; *“In Gądn, there are unfinished buildings that have been haunting for more than 20 years.”*; *“Because it is beautifully renovated in Moryń. Nevertheless, this beach is small and there are simply crowds out there.”* These negative opinions on the tourist infrastructure were primarily expressed by the entrepreneurs and members of NGOs. It is how they indicated the negligence of the part responsible for this state i.e. municipal offices.

Poland is in the Schengen area; nevertheless, due to the Oder, which corresponds to the state border, good access to the county from the German side constitutes a significant issue. *“What is a very big advantage of our land here, is the existence of two or three large border crossings with Germany. I think we overlook this, but it is a huge potential for this area. It should be noted that, as someone here said, Berlin is closer than Szczecin.”* The proximity of Berlin, as the great agglomeration generating tourist activity, was perceived by the representatives of the southern part of the county that were present at the meeting in Moryń. This assessment results from a smaller distance to Berlin and the existence of two border crossings with Germany in the area.

The degree to which touristic values are used or shared is not highly rated. *“I would hesitate whether to rate the way they are used as barely sufficient or insufficient.”; “When it comes to landscapes, it’s just a pity. Pity that they are so rarely-used in this county.”* On the other hand, the respondents point out that such little tourism activity may still be seen as an advantage. *“You can show the lake here, with one canoe and beautiful nature.”*

As the respondents claim, the main reasons for poor utilisation of the assets lie in the poor awareness of the residents, which results from, among others, historical events. *“We brought our history here and we don’t really promote the history that was established here. (...) We’ve been here for 70 years. We do not have the history that would attract people to us.”* The respondents also state that the lack of interest in the use of assets results from the fact that they are ignored. *“They do not see them, perhaps they do not want to see. (...) They do not see, do not want to see and, maybe, they do not need it.”; “They are not appreciated by the residents, while they are more appreciated by Western tourists, here – Germans, and tourists from major cities.”; “The residents do not appreciate such sights as Geopark.”; “Those residents... do not appreciate the fact that Trzcińsko is so beautiful.”*

The foregoing phenomenon also applies to the employees of local government administration. *“There is just such a problem that even the employees of individual communes, including county residents, do not know what attractions they have here.”*

Some respondents themselves admit to have a low level of knowledge on the assets of the county. *“Because I simply do not even know what sights we have. Ashamed to admit it.”; “It’s about the Gryfino area because the rest of the county is unknown to me.”* The inhabitants’ low level of regional identity was emphasised by all the participants of the FGIs in both Moryń and Gryfino. This view is confirmed in the literature, as the inhabitants of Western Pomerania, who were relocated to the area after the Second World War, have still not formed their new territorial awareness (Leoński, 2003).

As the FGI participants emphasise, the promotion of tourism development in the county should be started from increasing the level of consciousness among its residents. *“It’s all about making the residents aware and instilling it in them, because we*

have to start from the residents, so that we may further promote, they must believe that it’s beautiful here, that it’s worth living here.” The issue of residents’ attitude towards the development of tourism is discussed by, among others, Williams et al. (1995). They state that those residents who reside in a particular area for a shorter period of time, more willingly identify with the natural values rather than the cultural ones. Therefore, it is believed that the promotional activities in the county of Gryfino should be firstly directed to the residents and emphasise the natural values. The issue of raising the residents’ awareness is connected with the question of the proper promotion of tourist sights which, in turn, affects the use of the county’s tourist potential. Unfortunately, the promotional activities are viewed as woefully inadequate. *“We have assets but we, sort of, do not have information on how to present them more broadly.”; “Also there is poor tourist information.”; “The promotion is like, I do not know what. Like from the underground. Here, someone will stop by a chance only because he or she was just passing. I don’t know. Because they saw the walls...?”* Quite a sad opinion may be the quintessence of these views. *“You have to get lost to come here.”*

The local government representatives’ assessment of the cooperation and coordination of activities is clearly very negative. The participants consider it to be a serious problem. *“This cooperation does not exist. We will really pickle ourselves in our own juice of some misunderstandings and lack of cooperation. We should talk about this because it is quite a serious problem.”; “There is no cooperation in simply promoting ourselves as Gryfino County.”; “Thinking about it, so that those communes of ours would not necessarily so much overlap, that is, consistency again, because it’s a pity. It could be staggered within the whole holiday period and we could entertain people in this way.”*

