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## GOTHS VILLAGE IN MASŁOMĘCZ AS AN EXAMPLE OF CROSS-BORDER TOURIST PRODUCT

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### Keywords:

- thematic village
- service quality
- Masłomęcz
- tourism

### Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to present the functioning of the Goths Village as a cross-border product, assessment of the quality of provided services, and indication of skills the tourists acquire while staying in the thematic village. Goths Village in Masłomęcz – the village is famous for Europe's largest Gothic cemeteries and traces of Goths settlement. The study was performed by means of diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique.

Goths Village in Masłomęcz can serve as a flagship product of cross-border tourism, but this must be a better promotion of the product in the country and abroad.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a rapidly growing sector of the economy in Europe; it has a large part in shaping the GDP of European countries [Aubert 2002]. The cross-border tourism is of great importance in the development of regions, especially the near-border ones. This kind of tourism can develop through facilitation of border crossing [Kozma 2002], convenient exchange rates, facilitating the use of express roads and motorways [Timothy 2001], the creation of cross-border tourist products, and promotion of the region beyond the borders of the country [A. Brzosko-Sermak, 2015].

Tourist products located on the border are more likely to develop and interest of tourists from neighboring countries because of the similar history, culture and tradition [Timothy 2005], because during the ages, the border regions have built a common experience and a common history mutually shaping their cultures [Zbaraszewski at al., 2014].

Border regions are often peripheral areas with adverse living conditions and their progressive depopulation, therefore it should be taken care of their development, among others, by concentrating of factors considered to be the fundamentals of a modern economy (creative businesses, knowledge-based products) [Potocki 2009]. One of the ways for the economic development of these regions is to create thematic villages. Thematic village is a complex project designed to boost the rural economy through the integration of the local community around issues related to a product, service or culture of a given region, which creates a kind of tourist product [Idziak 2008]. As a result, the village becomes original and unique, and develops much better in economic and social terms as compared to other villages of similar initial state. It is primarily determined by the connection of entrepreneurs, folk artists, tourist farms, and rural tourism enterprises offers in common, complex, and specialized tourist product, which provides recreation, education and active leisure for tourists. The advantage of creating thematic villages is that it does not require large financial outlays, it can be set up in each village, even when there are not interesting natural and cultural values, as well as the fact that it involves many residents of the village, freeing their creative power and creativity [Czapiewska 2012].

## **THE OBJECTIVE, MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The aim of the paper is to present the functioning of the Goths Village as a cross-border product, assessment of the quality of provided services, and indication of skills the tourists acquire while staying in the thematic village.

The study was performed by means of diagnostic survey using the questionnaire technique. The research tool was the original questionnaire. Sampling was purposeful - those who agreed to fill in the questionnaire, have been selected. The questionnaire was given to 150 tourists who met the conditions of stratified selection.

Correctly completed questionnaire was received from 118 persons.

When selecting a representative sample, the layer selection was used. The individual layers were formed taking into account: gender, place of residence, i.e. village, city to 30 thousand, and over 30 thousand residents, as well as the ages range of respondents. When determining the proportion of each layer, the data from the Statistical Office in Lublin of 2013 were applied. Among 118 respondents, women accounted for 51.69%, the share of men was 48.31% of respondents. In 29.66% respondents lived in villages, in 17.80% in the city to 30 thousand residents, while 52.54% in the city over 30 thousand. The age range from 18 to 30 year old made a group of 35.59% respondents, from 31 to 45 years - 37.29%, and at the age of 46 and more - 27.12% respondents. Among respondents, the group with primary and professional education accounted for 23.73%, the secondary education 41.53%, and with higher education - 34.75%. A survey was conducted from March to July 2016, i.e. in the period when most tourists arrive to the theme village in question.

The study was supplemented by observation and monographic method.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY AREA**

Masłomęcz is a village located in the Lublin province, Hrubieszów district, 30 km from the border crossing Zosin-Ustyluh (Ukraine) and 139 km from the border crossing Sławatycze-Domaczewo (Belarus) [Lodzińska, Wiczorek 2008].

