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THE TOURISM FUNCTION OF THE CASTLES OF THE KNIGHTS
OF THE TEUTONIC ORDER IN POLAND

Abstract: The author’s main objective is to define the level of development of the tourism function of the Teutonic Order castles found in the area of contemporary Poland. The author has taken into account both well-preserved and renovated castles, as well as those in a state of ruin. In order to achieve his goal, he analysed forms of castle development and numbers of tourists, which is the main measure of the tourism function. The final stage of the research was to define the tourism rank of the castles studied.

Key words: castle, museum, hotel, tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem, popularly called the Knights of the Teutonic Order (the German Order) arrived in the territory of Poland in the 1320s. Through armed conquests, diplomacy and commerce, the Knights founded a powerful state, spreading north to the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. The conquered lands and the territory of Warmia were covered with a network of castles with administrative, economic, military and cultural functions, as well as symbolizing the new power. At present, due to their number and concentration, they are compared to the Chateaux of the Loire Valley or the castles on the Rhine, perhaps a slight overstatement. Regardless of their condition and the way they are used today, the old strongholds are very interesting from a tourism point of view.

Academic research on castles in Poland started over 200 years ago (ARSZYŃSKI 1995). So far, however, the main focus has been the historical, architectonic and conservation aspects. A considerably smaller number of publications present the transformations and functions of the castles after the Second World War. Researchers also seem to be taking less interest in the tourism issues of the castles.


The use of the medieval military cultural heritage for tourism purposes has been studied by other Polish researchers as well. The attractiveness of medieval castles was studied by A. SZWICHTENBERG (2002) and A. MIKOS VON ROHRScheidT in 2010, who were joined by JĘDRYSISAK in 2011. Research into the importance of Teutonic Knights’ and bishops’ strongholds was undertaken by M. DASZKOWSKA (2002), E. PIEKARSKA (2002), M. GULDA & K. MAROSZEK (2002) and others, in order to promote Polish national and regional tourism. The author believes that a comprehensive study of the tourism function of monastic and church castles in Poland is still to be written.

2. THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL RANGE OF RESEARCH; THE NUMBER OF CASTLES

The article presents the results of research into the castles situated on the territory of the former monastic state and Warmia, within the borders of contemporary Poland. Nowadays, this territory belongs to three voivodeships: Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Pomorskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie (about 50 000 km²). Primary and secondary collection of data included the period...
from June to September 2013, but references were also made to the author’s earlier work from 2007-12. The time range of the data collected on visits to the castles covers the period from 1945 (the castle in Olsztyn) to July 2013. The author refers only to a part of the material collected.

The exact number of monastic, bishops’ and chapter house defensive buildings in this area is difficult to define. A significant number of castles ceased to exist at different historical periods, and others have fallen into ruin. According to M. ARSZYŃSKI (2000, pp. 40-42), the number of castles in the area of the former monastic state and Warmia was ‘well over 100’ (Fig. 1). P. ZANIEWSKI (2005) quotes a number of 120, and BIESZK (2010, p. 9) lists over 160 Teutonic Knights’ castles and 24 others, administered by bishops and chapters. The highest density is recorded in the Chełm district (Land), as this area was the supply hinterland for battles with Poland, both defensive and offensive. There are three times more castles here than in other areas.

Due to the analysis of the condition and development of castles, 25 have been identified which have the function of hotel or museum. Given the number of castles quoted by P. ZANIEWSKI (2005), it can be concluded that they make up nearly one fifth of all the strongholds from the former monastic state.

3. THE CONDITION OF THE CASTLES

Despite their turbulent history, some castles of the former monastic state still exist and have a variety of functions: cultural, educational, administrative, judicial, or even sacred. At present, the tourism function of many castles is also extremely significant. The factors which influence its development, as well as the tourism attractiveness of a castle, may be divided into external and internal (independent of and depending on the features of a given building). The former include geographical location, accessibility,
the proximity of other castles, natural and human assets of the surroundings and available infrastructure. Apart from the history, legal status, building management policy and form of ownership, the internal factors, which decide the development of the tourism function, include state of conservation and type of development (including tourism development).

