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THE HISTORIC TOWN OF SANDOMIERZ AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Abstract: Towns are tourist destinations because of their material heritage, cultural events as well as a wide range of other attractions. A special role in contemporary tourism development is played by historic towns that offer tourists not only heritage but also combine their *genius loci* with contemporary human needs. Sandomierz is one of the oldest Polish towns with its origins going back to the early Piast period. The thousand years of its history is visible in a well-preserved urban-architectural complex which has successfully survived both world wars in the 20th c. Today's image of 'tourist' Sandomierz is connected with the TV serial of *Ojciec Mateusz*. The story, set in Sandomierz, has become a tourist attraction as well as an important means of promotion and creating an image of the town as a pleasant and hospitable place. The role of the serial as a factor for tourism development in terms of tourism infrastructure and volume of tourists dates from 2008. Sandomierz offers much else that has created favourable conditions for the development of new forms of tourism.

Keywords: Sandomierz, historic town, tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

With both richness of historical and cultural heritage and opportunities for leisure, towns have attracted travellers since the beginnings of modern tourism. This was visible for instance with the *grand tour* which appeared with the Renaissance in Europe in the late 16th c. and was intensified in the following centuries. Then upper class young Britons headed towards southern Europe to visit places related to both ancient history and historical and artistic eras including Paris, Venice, Florence and Rome, as well as a number of smaller cities and towns where traces of the past had been preserved. They were followed by other Europeans including Germans, Russians and French as well as Poles, whose homeland in the 19th c. was under partition.

This way a canon of historic towns was established attracting travellers by their beauty expressing both antiquity and, in many cases, special landscapes resulting from relations between the town and the natural environment (such as landforms, rivers, ecosystems, coasts and natural resources). Their specific links were manifested primarily in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance towns (e.g. concerning defensive systems and urban layout) as well as in Baroque and

Neo-classical towns (e.g. concerning aesthetics and landscape). In this way, the towns emerging and developing became defined as historic, in contrast to contemporary towns which, according to the modern paradigm, are created for a rapidly changing capitalist society.

A town, as a specific creation both enduring and undergoing change, shapes itself and is being shaped functionally by its inhabitants and users, but has been gradually losing its historical nature. This process has been stimulated by other factors such as natural disasters, wars, and political decisions. Thus, today the scale of preservation of the historical material heritage differs between individual towns, as well as the diversity of attitudes towards such heritage found among the residents and decision-makers responsible for shaping its future vision.

It should be explicitly stated here that by 'historic town' different types are described in the literature. The term can apply to the entire urban organism or only to the specific part where the historic urban-architectural layout has been preserved, often directly connected with its beginnings (in Polish often called *Stare Miasto* – Old Town). For example, in the case of

Kraków the historic city can be taken either as the entire city within its administrative boundaries (by analysing wider historical themes throughout its territory), or only the historic centre, whose external borders are rather fluid depending on the context.

In discussions about the relationship between a historic town and tourism, the works of Ashworth (ASHWORTH & TUNBRIDGE 1990, ASHWORTH 1993) play an important role. Ashworth's 'historic town' is dynamic and underlines the relation of modern man to its history. It is understood by Ashworth as a second stage in the transformation process from an *old town* to a *heritage town*, analysed as a product offered for tourists. This context underlines the role of the so-called heritage planning process; in Ashworth's concept not every *old town* is a *historic town*.

The history of Polish towns dates back to the early Middle Ages, and their origins are to be found in the Piast towns with sites dating back to the 10th and 11th c. Most of today's Polish towns have medieval roots. In many cases their historic districts have survived only in the urban layout with a limited number of historical monuments as the result of the destruction caused by World Wars I and II. The best-preserved urban-architectural ensembles have been designated as world heritage sites (UNESCO), for instance Kraków, Warsaw (reconstructed), Zamość and Toruń.