Goths Village in Masłomęcz – the village is famous for Europe's largest Gothic cemeteries and traces of Goths settlement. Goths came from Scandinavia and settled in Polish Pomerania, and their next goal was the Black Sea shore. At that time, some of them (approximately 1500 to 2000 people) in the second century after Christ founded the village in Hrubieszów Valley at Huczwa river, and civilization they created, was one of the largest in Europe that time. Goths cultivated cereals (wheat, barley) or vegetables such as peas, lentils, broad beans, and bred animals (sheep, oxen), engaged in fishing and small crafts. They could perform combs, jewelry (necklaces, charms, brooches, bracelets), leather products (shoes, pouches, goatskins), glassware, tableware and articles made of metal. They warmed their wooden huts with dome furnaces. It was a very tolerant nation, respectful for the culture of other communities, allowed ethnically foreign individuals to live according to their own rules and traditions. Archaeological research leading to the discovery of the Goths was led by Prof. Andrzej Kokowski, PhD, while Masłomęcz Association of Goths Village involved in restoring the life of the Goths [Mazurek-Kusiak 2011].

The offer of Goths Village includes:

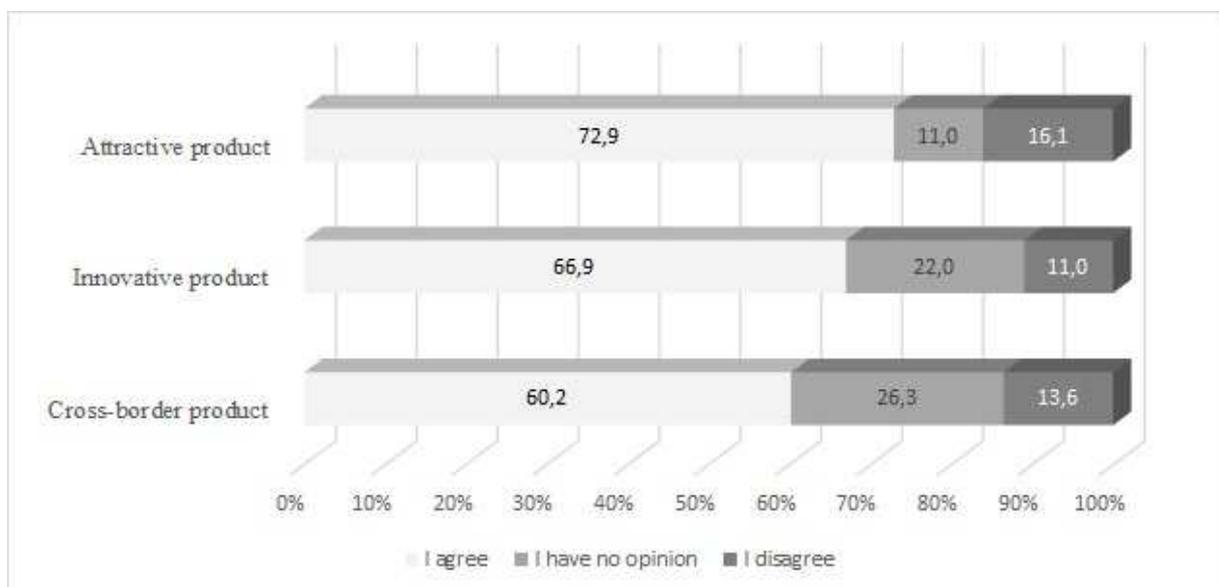
1. guided tour of the Gothic Cottage replica in 1:2 scale and learning the history of the region and the Goths, as well as funeral rituals of the Goths,
2. participation in the archaeological workshops,
3. preparation and tasting the Gothic dishes,
4. fight show of Gothic warriors,
5. workshops of old crafts (weaving, pottery, making jewelry and ornaments, making clothes and sandals),
6. archery learning.

The Association also organizes the study visits, integration trips, and cyclic archaeological feasts, that enjoy a great success. Moreover, in the municipality of Hrubieszów in Dołhobycze and Bug Protected Landscape Area, the bicycle Gothic Trail was created, where guests can visit a replica of the Gothic Cottage, Kryłowska Temple with the seventeenth century painting of Our Lady of Loreto, castle ruins in Kryłów, and admire the beauty of the Bug river landscape [Fuchs 2009].