The author focuses on castles which, as accommodation, catering and museum facilities, have a tourism function. Considerably less attention is devoted to castles in a state of ruin, or remnants of castles, or buildings erected on castle foundations.

Without going into a terminological discussion in the field of archaeology, architecture and historical monument conservation, the author divides castles into two groups, according to their state of conservation:

- buildings in ruin,
- preserved, reconstructed and partly or completely rebuilt buildings.

As regards the type of tourism development, the second group consists of buildings:

- with a simple, uni-directional type of development, functioning as hotels or museums,
- with a complex type of development, having at least two functions.

The majority of the monastic and Warmian bishops’ castles have not survived intact. However, castles in a state of ruin may have an important tourism function, like the one in Radzyń Chełmiński, which is among the most distinctive Teutonic Order castles in Poland. Another example is the less impressive ruin of the Komtur's castle in Toruń. The stronghold is the oldest (1255-1300) brick castle built by the Knights of the Teutonic Order in this part of Europe (GUERQUIN 1984, p. 311). Other castle ruins which are tourism attractions can be found in Szymbark, Prabuty, Papowo Biskupie, Kurzętnik, Lubawa and many other destinations. The actual tourism function of castle ruins is difficult to define, due to the lack of tourism records; apart from Radzyń Chełmiński and Toruń, records on tourism are not taken.

Apart from the size of the building, its visual attractiveness and the condition, the accessibility of the ruins is equally important. Some of them, no matter whether they are private property (like in Szymbark) or belong to the state (e.g. in Grudziądz) are undeveloped and freely accessible to the public, unlike others, such as the tower of the former castle in Braniewo.

4. CASTLES DEVELOPMENT

Well-preserved or rebuilt buildings are a much greater tourism attraction. From the tourism point of view, the most significant are the castles adapted as museums or hotels. The castles which are completely or in a greater part turned into museums include Malbork, Kwidzyn, Olsztyn, Lidzbark Warmiński, Kętrzyn, Świecie, Brodnica and Człuchów strongholds. The other group consists of castles where museums are next to other forms of development: Reszel\textsuperscript{2}, Gniew, Golub-Dobrzyń, Nidzica and Ostróda. There are also castles which accommodate small and very small museums, or even single exhibition rooms, like in Nowe, Sztum, Skarszewy or Pasłęk.

![Fig. 2. Castles by their use](image)

This group of buildings includes the hotel at Ryn Castle which can be visited with a guide, as well as small castles or a part of them, which are at the same time inhabited by their owners (Morąg and Przezmark).

In the case of castles having a hotel function, two groups were distinguished: large, high standard, four-star hotels, which occupy the whole or the greater part of the castles, and small or medium-sized hotels of a lower standard (usually two-three stars). The first group includes: Ryn\textsuperscript{3}, Gniew (Knight’s Hotel, Marysieika Palace, and the premises of a youth hostel dormitory, Hunter’s Palace), Lidzbark Warmiński (the hotel is situated in the castle grounds) and Giżycko. They are new (Ryn, Giżycko and Lidzbark Warmiński) or have re-opened after major refurbishment and reconstruction (Gniew). The castles in Gniew and Ryn are huge hotel complexes, which consist of the main building and others of varying standards. The other group in the castles in Bytów, Nidzica, Golub-Dobrzyń\textsuperscript{4} and Reszel, cannot compete with the former group, neither as regards the size, nor the standard and range of services.
Before 2012, there was a hotel in Malbork Castle, but it was closed due to the lease-holder’s financial problems. There are plans to re-open it after refurbishment.