One of the best preserved Polish *Old Towns* is located in Sandomierz (25,000 inhabitants in 2015). It is situated on high ground, a hill mostly covered with loess in the form of an elongated promontory, separated to this day from the rest of the town by deep ravines and the valley of Vistula. This gives the town a particularly high landscape value. Its form is most clearly visible from the Vistula side, and consists of successive dominant features, enriching the horizontal composition of the entire urban complex (Photo 1).



Photo 1. Sandomierz. Panorama of the town from the Vistula (Photo: R. Faracik)

The isolation of the hill has also preserved its unique, historic character. The loess ravines and the unique area of *Góry Pieprzowe* (Pepper Hills) additionally enrich its tourist attractions (PAŁYS & WĘGOREK 1998, CZARNECKI 1996). The town became a tourist centre at the turn of the 20th c. which is widely documented by guidebooks and other publications from that time. The aim of this article is to present the role of the *Stare Miasto* district of Sandomierz in the development of the town as a tourist destination.

2. STARE MIASTO IN THE SPATIAL ORGANISATION OF CONTEMPORARY SANDOMIERZ

As a result of about a thousand years of transformation, the settlement of Sandomierz (KALINOWSKI *et al.* 1956, KALINOWSKI 1986, FLOREK 2005) has been formed (Fig. 1) and its key is today's *Stare Miasto* (Fig. 1, no. 4).

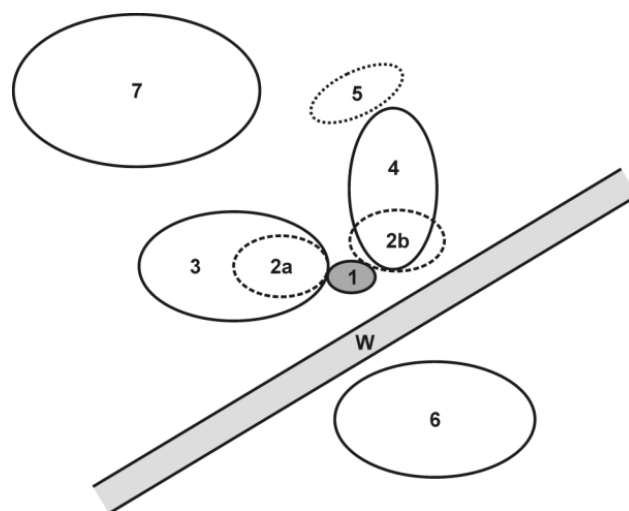


Fig 1. The current layout of the settlement of Sandomierz
1 – Castle Hill, 2a – St. James Hill, 2b – Collegium Hill and the surroundings of Collegium Gostomianum, 3 – area of the town until the Tatar raid, 4 – area of the town on receiving its charter, 5 – Przedmieście Opatowskie, 6 – the right-bank of the town, 7 – residential areas (after 1945), W – Vistula

Source: author

Sandomierz was founded in 1286 by Prince Leszek Czarny (after the final destruction of a former town during Tatar raids in 1259/60), and then enlarged and fortified by King Kazimierz Wielki. Its central part consists of formerly separate elevations (2b) on which early medieval building was located (the surroundings of today's cathedral and Collegium Gostomianum). Together with the buildings around the later St. James' Church (2a), and with the fortified town on the castle hill (1), they formed the oldest settlement in Sandomierz. By the middle of the 13th c., the town was