The idea came after the discovery of the Gothic settlement traces around the village Maślomęcz by Prof. Andrew Kokowski, PhD. The villagers decided not to allow to break cooperation with the scientific circles and oblivion in media. Thanks to the social initiative, Maślomęcz Association of Goths Village was established, which recreated scenes from everyday life of the local multicultural community of Goths.

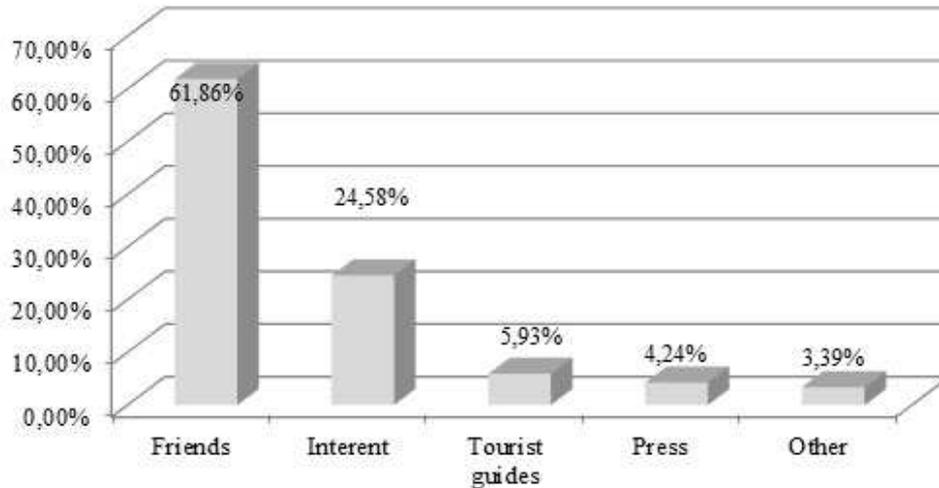
## RESULTS

At first, respondents were asked to make the tourist product characteristics of the Goths Village for its innovation, attractiveness and the function of the cross-border product attracting foreign tourists, especially from Ukraine and Belarus (Figure 1).



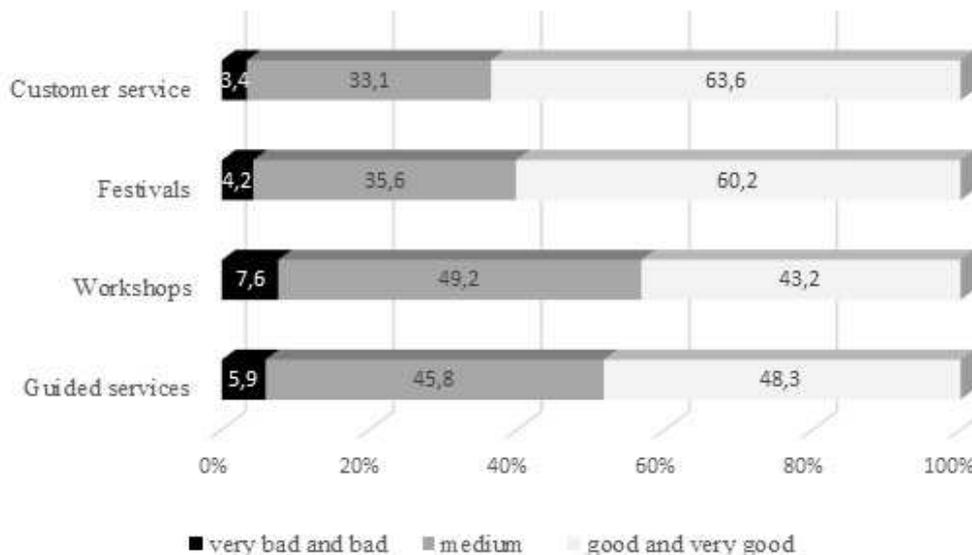
**Figure 1.** Character of The Goths Village in Maślomęcz product in respondents' opinions  
*Source: Study based on surveys*

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, it can be seen that 72.9% of respondents consider a theme village in Maślomęcz a tourist product that is attractive for tourists; 66.9% as an innovative product not seen anywhere else in Poland, and 60.2% as the product promoting the cross-border tourism.



