

MILITARY AND POLITICAL TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN THE CITY OF GDAŃSK

Paul PANTEA 

University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, 1 Universităţii Street, 410087,
Oradea, Bihor, Romania, e-mail: pantea.paul@student.uoradea.ro

Geraldine ŞOTAN-PETYKE 

University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, 1 Universităţii Street, 410087,
Oradea, Bihor, Romania, e-mail: sotanpetyke.geraldine@student.uoradea.ro

Daria-Maria CRIŞAN 

University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, 1 Universităţii Street, 410087,
Oradea, Bihor, Romania, e-mail: crisan.dariamaria@student.uoradea.ro

Jan A. WENDT  *

University of Gdańsk, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Jana
Bażyńskiego str. 4, 80-309 Gdańsk, Poland, e-mail: jan.wendt@ug.edu.pl

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Abstract: Military tourism is an atypical and recent form of tourism that is not sufficiently researched in the city of Gdańsk, northern Poland. However, the interest surrounding this phenomenon has been growing, which indicates the possibility of further development of military and political tourism in the area. The aim of this research is to present the major touristic attractions and to analyse the tourist traffic that play an important role in the overall development of military and political tourism in the city. The study is focusing on the following attractions: the Museum of the Second World War, Westerplatte and the European Solidarity Centre, as well as analysing the tourist flow.

Key words: military tourism, political tourism, museum, war, Poland, Gdańsk

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INTRODUCTION

Gdańsk, a city with over a thousand years of history, is known primarily for its historical values, as the center of processing and trade in amber products and the city of "Solidarity". But it is also the city where it is believed that the first

* Corresponding Author

shots starting World War II were fired. Almost eighty-five years have passed since the beginning of the Second World War (II WW) when on 1st September 1939 Nazi Germany invaded Poland followed by the official annexation of the Free City of Gdańsk the next day. Nowadays many people are interested in preserving and presenting the knowledge, lives, struggles and triumphs of those who lived in those times. The city of Gdańsk is one of the major attractions that tourists look for to experience the great emotional load of the past and to pay respects to those who are no longer among the living. Although many museums can be found in Gdańsk that actively contribute to the development of tourism in the area and its economic growth (Wojtowicz-Jankowska, 2017; Manikowska and Jakubowski, 2021), few of these attractions are part of the atypical form of military and political tourism.

Military tourism has developed into a broad trend of historical tourism (Hacker and Vining, 2021), history of wars and battles (Weaver, 2011; Venter, 2011; Zavarika, 2022), cultural and heritage tourism (Cooper, 2007; Zwigenberg, 2016; Venter, 2017; Mateus et al., 2023).

Due to historical events, there are many places in Poland that allow the development of military tourism (Jędrysiak and Mikos von Rohrscheidt, 2011). Defensive fortifications, bunkers, battlefields and numerous museums create numerous opportunities for the development of this relatively new sector of tourist services (Poczta, 2008; Lawin and Stasiak, 2009; Wendt, 2011). This is important due to the fact that tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy (Mikos von Rohrscheidt, 2011; Chylińska, 2013; Ilieş and Wendt, 2015; Herman et al., 2023, 2024), and military tourism fits well into the forms of sustainable tourism (Zaraş-Januszkiewicz et al., 2020; Hattingh and Crisp, 2023). What is also important, military tourism is becoming more and more popular among visitors. This increase in interest is largely due to the change in the modern understanding of tourism (Wendt, 2018, 2020), a large number of historical and military facilities and the creation of military-themed events that are becoming increasingly popular (Hrusovsky and Noeres, 2011). There is already a relatively large amount of scientific literature on Polish military and political tourism (Mikos von Rohrscheidt, 2009; Bończk, 2013; Zienkiewicz and Podciborski, 2019; Chylińska and Musiaka, 2020; Drobnák et al., 2022), but there are not many studies on northern Poland (Zienkiewicz et al., 2021). Previous studies mainly point to the niche importance and market share of such forms of tourism. They focus on the description of the values used in military tourism and their importance in history, education, local and regional development (Stach et al., 2014; Zgłobicki et al., 2016; Sadowski, 2016; Podciborski et al., 2023).