It seems that the hotel market in the castles of northern Poland (especially in large buildings) is slowly filling. However, there is a group of castles which may try to enter the hotel market in the future after necessary refurbishment and adaptation. These are the castles in Węgorzewo, Barciany and Elk. At present, they are private property and access to them is difficult.
Tourists are also interested in castles adapted to non-tourism purposes, like those in Bierzgłów, which is a Diocesan Culture Centre, a building on the premises of the former Lębork Castle, which accommodates the court of justice, the castle in Działdowo, used by the city council, or the castle in Olsztyn, which has been turned into a school. It seems that interest in this type of building is rather small and, apart from ‘incidental tourists’, Middle Ages enthusiasts rather than ‘mass tourists’.

At this point, we should mention the issue of castle ownership. The majority of castles (14) belong to local government at different levels, a further five are private property, four belong to the state, and the buildings on the cathedral hill in Frombork belong to the Warmia Chapter. A separate example is Lidzbark Warmiński, where the castle belongs to the local government and the castle grounds are private property.

5. TOURISM VOLUME

The author limited his analysis of tourism to its volume, which is the measure most reliably defining the tourism significance of the studied buildings. Analysis of seasonality and tourist motivation was not conducted. More information on tourism in Teutonic Order and bishops’ castles may be found in the works by J. KOSTRZEWIA (1991), Ł. MUSIAKA (2007, 2012, 2013) or M. KUSZTAL (2008).

5.1. MUSEUMS

As regards the number of tourists, museums accommodated in castles can be divided into several groups: the largest, very large, large, medium-sized and small (cf. Table 1). The ‘largest’ museums are the Castle Museum in Malbork and the Nicolaus Copernicus Museum in Frombork. In Malbork, the mean annual number of visitors in the last 16 years has been 434,600, but since the museum was opened in 1961 the number has even exceeded half a million. In 1999-2011, the average number of visitors in Frombork was about 130,000 a year.

The next group consists of ‘very large’ museums: Olsztyn, Toruń, Golub-Dobrzyn, Lidzbark Warmiński and Bytów. The number of the tickets sold there varies from 45,500 in Olsztyn to 21,100 in Bytów.

There are ‘large’ museums in Gniew (24,300 visitors a year, on average), Kętrzyn (about 15,800) and Nidzica (12,600). We may also include Ryn in this group where the average number of tourists visiting the castle with a guide has been 16,100 annually since the castle was opened to the public. Perhaps this group should also include the museum in Człuchów, opened in May 2013, which was visited by 18,900 between May and 25th August. After such a short time it is difficult to ascribe the museum to any specific group.

‘Small’ museums includes those in Brodnica, Radzyń Chełmiński, Ostróda Nowe, Sztum, Przezmark, Skarszewy and Pasłę. The number of visitors there oscillates between nearly 11,000 in Brodnica, less than 1000 in Nidzica and 276 in the ‘History Chamber’ run by the public library in Pasłę.

A separate case is the castle in Reszel, where apart from the art gallery, tickets are sold to visit the castle tower (unlike a museum, it does not have any special exhibitions). The average number of tickets sold in 2006-8 was 46,700, which would allow us to include Reszel in the ‘very large’ category. Unfortunately, no records are being kept at present as regards the number of visitors.

5.2. HOTELS

As regards hotel facilities, the collected data is much more modest, which is caused by the fact that private owners are reluctant to provide information (Nidzica, Bytów) or because hotels have been functioning for a very short time (Lidzbark Warmiński and Gżycko).

Hotels accommodated in castles have been divided into three groups with regard to the number of guests. The group of ‘large’ hotels includes Ryn (41,600 guests annually, on average), Gżycko (over 19,700 guests in the first year), Lidzbark Warmiński (16,900) and Gniew, where all the buildings in the castle complex accommodated over 15,000 people in 2012. ‘Medium’, where the number of guests is about 5,000 a year, includes Bytów and Nidzica. ‘Small’ includes Golub Castle (over 3,600 guests in 2012) and Kreativ Hotel at Reszel Castle, with an average of 2,700 guests a year (Table 2).

The employees and managers of some of the castles claim that in recent years they have observed a decrease in the total number of tourists. The main reason seems to be the general economic crisis and less available disposable income.

