

TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS IN SMART CITIES: PERCEPTION OF RESIDENTS AND COMPANIES

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Purpose: This paper aims to identify the differences in how citizens and companies perceive tourist attractiveness of two cities - Szczecin and Koszalin - and offer a broader perspective on the role of tourist attractiveness within the concept of a smart city.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was quantitative and based on survey data from residents and businesses in Szczecin and Koszalin. The data were collected using a survey research method with mixed-mode data collection techniques. The results related to tourist attractiveness were analysed using Student's t-test for independent samples, after verifying normality and equality of variances. The paper raises the following research question: What are the differences in how residents and businesses in the surveyed cities perceive tourist attractiveness?

Findings: The tourist attractiveness of cities was rated on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates no tourist attractiveness, and 100 signifies definite tourist attractiveness. Residents of Szczecin and Koszalin perceive their cities' tourist appeal similarly, but companies show notable differences. Entrepreneurs in Szczecin rate the tourist attractiveness higher than those in Koszalin. In Koszalin, there is also a gap between residents' and businesses' assessments, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholder groups to enhance tourist attractiveness.

Research limitations/implications: The study is constrained by its pilot nature and focus on only two medium-sized cities, which limits the potential for broader generalisation of the results. Additionally, enterprises were analysed without sectoral division, and the data is purely declarative, which may impact its objectivity.

Practical implications: The study's findings offer practical guidance for city managers, demonstrating how to consider the perspectives of two key stakeholder groups with different needs and expectations. This can support more informed decision-making when developing tourist attractions, particularly in smaller urban centres.

Social implications: These include strengthening citizens' roles in co-creating urban space and enhancing the quality of life through a more sustainable and inclusive approach to tourism development.

Originality/value: The study offers broader insights into how residents and businesses perceive tourist attractiveness within the context of Smart Cities and perceptions of the tourist appeal of medium-sized cities.

Keywords: smart city, citizens, company, tourist attraction.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The concept of a Smart City as a research context is currently linked not only with technological solutions (Albino et al., 2015; Fernandez-Anez et al., 2018), but also with quality of life, sustainable areas, inclusiveness for residents and businesses, including the achievement of social goals. The modern definition of a city refers to management methods and operations driven by implementing various objectives (Hämäläinen, 2020). Therefore, smart cities must be innovative solutions to urban issues, people-oriented, and beneficial to all users (Hollands, 2020).

Nowadays, the idea of a Smart City involves attracting human capital and mobilising it through modern technologies in collaboration with various city stakeholders (Meijer, Bolívar, 2016). Therefore, a Smart City mainly involves changing and modernising relationships within and between people, communities, and local government. As a result, the urban environment is enhanced, the city's competitiveness and prestige are elevated, which improves its residents' well-being (Kong, Woods, 2018).

Transforming a city into a Smart City requires a broad and critical perspective. This is due to the fact that the concept itself is subject to ongoing debate. Some researchers emphasise that a Smart City is sometimes instrumentalised and used to achieve corporate goals, and technological development may worsen socio-economic inequalities (Vanolo, 2013). This instrumental approach, viewing residents as customers, will reinforce the neoliberal concept of citizenship (Cardullo, Kitchin, 2019), where citizens become mainly consumers of technological services rather than co-creators of urban communities. Consequently, this could deepen inequalities and weaken the social aspect of the Smart City. Therefore, this study highlights inclusiveness and diverse perspectives—of residents and businesses—as essential to understanding the attractiveness of a city in the context of Smart City (Vanolo, 2013).

It is crucial to take a critical approach when implementing Smart City initiatives to ensure they follow the principles of sustainability, inclusiveness, and fairness, and their results are beneficial not only to the economy but also to the well-being of all city residents (Albino et al., 2015). It is worth noting that integrating the economy with an innovative environment and, further, with a smart office or smart mobility for residents will create a comprehensive urban ecosystem that addresses the needs of inclusiveness, sustainability, and efficiency within the city. For example, integrating the economy with an innovative environment and, further,

with a smart office or smart mobility for residents will create a comprehensive urban ecosystem that addresses the needs of inclusiveness, sustainability, and efficiency within the city (Hollands, 2020).