What is more, there is competition between the communes, rather than cooperation. This phenomenon is also very negatively perceived. *“There is no coordination in any activity, there is even competition.”; “It rarely happens that the communes work together, including in the field of tourism or promoting the sights for instance.”; “How to run a bicycle path across the communes’ borders? The rule is that they rather lead it to the borders and do not care about the rest, let the others worry.”*

The lack of trust on both sides is reported to constitute the basic problem in the cooperation between the tourism industry entrepreneurs and local government administration. *“There are often opportunities but neither the commune nor the environment of politicians have any confidence in the entrepreneurs.”; “The guesthouse owner was dealing on her own and is really great at it but only thanks to her own work. No support from the authorities.”; “If only there was such a systemic solution. Joint cooperation of offices and businesses. You could create one stand.”*

The entrepreneurs do not really expect help and are sceptical to cooperation. *“Nothing can I tell you as an entrepreneur. I have my own plans, objectives and I’m working on them, that’s all. I don’t cooperate with anyone. What I have to, I do.”* They conclude, however, that if such an initiative came from the local administration, they would gladly join the cooperation. *“And if only there was any cooperation with the commune, so that a tourist did not only come, stay or eat, but so that he or she would stay in the commune and travel around it.”*

The foregoing views were, above all, expressed by the entrepreneurs and representatives of NGOs, i.e. those most interested in the development of tourism. This is probably due to the expectation that the development of tourism industry may have a positive impact on residents’ living standards and to a sense of pride of living in a touristically attractive area. This aspect is mentioned by various authors (Harril, 2004; Wang et al., 2006; Andereck, Nyaupane, 2011; Hanafiah et al., 2013), who claim that, at the initial stage of tourism development, the attitudes of inhabitants are uniquely positive.

As the FGI participants state, it is the weakness of NGOs which work to promote tourism that mainly contributes to this non-beneficial cooperation. *“There are probably no longer any non-governmental organisations of tourism in the commune.”; “There are few NGOs working in our area. Generally, it is seen that there is a kind of stagnation in our society. People would want much but are not eager to give something.”; “The cooperation is all about money.”*

According to the respondents, the weakness of the non-governmental organizations results from, among others, their lack of awareness that tourism can be an important area of life in the coun-

ty of Gryfino. *“People here did not think of tourism at all. It seems to me that people do not even know that something could be created because, on the one hand, they are not interested and, on the other, is it not mentioned anywhere where they could find out about this.”*

If such organizations already exist and operate they: *“Are either weak, because their leaders act so on their own. When stronger, they begin their political wheeling and dealing. Who is more important here, instead of cooperating. Competition.”*

Non-governmental organizations, in turn, accuse the local authorities of their reluctance to cooperate. They also give some suggestions concerning the scope of cooperation. *“We invite the councillors, the mayor to attend the meetings of non-governmental organizations to talk about tourism. We get the response of a very noble silence.”; “We must constantly fight for attention as the council can help an activist and the activist can provide the council with some clues. Anyway, the cooperation is minimal and it should be better.”*

Despite all the foregoing problems and inadequacies within the cooperation of particular entities, the respondents call for the need for changes and coordination at the county level. *“There isn’t an organization that would sometimes convene these NGOs. So that this cooperation would not only be at the commune level, so that the documents at the county level and at the regional level would be created.”; “The county should definitely invest in it and work on the cooperation, the exchange of ideas and promotion of the region.”*

The above-presented opinions indicate that the entrepreneurs and NGO representatives believe that the level of public participation in the development of tourism is very low in the county of Gryfino. The significance of public participation in shaping tourism policy is clearly emphasised in the literature (Arnstein, 1969; Beunen, de Vries, 2011). What is crucial for the success of these activities is the increase in the activity on the social part in the creation and implementation of tourism development plans. Unfortunately, as some of the analysed area’s respondents claim, the authorities do not sufficiently understand this need.