The poorer situation in the hotel business is not always demonstrated by a falling number of guests. It may also show in the smaller number and variety of services purchased by customers. Regardless of the economic situation, in the near future we should expect considerable competition among the castles in Gniew, Gżycko, Ryn and Lidzbark Warmiński (the latter two belong to one owner).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Malbork</th>
<th>Olsztyn</th>
<th>Reszel</th>
<th>Toruń</th>
<th>Golub-Dobrzyń</th>
<th>Lidzbark Warmiński</th>
<th>Bytów</th>
<th>Gniew</th>
<th>Kętrzyn</th>
<th>Ryn</th>
<th>Kwidzyn</th>
<th>Nidzica</th>
<th>Brodnica</th>
<th>Ostróda</th>
<th>Świecie</th>
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<td>nd</td>
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<td>nd</td>
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<td>23 200</td>
<td>14 233</td>
<td>nd</td>
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<td>nd</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>28 459</td>
<td>30 581</td>
<td>25 707</td>
<td>14 200</td>
<td>not app</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>6 800</td>
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<td>26 561</td>
<td>18 119</td>
<td>16 224</td>
<td>not app</td>
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<td>nd</td>
<td>14 420</td>
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<td>nd</td>
<td>nd</td>
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<td>26 076</td>
<td>18 637</td>
<td>12 115</td>
<td>not app</td>
<td>22 370</td>
<td>12 330</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>11 417</td>
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<td>19 074</td>
<td>15 648</td>
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<td>6 537</td>
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<td>49 611</td>
<td>3 461</td>
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<td>23 989</td>
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<td>14 400</td>
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<td>37 680</td>
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<td>7 642</td>
<td>7 033</td>
<td>4 732</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Number of tickets sold at selected museums in the studied castles of the former Teutonic Order state on the territory of Poland in 1998-2012

**Key:** nd – no data, not app – not applicable (opened at a later time), *source: KUSZTAL (2008). The table does not contain information about the museums in Człuchów (open in May 2013) and Frombork (the author did not obtain details), while in the case of Reszel, in 2006-8, apart from the number of tickets to the modern art gallery, the author quotes the number of tickets sold to the castle tower (quoted in brackets). At present ticket records are not kept.

*Source: author’s compilation based on the collected data*
Figure 3 presents tourism in the castles studied recorded in 2012. A part of the data is approximate, others should not be generalized because there is a risk that the same visitors might be counted twice (e.g. those who both visit the museum and stay at the hotel). However, the data sufficient to present the scale of the phenomenon. The overall documented number of tourists in the castles was about one million in 2012. It is a substantial number, but it certainly does not reflect the whole situation. The total number of persons visiting the castles is difficult to establish and is usually larger that the one quoted by museum or hotel statistics. This is due to many factors, such as free access to the courtyard of the majority of castles, unregistered cultural and entertainment events, local inhabitants taking part in events held in the castles or using libraries, culture clubs, etc. The assumption that castles are visited by a much larger number of people than the one shown in official records (despite the double counting of the same people in some cases) is confirmed for Kostrzyn Castle. The museum employees estimated the total number of visitors in 2005 at 40,000, while the number of tickets sold in the same period was only 17,164 and the number of other visitors was about 1500. The number quoted by the museum staff is then twice as large as the official one.

Employees of the Gniew Castle Foundation, which no longer exists, estimated the number of visitors in 2012, before selling the castle, at 80-100,000 annually.

6. TERRITORIAL ORIGINS OF TOURISTS

As regards the territorial origins of tourists and visitors, museum managers and employees most often mentioned the following voivodeships: Pomorskie, Mazowieckie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Wielkopolskie and śląskie. The remaining areas of Poland were also represented, but to a smaller degree. Visitors and tourists can be divided into two
groups: the first includes the inhabitants of large cities, such as Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Kraków and Upper Silesia who travel during summer holidays to the Baltic Sea and to the lake districts. The other group includes those coming from the Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeships (the study area) themselves. Apart from regular tourists, there are records of school excursions and those visiting castles on the occasion of various entertainments, historical or cultural events.