developing across the loess hills (3), and from this period two churches are preserved: St. James' and St. Paul's. Today, this part of the town (the original *Stare Miasto*) is a large 'oasis' of greenery with preserved loess ravines (including St Jadwiga (a Polish queen), or *Piszczele*, converted into a park and recreation area). To this day, the hill with its castle is the natural key-stone of both parts of the town. The extension of *Stare Miasto* outside its medieval walls, at the beginnings of the roads linking Sandomierz with Opatów and Zawichost, was formed of settlement in the area of the suburbs: *Przedmieście Opatowskiego* and *Przedmieście Zawichostskie*. A significant change in the town's urban structure started only in the 20th c. with the development of Sandomierz as the administrative and economic centre of the planned COP (*Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy* - Central Industrial Region) in the 1930s, the incorporation of areas on the right bank of the Vistula in 1938 (6) (MYJAK 2013), the location of factories in the era of socialist industrialization, and the construction of residential and service facilities (6, 7). The location of the historic district on an isolated elevation protected it from the direct influence of both industrial and residential development. The result is that the *Stare Miasto* of Sandomierz has preserved a high landscape value which distinguishes it from others in Poland.

3. DESTRUCTION WITHIN THE *STARE MIASTO* AND ACTION AGAINST THE CONSEQUENCES

The gradual decline of the town began in the mid-17th c. and neglected buildings fell into ruin. Subsequent conflicts and wars (during the partitions, Sandomierz was a border town) contributed to further destruction. Particularly intense degradation took place in the 19th c. within the *Stare Miasto*. At that time Sandomierz, a provincial town without development prospects or investment, faced a need to reorganize and rebuild its infrastructure. The condition of the *Stare Miasto* was made worse by frequent disasters caused by landslides and the subsidence of underground passages and storehouses. This was caused by the geology of the Sandomierz Hills as water from rainfall, and leaking from the water supply and sewerage systems, infiltrated the loess layer. Fortunately, this improved with the completion of projects culminating in the demolition of the town walls and some heavily damaged buildings (e.g. the ruins of St. Paul's Church). Part of the town was destroyed during the First World War. Fortunately, the *Stare Miasto* did not suffer during the fighting on the Baranów-Sandomierz

'bridgehead' in July and August 1944 and survived World War II.

During the second half of the 20th c., however, destruction resulting from subsidence and landslides became increasingly acute. In order to solve this problem comprehensively, scientists from AGH in Kraków (University of Science and Technology) were given responsibility. Starting in the early 1960s their work under the supervision of Prof. Zbigniew Strzelecki enabled the geology of the town hill to be studied precisely and identified the causes. The rescue operations started in 1964, and a large part was performed by workers from the mining construction company *Północ* in Bytom. The first stage was completed in 1980 in time for the celebrations for Sandomierz's millennium. One additional idea proposed was the development of an underground tourist trail within the discovered passages under Sandomierz market square. The trail, about 470 m long including 34 chambers given names referring to the history and legends of Sandomierz, was opened to the public on 10 December 1977 (MIKOŚ, CHMURA & TAJDUŚ 2013). Starting from Oleśnicki Manor and ending under the town hall, the trail is one of the town's top tourist attractions.

4. THE TOURIST VALUE OF THE MONUMENTS OF SANDOMIERZ *STARE MIASTO*

The entire area of the historic urban and architectural complex of Sandomierz (Fig. 2) covers about 40 hectares, of which 16 hectares belong to today's *Stare Miasto* (the area that received the charter). All the monuments, among which sacred sites dominate, are located there. These include the cathedral complex



Photo 2. Benedictine convent complex with St. Michael's Church: the view from Opatowska Gate
(Photo: R. Faracik)



Photo 3. Town hall in Sandomierz



Photo 4. The market square in Sandomierz
– western frontage



Photo 5. The market square in Sandomierz
– eastern frontage



Photo 6. Opatowska St – view from
The observation deck at Opatowska Gate



Photo 7. The castle in Sandomierz



Photo 8. Loess ravine of St Jadwiga



Photo 9. Długosz House
(Photos 3–9: R. Faracik)

western part of *Stare Miasto* (Żydowska St) was occupied by the Jewish quarter of which only the former synagogue from the 17th c. (now the State Archive) and the house of the kehilla from the 18th c. remain.