The problem of public awareness was once more mentioned when assessing the role of tourism in the economy of the county. The respondents noted that

tourism development was conditioned by increasing the residents' awareness. *"There was no idea for the development of communes and regions in the direction of tourism."*; *"People here did not think of tourism at all. People simply saw their only provisions in these border crossing points."*; *"Absolute lack of awareness. Tourism is not treated as a business. It is not considered to be a source of income for the commune. It is seen as some annoying duties that you need to perform."*

The interviewees perceive large, though still untapped, economic potential in the tourism industry *"The problem is that there are much greater possibilities than what is happening right now in our county"*; *"Tourism is a great tool to help in the growth of personal wealth and the development of the county"*; *"It can be a tool to make money."*

They also indicate that tourism could constitute the major sector of the county economy. The optimistic scenarios for the development of tourism do not see an alternative. *"The only direction for future development is tourism"*; *"I think that our lands are aimed at developing tourism. We just have to go in that direction"*; *"We have to face up to it and I don't know whether that tourism should not occupy the first, second place in the hierarchy of those things which can simply bring us income"*; *"There is no turning back for the sites, because they are something to be proud of."*

There are also positive opinions among the people with more moderate opinions. *"The development of tourism is, by all means, proper"*; *"Tourism is a business"*; *"It could be a branch that is expected to generate some profits over the years."* Markovič and Klarič (2015), among others, emphasise a particularly positive perception of the economic importance of tourism in the areas with a low level of its development. Presented opinions clearly confirm that, when it comes to the county of Gryfino, tourism is at an early stage of development and is, therefore, seen as one of the most important factors to improve the quality of life.

In the opinion of the gathered respondents, some measurements to change the mentality of local communities should be taken. *"Now, the residents must believe, and then we may wonder which groups we want to attract, what kind of people we want to draw, but it also requires the total commitment of the residents."*

Education is mentioned as one of the proposed measures to increase the interest in tourism in the county. *"Because the residents sort of became the informants, guides of a commune. Because we still greatly lack the interest of the local people. It is only heading in this direction, but there is still too little education about those values provided for the local people."*

These opinions refer to the views represented in the literature that highlight the positive role of tourism in shaping territorial identity. This particularly applies to areas where tourism is poorly developed (Wang et al., 2006; Andereck, Nyaupane, 2010; Chandralal, 2010; Hanafiah et al., 2013).

The discussions resulted in some ideas on the basis of which segments of the tourism market could be most interested in coming to the county of Gryfino. The respondents indicate, among others, the day trippers of cognitive motivations. *"We will never have tourists staying for a few days. We have to focus on one-day tourists who come in a big number"*; *"In our commune these are usually one-day tourists and the castle of Swobnica is of increasing significance. There are more and more people from abroad."*

On the other hand, it is necessary to prepare a comprehensive offer for those interested in active tourism. *"The idea is that a tourist could spend this time in an active way"*; *"They would like to spend time actively. I do not know, probably canoes or something"*; *"We will not stop someone at a single rock, at one hill and, on the other hand, none of our communes has so many attractions to keep a tourist longer, for a week, two in one commune."*

Family tourism is mentioned as the third segment. *"I am convinced that, when considering such segments as e.g. family tourism, you can spend a few days here together with the children."*

The proposals submitted by the respondents abound in commonly known demands associated with promotion. *"One would have to reach to a wider group of those who might be interested in visiting such a place"*; *"We don't participate in tourism fairs enough. Too few materials, brochures"*. Some of the responses also involve ideas targeted at specific segments of the tourism market. *"We need to properly advertise, sell ourselves. Advertise in a modern way. In the trade press like Bike World or Bike."*

A heated debate considered such issues as the development of infrastructure and cooperation. The

biggest problem is the lack of “*Systemic coherent action that is needed to get it all together.*”; “*One could create the entire network of tourism infrastructure. Like we said, bike trails, culinary trails.*”; “*It seems to me that the creation of such a hiking trail can be beneficial for everyone. For the Commune and for us too, for the entrepreneurs.*”; “*We need the base and attractions.*”

Concluding the deliberations on the role of tourism in the economy of the county, the following view showing the essence of the problem may be presented. “*We have a situation of absolute stalemate and a vicious circle. There are no tourists, so there is no investment. There is no investment so there are no tourists.*” This conclusion confirms the earlier assertion that, as the respondents claim, the main problem in the development of tourism is poor cooperation between the stakeholders. Unfortunately, the chances for economic and social success are small without good cooperation between the government, business and NGOs (Arnstein, 1969; Beaumont, Dredge, 2010; Chandralal, 2010; Andreck, Nyuapane, 2011; Tucki et al., 2013).