Military tourism covers a wide spectrum of values. Based on the literature (Kowalczyk, 2009; Stach, 2013), they include: historical military routes, fortification lines, military museums, individual military facilities, exhibitions and military collections. For obvious reasons, all the values indicated above are the result of historical events and political decisions, which leads to the conclusion that military tourism is related to cultural tourism, historical tourism and "political" tourism (Wendt et al., 2021; Mikhaylova et al., 2022). The latter can be described as an interest in learning about events/objects/museums in recent history that influence contemporary politics. There is nothing new in this statement, accounts of recent history and politics have a very rich literature (Friedman and Kenney, 2005; Lawson and Hobson, 2008). However, from the

point of view of the classification of tourism, it seems appropriate to point out differences in the field of military tourism between, for example, visiting the Wisłujście Fortress Museum (beginning of construction in the 15th century) and a stay at the European Solidarity Center (ECS, founded in 2007). "Solidarity" - a great Polish social movement (1980s), pacified by the army after the introduction of martial law in Poland. Similarly, the Polish military outpost at Westerplatte, in the former Free City, apart from the military material depot, had political significance for all parties involved in the realities of Gdańsk at that time, including primarily the Free City, the League of Nations, Germany and Poland (Bógdał-Brzezińska and Wendt, 2020).

The aim of the research undertaken is to confirm the increased interest in visiting selected facilities during free days in Poland (the so-called May long weekend); assessment of age and gender diversity of tourists and comparison of the attractiveness of three selected facilities in relation to their transport accessibility. The following hypotheses will be verified:

H1 long May weekend favors an increase in the number of visitors.

H2 military and political facilities are more popular with men than women.

H3 military facilities are more popular than ECS facilities.

H4 Greater tourist traffic is recorded in facilities with greater transport accessibility than in facilities that are more difficult to reach.

METHODS

The research methods and techniques used in this study had been selected to best fit the unique research problem and the subsequent scarcity of data sources (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2018). The methodology of the study included several stages.

Researching the project and selecting suitable attractions. This stage consisted of researching the subject of military / political tourism and identifying important attractions related to the city of Gdańsk.

Reviewing relevant literature and documents to aid in identifying the state of military / political tourism in the region. In order to determine the subject matter of the present article, an analysis of literature was undertaken in terms of issues related to military / political tourism and its development.

Collecting and analysing source data. The main obstacle of the research was obtaining information on museum resources as well as statistical data for monitoring the volume of tourist traffic. The information used in this article was gathered through field observations, photographs, interviews with visitors and direct contact with museum employees and staff, which proved to be a very valuable source of information.

Three tourist attractions in Gdańsk were selected to analyze tourist traffic and verify the research hypotheses. A classic military museum, the Museum of the Second World War (Machcewicz, 2019), the Westerplatte facilities, where there is a monument dedicated to the defenders of the Polish Transit Depot and the remains of the fortification system (military aspect), and on the other hand it is a place known for the outbreak of World War II (Samól et al., 2023) and the stay of Pope John Paul II and numerous international meetings of politicians on the anniversaries of the outbreak of the war, as well as a classic attraction with a political dimension - the European Solidarity Center (ECS).

The research was conducted for three weeks, before the long weekend in Poland (25/04/2024), during the long weekend (02/05) and after its end

(09/05). The long weekend is a specific period of free time in Poland resulting from two days off each year, which in Poland are May 1 (day off, Labor Day) and May 3 (Constitution Day). In 2024, two public holidays (01/05; 03/05) with free Saturdays (27/04; 04/05) and Sundays (28/04; 04/05) with three days of leave (29/04; 04/05; 30/04; 02/05) allow you to create a nine-day "long weekend" that can be used for rest or a tourist trip. The students conducted the research during two hours, through direct observation, in a way that allowed for comparison of results.

MILITARY MUSEUMS AND EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE (ECS)

Military tourism is a segment of the tourism industry known to attract a large flow of visitors, influencing the way they view certain events from the past, as well as being repositories for knowledge and by preserving historical resources and memories for future generations. Military bases and facilities, former battlefields and war theatres, museums, exhibitions and memorials play a special role in social life due to their vast collections of military artefacts, models, equipment, archives, documents, photographs, etc. that hold educational and historical value.