As regards the hotels, we can observe a clear dominance of people coming from the Mazowieckie voivodeship, mainly Warsaw and its vicinity. This is caused by the great number of business clients who have their companies in the capital city and are looking for attractive places to do business, conference venues, etc. The demand for this sort of service, however smaller, is also generated by the Trójmiasto area. Other large cities in the region, such as Olsztyn or Bydgoszcz, play a considerably smaller role.

![Fig. 4. The origins of tourists in selected castles and towns in Poland, by voivodeship](source: Ł. MUSIKA (2012))

Domestic and foreign individual guests are attracted by interesting theme packages and, in some cases, price discounts, which in a way ‘spoil the market’. This concerns mainly luxurious hotels. Fig. 4 presents the territorial origins of Polish tourists (603), visiting six selected castles and places in the study area on the basis of the research conducted by the author while writing his MA thesis (MUSIKA 2012, 2013).

When it comes to foreign tourists, the museums were most frequently visited by Germans and those from German-speaking countries, from Russia, Great Britain and English-speaking countries, Lithuania, Scandinavia and Ukraine. The share of foreign tourists usually does not exceed a small percentage of all tourists. An exception is the Castle Museum in Malbork, where in recent years it was about 20%. This is also where German-speaking visitors predominate, but the status of the castle, the fact that it has been put on the UNESCO World Heritage List (since 1997), and multi-lingual guides attract guests from every corner of the world.

Hotels are also used mostly by Germans, as well as by tourists from Great Britain, Russia and Lithuania. The domination of German tourists results mainly from historical (the area of former Prussia), personal (descendants of those displaced after the Second World War as well as original inhabitants), and economic reasons (the chance to rest in a naturally and culturally attractive region for a relatively low price, within close distance of Germany).

The collected materials confirm the earlier results of research conducted by the author (MUSIKA 2007, 2012), J. KOSTRZEWA (1991) and M. KUSZTAL (2008).

### 7. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the collected data concerning tourism in the medieval castles of the Teutonic Order made it possible to define the tourism significance of the studied buildings. The author suggested a division into castles of local, ‘supra-local’, regional, national and international importance (Table 3).

The number of visitors to individual castles (cf. Table 1 and 2) and the total numbers of tourists lets us conclude that they are a very important element of Polish tourism, which, unfortunately, has not been fully used. Their significance can be seen in the newly opened castle hotels and museums, the increasing number of hotel guests and museum visitors, as well as the refurbishment and reconstruction of former strongholds accompanied by functional and ownership transformations which aim at adapting the castles for tourism and economic purposes.

The author believes that the main obstacle to the development of the tourism function of medieval castles in northern Poland is not their poor state of...
repair or finances, but the fact that people are not aware of their valuable national heritage, have no ideas how to take advantage of it and are generally unwilling to take action. In order for monastic and bishops’ castles to become a real tourism product, cooperation at the local, regional and national levels, going beyond the products offered so far, such as tours in Gothic castles (NAROZNIAK 2002) or the castles of Lower Pwisle.

**FOOTNOTES**

1 For comparison, Zanievski (2005) quotes a number of over 800 brick defensive castles built between the 13th and 17th c, identified on the territory of Poland. About 200 of them were preserved in near-original state, and further 200 are in ruins.

2 Reszel Castle accommodates a contemporary art gallery, a branch of the Warmia and Mazury Museum in Olsztyn.

3 Ryn Castle Hotel and Krasicki Hotel in Lidzbark Warmiński belong to the same owner – the Anders Group - which owns hotels and restaurants in the Warmia and Mazury region. The hotel is not categorised.

4 The hotel is not categorised.

5 Despite the fact that the cathedral in Frombork is not a classic castle, many researchers treat it as a military establishment due to the strong fortifications of the cathedral hill.

6 All the mean values of the tourism volume for hotels and museums were calculated on the basis of the maximum period data which the author had access to at each.

7 Perhaps the hotel at Golub Castle may be classified as medium-sized, but the collected data concern only 2012.

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