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in interest in enhancing the attractiveness of a place. This concept extends well beyond just the city's infrastructure or the availability of related services. It includes factors such as quality of life, a sense of community, and residents' opportunities to shape urban spaces (Lee et al., 2020; Meijer, Bolívar, 2016; Romão et al., 2018). Smart living, social activation, and inclusion are increasingly important for residents. Smart living is described as a lifestyle where technology and the urban environment interact to improve quality of life, highlighting the importance of integrating modern solutions with the needs of the local community (Chen, Chan, 2022).

In the literature, the attractiveness of a city is also linked to the quality of life, which is increasingly considered a core component of the definition of a Smart City, replacing an approach focused solely on technology and management efficiency (Caragliu et al., 2011; Ismagilova et al., 2019; Mora et al., 2019). This shift in focus indicates that the development of a smart city must be viewed within the context of its residents' social and cultural experiences, which also directly influences its perceived tourist attractiveness.

As part of the development of the concept of tourist attractiveness within a smart city, the notion of smart tourism has emerged. According to this idea, it is possible to co-create experiences (Gretzel et al., 2015). Therefore, residents and businesses can be considered co-creators of a smart city's tourist attractiveness.

Nevertheless, detailed analyses of other key stakeholder groups, such as residents and businesses, who influence both the quality of life in the city and its appeal to tourists, remain lacking. This paper aims to identify differences in how citizens and companies perceive the tourist attractiveness of two cities, Szczecin and Koszalin, to address a research gap and emphasise the need for further investigation in this field.

2. Methods

The data were collected using a survey research method with mixed-mode data collection techniques. The sampling frame was based on a database of companies provided by the Flow Research Centre. In 2021, a pilot survey was carried out on a random sample of 221 companies and 427 citizens from the West Pomeranian region in Poland using CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) and CAWI (computer-assisted web interviewing) techniques. The sample comprises 221 companies: 120 from Szczecin and 101 from Koszalin. Of 427 citizens, 225 from Szczecin and 202 from Koszalin constitute the sample. The final sample comprised 221 companies. Among the surveyed entities, sole proprietorships

constituted the largest group ($n = 130$), followed by micro-enterprises ($n = 61$) and small firms ($n = 20$). Medium-sized and large companies were represented to a lesser extent, with five entities in each category. In terms of respondent characteristics, women accounted for 58% of the sample ($n = 247$), while men represented 42% ($n = 180$). Most respondents reported either tertiary education (52%) or secondary education (40%). With regard to marital status, half of the participants were married (50%), whereas 26% declared being single.

This study aims to identify whether there are significant differences in the perceived tourist attractiveness between citizens and companies in two urban contexts (Szczecin and Koszalin), both across cities and between stakeholder groups within each city. The paper raises the following research question: What are the differences in how residents and businesses in the surveyed cities perceive tourist attractiveness? The tourist attractiveness of cities was rated on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates no tourist attractiveness, and 100 signifies definite tourist attractiveness.

The study adopted a quantitative approach, with the independent two-sample t-test used as the primary statistical technique to test the null hypothesis. Moreover, the normality test - Shapiro-Wilk normality test ($\text{Alpha} = 0.05$) and the F-test for equal variances ($\text{Alpha} = 0.05$) were also conducted as preliminary procedures for the t-test. The tourist attractiveness scores were collected from the four mentioned samples under the ratio scale question. The scale ranges from 0 to 100, where 0 means no tourist attractiveness at all, and 100 means the maximum tourist attractiveness. RStudio and Microsoft Excel were used to analyse the primary data, and results were reported according to the APA standards.