This study has selected a few attractions that qualify as important facilities for the development of military and political tourism in the city of Gdańsk:

The Museum of the Second World War (Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku) was opened in 2016 and represents a grand addition to the northern waterfront of the city, at the confluence of the Radunia River and Motława River canals. The modern building of the museum takes up 23.000 square metres and the main exhibition, considered one of the most extensive in the world, covers almost 5.000 square metres and is located in the basement of the building. The exhibition traces the fate of Poland and its people during the world's greatest conflict, comprised of three narrative sectors: „The Road to War”, „The Terror of War” and „The Long Shadow of War”, further divided into eighteen sections arranged in chronological order.

The European Solidarity Centre (Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, ECS) is another important cultural building that was opened in 2014 and is situated in Śródmieście district, at Solidarity Square (Plac Solidarności) and in the vicinity of Gate No. 2 (Brama nr 2 Stoczni Gdańskiej) and the Three Crosses Monument, all related to the Solidarity Movement (Kołtan and Konarowska, 2014). The building resembles a massive, weathered hull of a ship docked near the legendary gate leading to the Gdansk Shipyard. The interior is reminiscent of a large hall with crane guiding structures and houses the main exhibition devoted to the history of Solidarność, the Polish Shipyard Trade Union, civil resistance movement and other movements that played key roles in the process of defeating communism in Poland and other Eastern European countries, which are all presented in an interactive manner. The European Solidarity Centre also contains a library with a reading room soring 100.000 volumes, a multimedia library, a multifunction room for 430 listeners, archives with the capacity to store over 40.000 files, a server room, research and science centre, education and training centre as well as creative workshop laboratories.

Westerplatte is perhaps the most famous peninsula in Poland located on the costal mouth of the Dead Vistula (Martwa Wisła), in Gdańsk harbour channel. It is the place of heroic resistance of the Polish garrison, a handful of soldiers who opposed the German invaders during the Battle of Westerplatte that began on 1st September 1939 and lasted until 7th September.

It had a significant impact on Polish morale, bringing unity and national pride to all who faced overwhelming odds. The resilience and bravery of the Polish soldiers displayed during the battle soon became a symbol of hope for the entire nation. This battle marks the official beginning of the Second World War.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in this study has been gathered during a period of three weeks, on certain days, which are 25th April, 2nd May and 9th May, however due to the considerable variations in the behaviour of individual tourists, weather conditions, holidays and the general scarcity of statistical data and reliable sources, the authors had to rely on studying the tourist flow, counting the number of visitors, as well as sorting and dividing them into age and gender groups. Eventually, enough data has been collected and processed so that graphs, tables comparisons and conclusions can be made with said data.

Table 1. The number of tourists that visited the military and political tourism attractions

Name of the attraction	Date	Total	Age			Genders	
			0-18 yrs.	19-65 yrs.	65+ yrs.	Female	Male
European Solidarity Centre	25.04	116	6	97	13	44	72
	02.05	127	18	82	27	59	68
	09.05	315	15	269	31	154	161
Museum of the Second World War	25.04	289	80	181	28	139	150
	02.05	264	57	176	31	152	112
	09.05	432	132	257	43	223	209
Westerplatte	25.04	135	53	77	5	56	79
	02.05	244	41	191	12	128	116
	09.05	519	264	238	17	265	254

Using the information presented in Table 1 the authors have constructed several graphs to aid in the visualisation of the tourist flow at each of the main attraction relevant to the subject of military and political tourism.

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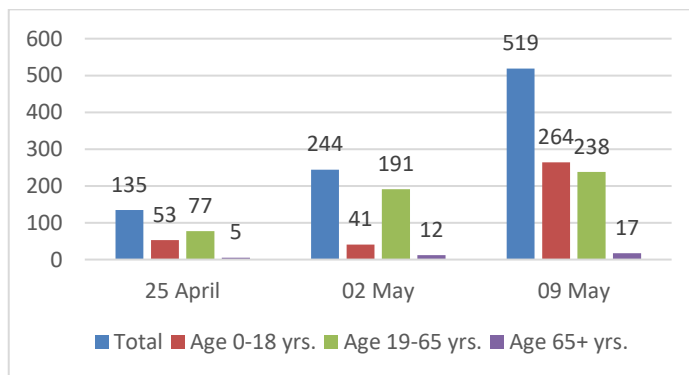