Several noble mansions have survived and some today are used for tourist accommodation, e.g. *Dworek Skorupskich* ('Dworek Ojca Mateusza'), *Dworek Stróżyńskich* (Hotel 'Sarmata'), and *Dwór Karpińskich* (a guest-house).

5. STARE MIASTO AS A SPACE FOR OUTDOOR EVENTS

The *stare miasto* in Sandomierz is a space for many cultural events and the market square especially, is a unique setting for those related to the history of the town, the region and the country. In this respect, the Jagiellonian Fair and the accompanying medieval tournament are particularly prominent. The two-day event takes place at a weekend in July and begins with a staging of the coronation of Władysław Jagiello's wife, Elżbieta Granowska from Sandomierz, as Queen of Poland. During the event, exhibitors from all over the country present artistic and culinary products. On Sandomierz fields, there is a tournament and display of medieval armies. Regular events include a court dance and ceremonial parades. Games are organized for participants of all ages. The Jagiellonian Fair is a part of a tradition of cultural and artistic events taking place in towns lying on the *Via Jagiellonica*, connecting Kraków with Vilnius.

6. STARE MIASTO AS A SET FOR A TV SERIAL: THE EXAMPLE OF *OJCIEC MATEUSZ*

Today, one of the symbols of the town is the character of the priest, Mateusz Żmigrodzki, the title character of the *Ojciec Mateusz* serial, based on the Italian original *Don Matteo*, and shot by Polish Television since 2008. The choice of Sandomierz among other towns was determined by its historical character, rich in monuments, which directly refers to the Italian original, Gubbio. Important roles in this have been played by local government and church authorities (Sandomierz diocese). Thanks to an agreement signed by Polish Television and the Regional Tourism Organization of Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship the programme is made in Sandomierz and its environs as well as in other places including Busko-Zdrój, Opatów, Wąchock and Kielce (SZPARA & MUSZ 2016).

As a consequence, the serial has played a key role in promoting the town and creating its image as a pleasant and hospitable place (Photo 10).



Photo 10. The cast of '*Ojciec Mateusz*' during the promotion '*Ojciec Mateusz - tajemnicze zagadki Sandomierza*' on 2 July 2014 at the town hall in Sandomierz (Photo: author)

Additionally, in 2015 the movie *Ziarno prawdy* was released as an adaptation of a crime novel by Zygmunt Miłoszewski of the same title. It is set in Sandomierz, and the town became a location for its production.

7. ACCOMMODATION AND ITS SPATIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Accommodation is considered a basic element of tourism infrastructure and its development and type determine tourism development. Another important issue is its spatial differentiation. The development of accommodation in Sandomierz is conditioned by its high tourism value and the promotion of the town but particular locations are the result of many specific factors.

As a result of an inventory (mapping and internet searching) in 2016, 107 'accommodation units' were identified with a total capacity of 2532 beds of which about 90% were open all year. The greatest capacity (more than 100 beds) is found in two hotels (*Mały Rzym****, *Sarmata****), a motel with a guest house (*Motel Królowej Jadwigi*), and two cheap tourist hostels (*Salus* and *Bursa Szkolna*). *Browarny Camping* (with capacity of 200 beds) is open predominantly during the summer but also offers some year-round accommodation.