Research hypotheses

- H₀₁: The population means of citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin and Koszalin are equal.
- H_{a1}: The population means of citizens' tourist attractiveness scores for Szczecin and Koszalin are unequal.
- H₀₂: The population means companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin and Koszalin are equal.
- H_{a2}: The population means of the companies' tourist attractiveness scores for Szczecin and Koszalin are unequal.
- H₀₃: The population mean scores for companies' tourist attractiveness are equal to the population mean scores for citizens' tourist attractiveness in Szczecin.
- H_{a3}: The population mean scores for companies' tourist attractiveness are not equal to the population mean scores for citizens' tourist attractiveness in Szczecin.
- H₀₄: The population mean scores for companies' tourist attractiveness are equal to the population mean scores for citizens' tourist attractiveness in Koszalin.
- H_{a4}: The population mean scores for companies' tourist attractiveness are not equal to those for citizens' tourist attractiveness in Koszalin.

3. Results

Statistical analyses enabled a comparison of perceptions of tourist attractiveness in two urban centres – Szczecin and Koszalin – considering the perspectives of residents and businesses. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test was employed to ensure reliable and credible differences in stakeholder perceptions (Table 1).

Table 1.

Normality test - Shapiro-Wilk normality test (Alpha = 0.05)

Sample distribution	W	p-value	Decision
Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	.95	.000	Data not coming from a normally distributed population
Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	.95	.000	Data not coming from a normally distributed population
Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	.97	.010	Data not coming from a normally distributed population
Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	.95	.000	Data not coming from a normally distributed population

Source: Field data 2021.

A Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin, $W(n = 225) = .95, p < .005$, the normality of citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin, $W(n = 202) = .95, p < .005$, the normality of companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin, $W(n = 120) = .97, p < .005$, the normality of companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin, $W(n = 101) = .95, p < .005$. The results indicated a significant deviation from normality. However, for $n > 30$, the t-test is robust even though it violates normality due to the Central Limit Theorem (Table 1).

The F-test was used to assess the homogeneity of variance between stakeholder groups and cities (Table 2).

Table 2.

F test for the equal variance (Alpha = 0.05)

Sample distribution I	Sample distribution II	F	p-value	Decision
Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	.88	.356	Sample variances are equal
Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	.74	.121	Sample variances are equal
Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin	1.01	.952	Sample variances are equal
Citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	Companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin	.85	.349	Sample variances are equal

Source: Field data 2021.

An F-test was conducted to compare the variances of citizens' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin and Koszalin: $F(224, 201) = 0.88, p = .357, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.67, 1.15]$, companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Szczecin and Koszalin: $F(119, 100) = 0.74, p = .121, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.50, 1.08]$, citizens' tourist attractiveness scores and companies' tourist attractiveness scores in

Szczecin: $F(224, 119) = 1.01, p = .952, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.73, 1.37]$, and citizens' tourist attractiveness scores and companies' tourist attractiveness scores in Koszalin: $F(201, 100) = 1.85, p = .349, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.60, 1.18]$. The F tests confirmed no significant differences in the variability between the stakeholder groups and cities studied. This indicates that the spread of tourist attractiveness ratings was similar among residents of Szczecin and Koszalin and between company representatives and citizens. In other words, the average levels of attractiveness and the stability and consistency of the ratings were comparable. From a methodological standpoint, this permitted the use of Student's t-tests assuming homogeneity of variance (Table 2).

Testing hypothesis H₀₁

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the tourist attractiveness scores between citizens of Szczecin and Koszalin. There was no significant difference in scores between citizens of Szczecin ($M = 62.82, SD = 24.96, n = 225$) and citizens of Koszalin ($M = 60.60, SD = 26.58, n = 202$); $t(425) = 0.88, p = .37, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.08$.

Testing hypothesis H₀₂

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the tourist attractiveness scores of companies from Szczecin and Koszalin. There was a significant difference in scores between companies from Szczecin ($M = 62.25, SD = 24.80, n = 120$) and companies from Koszalin ($M = 47.7, SD = 28.76, n = 101$); $t(219) = 3.46, p = .000, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.46$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 5.38 to 19.58. It can be also concluded that companies from Szczecin rate the tourist attractiveness of their city higher than those from Koszalin.

Testing hypothesis H₀₃

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the tourist attractiveness scores of citizens and companies from Szczecin. There was no significant difference in scores between citizens of Szczecin ($M = 62.82, SD = 24.96, n = 225$) and companies from Szczecin ($M = 60.25, SD = 24.80, n = 120$); $t(343) = 0.910, p = .36, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.10$.