Figure 1. Number of visitors at the European Solidarity Centre

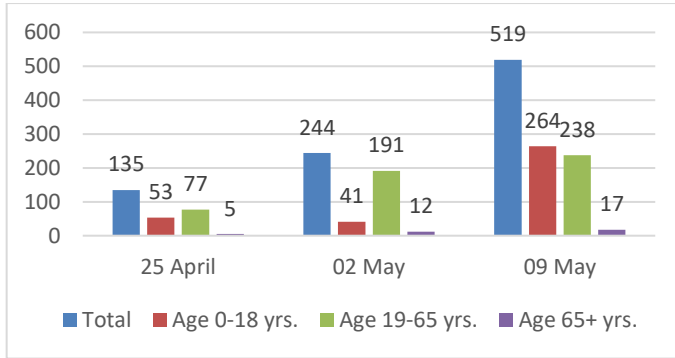


Figure 2. Number of visitors at the Museum of the Second World War

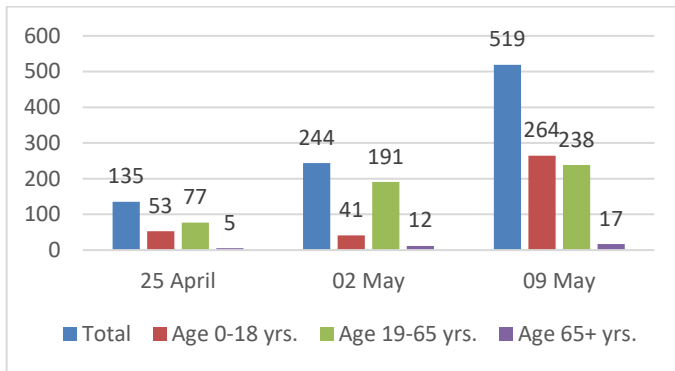


Figure 3. Number of visitors at Westerplatte

Studying the data from Figures 1-3 it can be concluded that the busiest day for all three attractions was 9th May, mostly because of fair weather suitable for tourism. Also, it can be observed that many visitors seen at all three of the locations are between the ages of 18 to 65, however the second highest number of visitors are part of the 0 to 18 age group, and the least visitors recorded are elderly of 65+ years.