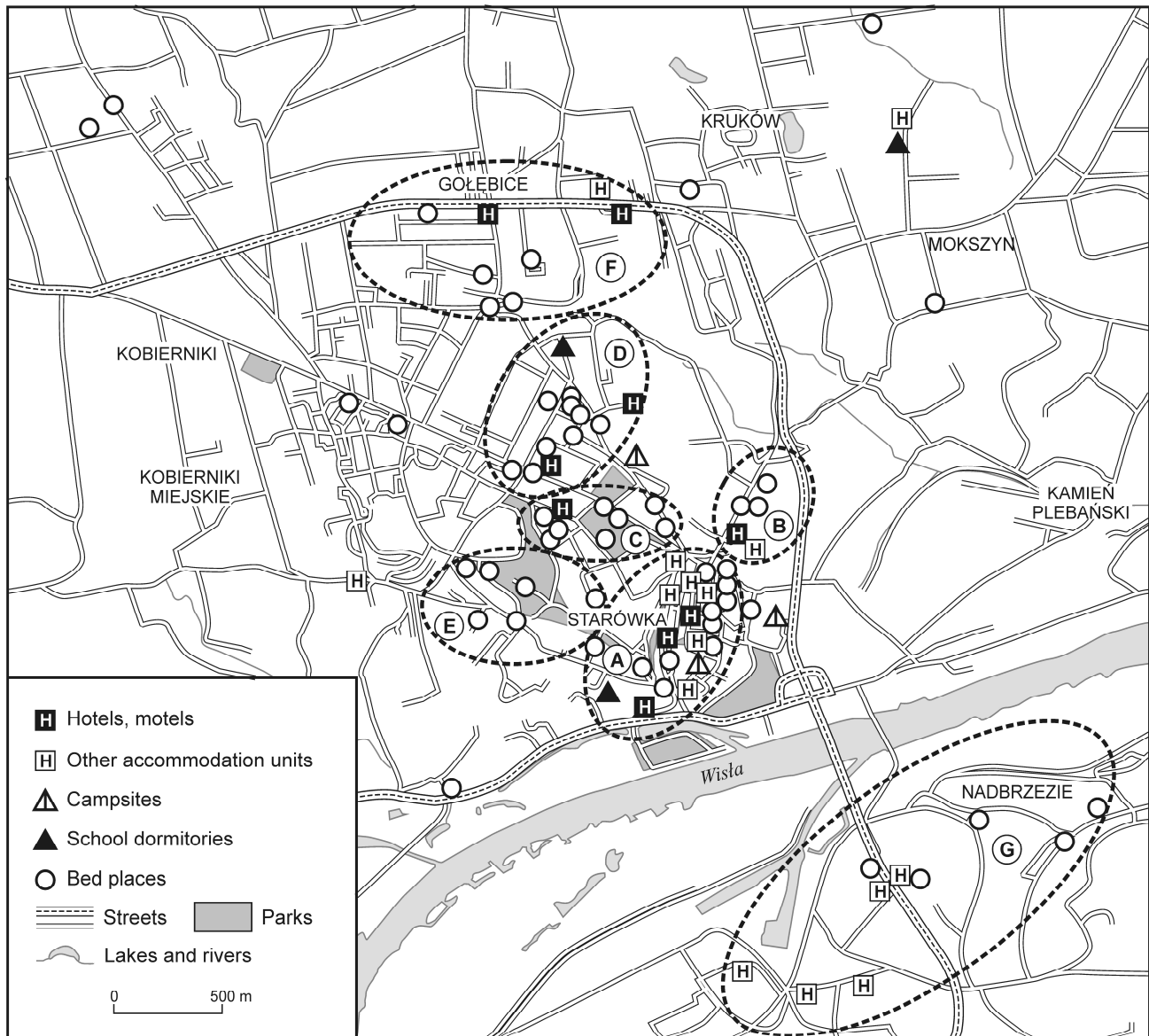


Fig. 3. Accommodation in Sandomierz and areas of concentration (A-G, explanation in the text)

Source: author (www.google.com/maps)

Analysing the spatial distribution in Sandomierz, areas of concentration can be distinguished (Fig. 3, A-G):

A – *Stare Miasto* with the castle and the neighbouring area of the original town (around St. James' Church). Location is related to the immediate vicinity of historic buildings, and their diversity is related to type (hotels, guest rooms, guest houses and other accommodation) as well as the standard of services offered. Some of them are in original historic interiors.