4. Discussion of findings – confronting the existence of the tourist potential and social conditions

The analysis of the presented material prompts to provide answers to the research questions raised at the outset. Firstly, the county of Gryfino has numerous and significant tourist attractions of both nature and culture. Undoubtedly, the current tourism infrastructure, especially hotels, is not very well developed and does not allow the county to fully use the existing opportunities in receiving tourists. Furthermore, despite favourable external conditions resulting from the vicinity of large cities (Szczecin, Berlin), other tourist services are also not sufficiently developed. The reasons for this situation are mainly to be seen in the ambivalent attitudes of the residents who, on the one hand, perceive the tourist assets, especially those of a natural character but, on the other hand, do not want to see the assets of a cultural nature. These attitudes also result in a lack of cooperation between the authorities of individual communes and tourist entrepreneurs and NGOs.

This, in turn, adversely affects the development of tourism infrastructure and promotion of the particular communes.

There may be several reasons for such attitudes among residents. One of them is probably the fear of promoting tourist attractions that cannot be identified with the history of Poland, i.e. the history of the county’s current residents. As already mentioned, after the end of World War II, this region witnessed a complete replacement of the population. What is more, the Oder River, which had been the economic axis of the area, became a border river between Poland and Germany. The county residents claim that the areas west of the Oder are, in terms of tourism development, at a far more advanced stage. As the previously presented Doxey’s Irridex indicates, the evolution of the residents’ attitudes towards the development of tourism was interrupted on the east side of the Oder. The tourism infrastructure which existed in the area before and the social behaviour patterns have changed completely. It was not until 1989, i.e. the beginning of the profound socioeconomic changes in Poland, that the current county of Gryfino abandoned developing tourism whose aim was to establish the appropriate patriotic attitude of the new residents of these areas. It was inspired and controlled by the authorities and was to shape the regional identity of the new residents. As Leoński (2003) states, this was the way in which the so-called identity of the façade that is characterised by the detachment from reality and the need to be guided by external dictates, was created.

Due to the fact that after 1989, when Poland entered the path of free market economy and there was a shortage of political and administrative factors controlling tourism, the previous model of tourism development in the area collapsed. A new stage in the development of tourism was initiated and it continues till today. The residents are currently building their new identity and, therefore, their new attitudes towards tourism development are also in the process of formation. Referring to the opinion of Williams et al. (1995), it can be stated that the present residents identify with the tourist values of a natural character, rather than with the cultural ones. This situation is, however, undergoing some changes as evidenced by the positive statements on the cultural heritage given by some

FGI participants. Both the lovers of sightseeing and those born and raised in the area of successive generations of residents consider this part of the West Pomeranian Province as their 'little motherland'.

Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 constituted yet another factor contributing to the change in attitudes towards the existing assets and, hence, the development of tourism. The Oder between Poland and Germany slowly ceases to divide and more and more numerous common, cross-border cooperation initiatives are being set up. As a result, some new sections of the European thematic routes were delineated: the European Route of Gothic, the Cistercian Route and the Trails of the Knights Hospitallers and the Knights Templar. Owing to these actions, the attitudes of considering the existing cultural heritage of this area as a part of the cultural heritage of Europe are becoming increasingly visible among the residents. The European culture is our common heritage and thus it also characterises the current residents of Gryfino County.

What should, thus, be expected is that the area with such rich tourist assets will soon enter the path of tourism development and, with the proper operation of local authorities taking the interests of the local community into account, it will be tourism tailored to the specific circumstances of the natural and cultural values of the area.

In conclusion, one may notice that confronting the analysis results of the tourism potential and the residents' attitudes towards the development of tourism on the example of the county of Gryfino, as well as applying the method of FGI, allowed for an in-depth analysis of the problem and showed the adequacy of the application of the presented research approach.

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