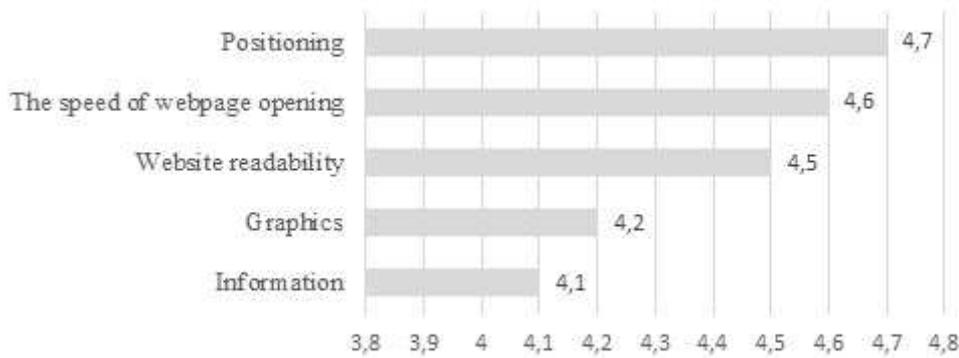
**Figure 2.** Information sources about Goths Village  
 Source: Study based on surveys

Data in Figure 2 indicate that the majority (almost 62%) of the tourists decided to come to the Goths Village under the influence of positive reviews about this place from their friends. The website attracted the attention of about 25% of respondents. Less than 6% of respondents learned about the attractions of the Goths Village from tourist guides. Articles and information in the press attracted only 4.24% of surveyed tourists.



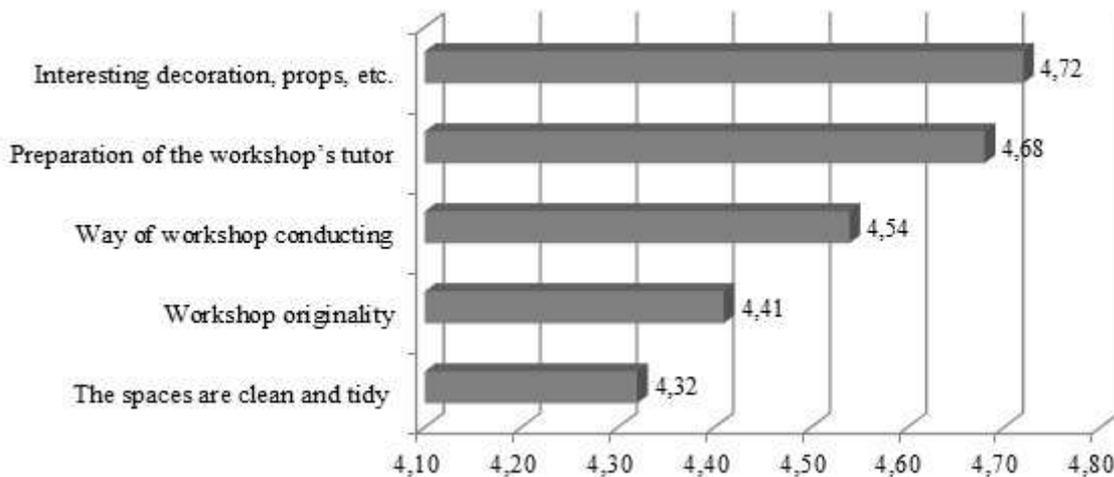
**Figure 3.** Evaluation of services from The Goths Village in Masłomęcz in respondents' opinions  
 Source: Study based on surveys

The data in Figure 3 show that surveyed respondents most ranked the way and quality of customer service (63.6% of good and very good ratings). Employees in the Goths Village are passionate about their work, very friendly and empathic towards tourists, they can respond to the individual needs of customers, due to their personality they can attract the interests of visited objects and conducted workshops. Respondents also highly evaluated festivals and events organized by the Goths Village (60.2% of good and very good ratings), especially the archaeological feasts and educational and research workshops (43.2% of good and very good ratings). Considering workshops, respondents mostly appreciate learning of the ancient crafts and fight shows.