B – the area of Zawichojska St, from Opatowska Gate to Żwirki i Wigury St. This partially belongs to the historic part of *Przedmieście Zawichojskie*. Buildings are concentrated along the main access road to *Stare*

Miasto from Kraków and Tarnobrzeg. It covers the area east of Zawichojska St to the hill. There are both guest rooms and two large units, Hotel *Sarmata* and PTTK Tourist Hostel. The area is distinguished by good accessibility and proximity to *Stare Miasto*.

C – the area of Mickiewicza St and Żeromskiego St, from Opatowska Gate and the Benedictine monastery to Kościuszki St together with the surroundings of the Monastery of the *Reformati* Order and the town park. The area is directly adjacent to *Stare Miasto* and includes the historic *Przedmieście Opatowskie*. It is distinguished by its convenient location in relation to the historic centre and the immediate vicinity of valuable architectural complexes and open space.

D – the area of 11 Listopada St, from Mickiewicz St to Okrzei St. The area, adjacent to the army barracks in the west, covers mainly private housing along 11 Listopada St and Wojska Polskiego St (including side streets), at their crossroads the bus station is found. Apart from guest rooms offered in private houses, there is a hotel, *Mały Rzym*, and the *Bursa Szkolna* offering cheap accommodation for tourist groups.

E – an area of detached housing between Słoneczna St and Rokitek St. The houses offer guest rooms and apartments for rent. The link with *Stare Miasto* is provided by Staromiejska St, leading to St. James' Church and the castle. This area is separated from *Stare Miasto* by a deep loess ravine.

F – Gołębice: the area located along national roads nos 77 and 79 (within Sandomierz itself, Kwiatkowskiego St) and Różana St. It has mainly a transit function.

G – the right-bank of Sandomierz, associated with the glassworks and other factories in the southern part of the area and individual houses within former villages. In the industrial and residential parts (around Portowa St) there is accommodation serving tourist groups. Accommodation is being currently built at Lwowska St (national road no. 77). In the area of Ostrówek and Nadbrzezie, guest rooms and apartments are offered in private houses. The development of tourism in this part of the town is connected with the transformation of its former industrial function since the 1990's.

Accommodation associated with agriculture and vineyards is a separate category in areas with typical agricultural features (north and northeast of the town) and involves both agritourism farms and guesthouses. In this category in Mokoszyń are dormitories at the School of Agricultural Education Centre of *Ziemia Sandomierska* and accommodation at the Agricultural Advisory Centre.

Private apartments and rooms rented to tourists are popular categories of accommodation located not only in individual houses but also in multi-storey buildings, including housing estates. The proportion of such accommodation is estimated at 10-15%. Apartments are also available for use in newly built districts or in renovated historic buildings within *Stare Miasto*.

8. TOURISM IN STARE MIASTO

The issue of obtaining reliable data concerning the volume of tourism is one of the main barriers affecting analysis and diagnosis of tourism development. Official statistics (based on reports in accommodation units) are significantly imprecise while data on visits to tourist attractions (sold/issued tickets) do not

provide a full picture. In order to estimate the volume, a survey of the number of visitors¹ at characteristic points in *Stare Miasto* was conducted:

- at the well in the market square;
- at Długosz House;
- in front of the entrance gate to the castle;
- the entrance of St. James Church;
- at the lower entrance to St Jadwiga ravine.

The research was conducted on July 2, 2014 (Wednesday), July 4, 2014 (Friday), and May 16, 2015 (Saturday), from 8:00 to 17:00. All these days were sunny and conducive to strolling and exploring. Assuming that a visit to the Market Square is mandatory for every tourist visiting Sandomierz, *Stare Miasto* was visited by 2,400 people on July 2, 2014; 5,100 on July 4, 2014 and 2,200 on May 16, 2015 (Table 1). Away from the market square there is a decrease. Despite the relatively small size of *Stare Miasto* in Sandomierz, a large number of tourists remain within the market square where the main tourist attractions are located: the Underground Tourist Trail, the Armoury, and from 2017 the *Świat Ojca Mateusza* (The World of Father Mateusz) exhibition. A great attraction is Opatowska Gate (observation point).