Testing hypothesis H₀₄

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the tourist attractiveness scores of citizens and companies from Koszalin. There was a significant difference in scores between citizens of Koszalin ($M = 60.60, SD = 26.58, n = 202$) and companies from Koszalin ($M = 47.7, SD = 28.76, n = 301$); $t(219) = 3.85, p = .000, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.49$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 6.27 to 19.38. It can be concluded that citizens of Koszalin rate the tourist attractiveness of their city higher than companies from Koszalin.

T-test summary

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare tourist attractiveness scores across various groups. There was no significant difference between citizens of Szczecin ($M = 62.82, SD = 24.96, n = 225$) and citizens of Koszalin ($M = 60.60, SD = 26.58, n = 202$); $t(425) = 0.88, p = .37, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.08$. However, a significant difference was observed

between companies in Szczecin ($M = 62.25$, $SD = 24.80$, $n = 120$) and companies in Koszalin ($M = 47.7$, $SD = 28.76$, $n = 101$); $t(219) = 3.46$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.46, with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranging from 5.38 to 19.58. There was no significant difference in scores between citizens of Szczecin ($M = 62.82$, $SD = 24.96$, $n = 225$) and companies from Szczecin ($M = 60.25$, $SD = 24.80$, $n = 120$); $t(343) = 0.91$, $p = .36$, *Cohen's d* = 0.10. In contrast, a significant difference was found between citizens of Koszalin ($M = 60.60$, $SD = 26.58$, $n = 202$) and companies from Koszalin ($M = 47.7$, $SD = 28.76$, $n = 301$); $t(219) = 3.85$, $p < .001$, *Cohen's d* = 0.49, with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranging from 6.27 to 19.38.

4. Discussion

Assessing the tourist attractiveness of a city from both residents' and local companies' perspectives supports the Smart City concept by including stakeholder-driven knowledge in urban development. Smart cities prioritise participatory governance, co-creation, and evidence-based decision-making, where local actors serve not only as users but also as contributors to city development. Residents offer insights on quality of life, place identity, and the usability of urban spaces, while companies provide assessments based on economic viability, service quality, and infrastructure performance. Combining these viewpoints allows local authorities to create tourism and urban policies that are more responsive, inclusive, and aligned with actual stakeholder needs, thereby enhancing smart governance and fostering sustainable urban growth. It should also be highlighted that a smart city's tourist attractiveness largely depends on innovative factors, such as infrastructure or sustainable development practices, which influence the creation of urban value (Romão et al., 2018). The focus on co-creating smart urban spaces encourages community involvement, boosts residents' self-esteem, and enhances the area's tourist attractiveness (Lee et al., 2020).

In Szczecin, perceptions of tourist attractiveness were similar among citizens and businesses, indicating consistency across key stakeholders and suggesting potential for coordinated planning. The residents' assessments were fairly consistent and showed no significant difference between the two cities. This aligns with prior research showing that citizens often assess urban attractiveness comparably regardless of city size or specific characteristics (Cassia et al., 2018). From a management perspective, the similarity in perceptions between citizens and companies suggests a high level of stakeholder alignment regarding the tourist attractiveness of the cities. Such convergence may facilitate coordinated planning and implementation of urban development strategies, as shared assessments reduce the risk of conflicting expectations among key actors.

However, Koszalin showed a significant difference between citizens' and companies' assessments. This divergence may reflect differing priorities or expectations that a Smart City should meet for various stakeholders (Bokhari, Seunghwan, 2024; Chong et al., 2023). A comparison of the two cities reveals marked differences in the evaluation of companies, with Szczecin receiving a higher rating than Koszalin. This discrepancy is indicative of their divergent economic and promotional potential. This phenomenon may be attributed to the perception of entrepreneurs in larger cities that they are able to identify more opportunities and benefits for tourism, such as superior infrastructure, a more extensive market, and the potential for smart services (Azevedo Guedes et al., 2018). The size of a city may also influence its level of attractiveness and, consequently, its ratings (Müller-Eie, Kosmidis, 2023).