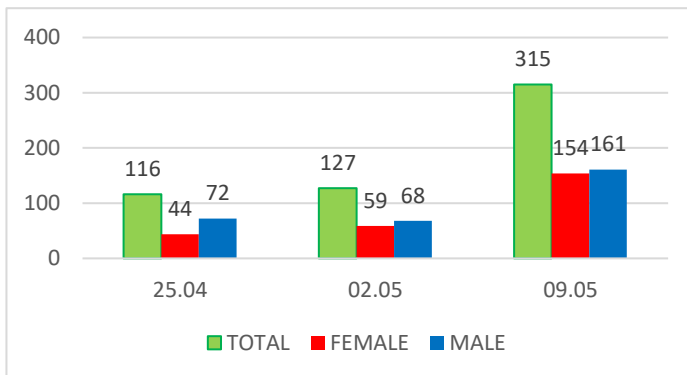


Figure 4. Visitors at the European Solidarity Centre

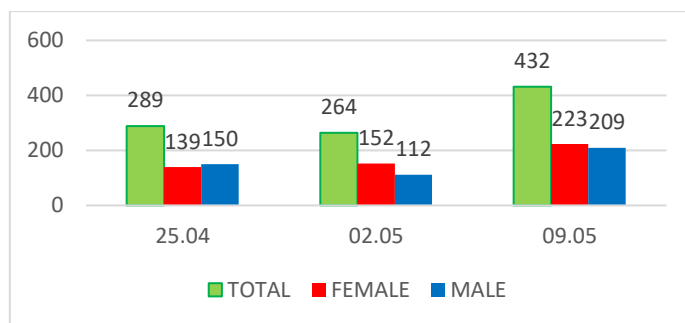


Figure 5. Visitors at the Museum of the Second World War

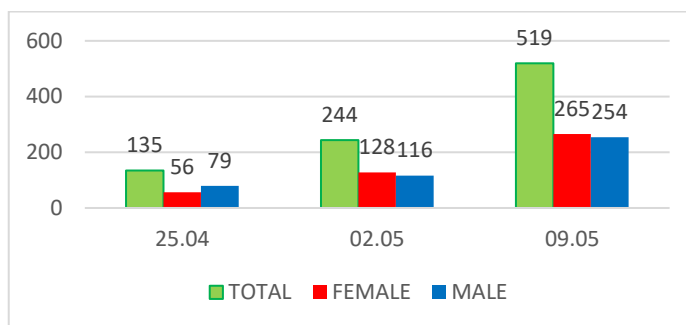


Figure 6. Visitors at Westerplatte

According to the analysis of the number of tourists, the May long weekend was not characterized by the highest tourist traffic. Before the long weekend, tourist traffic in the surveyed facilities was the lowest, during the weekend there was an increase in the number of tourists, but the largest number of people visiting selected attractions took place after the long weekend. This is probably the result of potential tourists deciding to go on a longer trip, most often abroad, in order to make the most of the long weekend. However, this explanation requires verification and additional research. Therefore, it can be said that H1 has been verified negatively.

According to the data represented by the graphs in Figures 4-6 the difference between the number of female visitors and male visitors at any of the attractions is not large, only a few dozen people. However, during 25th April the majority of visitors at any of the locations were males, perhaps caused by the not so favourable weather of that day, that is only a speculation and it could be the cause of other factors. Similar to the other set of data that sorted the number of visitors by age groups, it can be observed that the busiest day is once more 9th May, with the majority of visitors being female. Which negatively verifies H2.

However, another research hypothesis (H3) was positively verified. In total, the largest number of people visited the Museum of the Second World War (985), in second place was Westerplatte with a slightly smaller number of tourists (898), and in third place was the European Solidarity Center, which was visited by 558 people on the examined days and hours.

Analysing the complete set of data divided into different categories offers some valuable information on the tourist traffic and its preferences, as well as aiding in identifying the most popular military tourism destination in the city of Gdańsk. By far the most popular destination is the Museum of the Second World

War with over 985 visitors, but it is also a favourite among the adult population between the ages of 18 to 65 years. The next most visited attraction was Westerplatte with 898 tourists walking on the famous peninsula, fascinating many youngsters and adults alike. Surprisingly, the least visited location was the European Solidarity Centre with only 558 visitors crossing its threshold, but that does not mean it is not an important location, quite the opposite in fact.

The last hypothesis (H4), according to which higher tourist traffic is recorded in facilities with greater transport accessibility than in facilities that are more difficult to reach, was only partially positively verified. The Museum of the Second World War was the most popular and is located in the city center. However, the European Solidarity Center, located close to the Second World War Museum, had the lowest number of tourists in the period under study. In turn, Westerplatte, located in a place requiring a long commute from the center of Gdańsk, had a larger number of visitors than ECS located in the city center.

CONCLUSION

Military tourism is a segment of the tourist industry that is rapidly growing in the city of Gdańsk, due to its unique museums and significant historical locations with vast heritage and knowledge that create great potential to attract more tourists to the region. The main objective of the research conducted was to study, analyse and identify the possibility of further development of military and political tourism, as well as the increase and interests of the tourist flow to military destinations, often linked to great cultural and historical events, acts of heroism and other patriotic values.

The research undertaken allowed to identify the diversity of people visiting three selected military and political attractions in Gdańsk. The research objectives set in the work were also achieved. The most attractive one, assuming that the measure of attractiveness is the number of visitors in the period under study, is the WW2 Museum. There is no clear predominance of visitors based on gender, but there is a clear age difference among visitors to individual facilities. The study did not show any increased interest in visiting facilities during the long weekend. This is probably the result of tourists choosing other, whole-week destinations. Similarly, the hypothesis about the predominance of men among visitors to military facilities was negatively verified (H2). The greatest interest was in the Second World War Museum located in the center of the city, but the least popular was the ECS, located close to the Second World War Museum. In turn, Westerplatte, with relatively the most difficult transport accessibility among the three selected attractions, was visited by many more people than ECS, which partially positively confirms H4. However, the positive verification concerns the hypothesis of greater interest in military facilities than in the ECS presenting historical and political events.

The authors hope that this article and the statistics presented within can aid in understanding and expanding the potential increase of the military tourism phenomenon and contributing further to the development of the tourism industry in the city of Gdańsk.

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