Table 1. The number of tourists at chosen points in Sandomierz *Stare Miasto*

| Place | Number | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| | 2. 07. 2014 | 4. 07. 2014 | 16. 05. 2015 |
| Rynek – market square (the well) | 2,398 | 5,073 | 2,205 |
| Near Długosz House | 893 | 1,156 | 1,615 |
| Castle entrance | 614 | 565 | 1,015 |
| The entrance to St. James' Church | 498 | 765 | no data available |
| The ravine of St. Jadwiga (lower entrance) | 219 | 339 | 383 |

Source: author.

The increase in the number of tourists visiting the town since 2008 is highlighted by K. SZPARA & R. MUSZ (2016). According to these authors, it is mostly an effect of the promotion of Sandomierz through the serial *Ojciec Mateusz*. This is visible in visitor numbers at the major tourist attractions of the town. Between 2008 and 2011 the number visiting the Underground Tourist Trail increased by more than 70% (from just over 80,000 in 2008 to more than 137,000 in 2011), and to Opatowska Gate by more than 87% (from nearly 68,000 in 2008 to over 127,000 in 2011). The amount of accommodation and its users has also significantly increased.

In recent years, the number of visitors to local museums has risen as well (there are two museums: the Diocesan Museum and the District Museum, and

also a branch of the 'Museum of the Polish Peasant Movement' from Warsaw). In 2016, they were visited by a total of 95,900 people (for comparison, in 2012 it was 80,200, and in 2014, 72,200) (from Local Data Bank).

The survey among 211 tourists visiting Sandomierz (95 men and 116 women; age of respondents: under 25: 33; 26-50: 120; over 50: 38) July 1st-4th 2014 showed that the *Ojciec Mateusz* serial and the character of Father Mateusz were the main connection with the town for 58.3% of respondents. The serial was also declared one of the main reasons for 15.2% of the tourists questioned and 5.2% visited the TV sites (FARACIK *et al.* 2015).

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Sandomierz is one of the best preserved and most interesting monumental complexes in Poland, which makes it an important centre of cognitive tourism. Although, currently associated with the serial *Ojciec Mateusz* and considered as an example of the development of TV tourism in Poland, the town is trying to promote other aspects, often unique. In this regard, particularly interesting is the project called '*Sandomierz: the world capital of striped flint*' and events, competitions and workshops organised to promote striped flint as a raw material for jewellery, refer to traditions from the late 1970s and the artist Cezary Łutowicz, an undisputed authority in this field (WÓDZ 2008, 2009). Another example is the promotion of Sandomierz as the centre of an orchard and horticultural region. This is connected with the development of the Sandomierz *Szlak Jabłkowy* (Apple Trail), offering several tourist products and the *Szlak Winiarski* (Vineyard Trail), a proposal for oenotourism in the town and its surroundings (KAPŁAN 2014). Sandomierz is considered the Polish 'capital' of peaches and apricots (KĘSIK 1998). A thousand years of tradition as a centre of religious life is visible in its sacred landscape and is the specific *genius loci* of this place. This was confirmed by the Pope's visit in June 1999, while Sandomierz has been a pilgrimage destination for many centuries.

Its development as tourist centre can be seen as a factor inhibiting progressive depopulation. Further diversification of the tourist offer is necessary as well as the building of functional links with other attractions nearby. In addition to historic buildings (e.g. Opatów, Baranów Sandomierski, Koprzywnica, Kurozwęki, and the ruins of the Krzyżtopór castle in Ujazd), one proposal is for the reservoir in Tarnobrzeg (about 500 hectares), formed from a former opencast sulphur mine, at which tourism development has already begun.

ENDNOTE

¹ The survey was conducted by students of geography from the Institute of Geography and Spatial Management of Jagiellonian University, Kraków during fieldwork in 2014 and 2015.

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