A difference in assessment between companies and residents was also noted in the perception of stakeholder engagement (Fernando et al., 2025). In the West Pomeranian region, citizens rated stakeholder engagement higher than companies. Evidence from stakeholder engagement research also shows that trust in government is closely connected to the way the benefits of smart city initiatives are perceived (Hamamurad et al., 2022).

Findings highlight that residents' perceptions of a city's attractiveness directly impact their willingness to support and engage with tourism, creating a feedback loop that enhances the city's overall appeal for both residents and tourists (Romão et al., 2018). In turn, Liu and Li's research sheds light on how local residents perceive the impact of tourism on their communities (Liu, Li, 2018). Their study found that, despite some environmental concerns, local residents generally have a positive attitude towards tourism due to its economic and socio-cultural benefits. When local companies use smart technologies to improve service delivery and foster greater engagement, residents often see the local tourism sector as more vibrant and attractive. This enhances their sense of pride in their city (Torabi et al., 2022).

The literature on the subject often emphasises the relationship not only between tourism and the smart city, but also its specific dimension, which relates to sustainable development and inclusivity (Jayasinghe et al., 2024; Szabó-Szentgróti et al., 2025; Tundys, Wiśniewski, 2024). Findings presented in this paper highlight the importance of recognising multiple stakeholder perspectives when assessing tourist attractiveness, a key element in developing Smart City strategies. The observed discrepancies in Koszalin suggest that smaller urban centres may require more targeted engagement and dialogue between citizens and companies to support coherent planning and policy implementation.

Summary

This paper aimed to identify the differences in how citizens and companies perceive the tourist attractiveness of two urban cities of the West Pomeranian region, Szczecin and Koszalin, and offer broader insights into the role of tourist attractiveness within the Smart City concept.

Based on the analysis, the authors have enough evidence not to reject the formulated hypotheses H_{01} and H_{03} . The results indicate that there is no significant difference in the perception of tourist attractiveness between the citizens of Szczecin and Koszalin. Furthermore, there is no significant difference in the perception of tourist attractiveness between companies and citizens of Szczecin.

Based on the analysis, the authors have enough evidence to reject the formulated hypotheses H_{02} and H_{04} . The results indicate that there is a significant difference in the perception of tourist attractiveness between the companies from Szczecin and Koszalin. Companies from Szczecin rate the tourist attractiveness of their city higher, and those from Koszalin. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the perception of tourist attractiveness between companies and citizens of Koszalin. It should be noted that citizens rate tourist attractiveness higher than companies. The observed differences in how tourist attractiveness is perceived may originate from the varying roles and experiences of the analysed stakeholder groups. Companies tend to evaluate tourist attractiveness from an economic and operational perspective, considering factors such as demand stability, seasonality, infrastructure quality, and the local business environment, while citizens might base their views more on everyday experiences, emotional ties to the place, and symbolic or identity-related elements of the city. The higher ratings given by companies in Szczecin could reflect the city's stronger economic position and more extensive tourism infrastructure compared to Koszalin. For policymakers, these results emphasise the importance of tailoring urban development and tourism policies to the perspectives of different stakeholders. Specifically, the disparity between citizens' and companies' perceptions in Koszalin indicates a need for increased dialogue with the business community to better align tourism strategies with economic expectations and to foster greater involvement of local businesses in tourism development initiatives.

Despite the sizeable samples, this study has limitations. It was a pilot study conducted in only two cities within a specific region of Poland, which may limit the generalisability of the results. Moreover, data were based on self-reported perceptions, and the business sample was not analysed by sector. Future research could expand the scope to include additional urban centres, consider sectoral differences among businesses, and further explore the relationship between stakeholder perceptions and strategic urban planning. When indicating future research directions, it would also be necessary to take into account the perspective of the tourists themselves and their perception of the cities under study.

Overall, the companies' and citizens' responses provide a valuable initial overview of tourist attractiveness in the context of Smart Cities, offering insights for both theory and urban management practice.

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