**Figure 4.** Evaluation of the website [www.wioska-gotow.pl](http://www.wioska-gotow.pl) by respondents (5-grade ranking)  
 Source: Study based on surveys

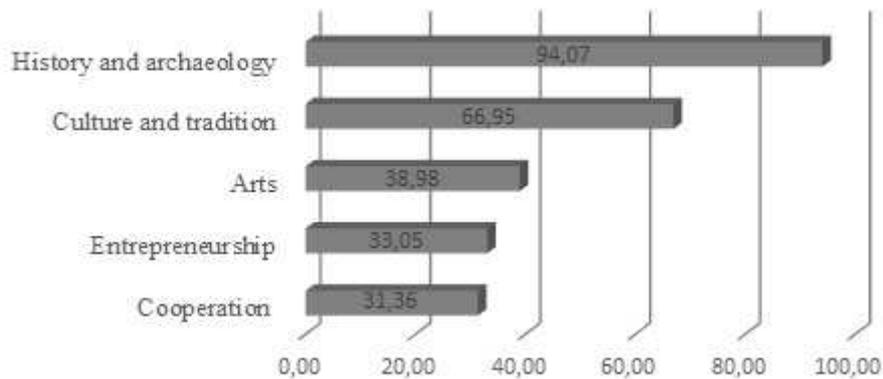
The website [www.wioska-gotow.pl](http://www.wioska-gotow.pl) is assessed by the respondents very highly. Positioning has been highly assessed (4.7 points). Respondents had no trouble finding a website upon the village, even without precise knowledge of the Internet address. Respondents appreciate the website due to the quick opening and transition to individual menu items (4.6 points), as well as readability of pages (4.5 points). Surveyed tourists liked the graphic design (4.2 pts.), especially the menu layout and photo gallery was appreciated by respondents. The information content was less evaluated (4.1 points). The surveyed people appreciated the archaeological and historical information about the life of Goths, but pointed to the lack of detailed information about the tourist and education offer in the Goths Village, as well as they accused the lack of website translation into foreign languages (Figure 4).



**Figure 5.** Evaluation of educational and artistic workshops in respondents' opinions (5-grade ranking)  
 Source: Study based on surveys

Based on the data in Figure 5, it can be seen that respondents assessed the highest an interesting design and use of historical props during the workshops, and the most they liked costumes worn by persons conducting workshops (4.72 points). The tutor's preparation was rated at 4.68 points. Coaches, according to the respondents opinions, are specialists and hobbyists in areas they lead workshops, so that they can "sell" their passion to participants. The way workshops has been conducted, were assessed at 4.54 points. The workshops are usually conducted in a manner involving a group in work, and leading person often shows some interesting information in a particular field. The originality of the workshops was also very good (4.41 points). Leaders have unusual approach to discussed issues, they can in a

practical and unconventional way teach participants new skills. Respondents believe that spaces where the workshops are held, are clean and tidy (4.32 points).



**Figure 6.** Skills the tourists acquire while visiting The Goths Village in Masłomęcz (data in %, respondents could point out more than 1 answer)

Source: Study based on surveys

People visiting Goths Village get many values and benefits. As many as 94.07% of respondents indicated that they learn history and archeology, very well learned the life of the Goths. Almost 67% of respondents indicated that by staying in the Goths Village, became sensitive to cultural heritage of the region, got interested in history, learned to respect the culture and traditions of the region. An important aspect of staying in the village is the acquisition of practical skills such as art, e.g. pottery, jewelry making, etc. (38.98% of responses). Another value, respondents have drawn attention to, is teaching the entrepreneurial behavior, showing that your own hobbies and interests can be commercialized (33.05% of responses). Nearly 33.63% of respondents indicated that their stay in the Goths Village taught them the cooperation, tolerance to other nations, mutual respect for one another (Figure 6).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Goths Village in Masłomęcz is one of the villages, where traditions, the way of life, work and leisure of ancient communities in Polish lands, are recreated. In Poland, there are also other objects, which occupy a unique place in the history of Polish archeology. Such sites may include, among others: Archaeological Museum in Biskupin (Kujawsko-Pomorskie), Village of Slavs and Vikings on Wolin Island (West Pomerania), or Choina-Horodyszczce Gord in Wolka Bielecka (Lublin province).

The settlement in Biskupin was created approximately 2,700 years ago during the Lusatian culture period. Inside the village, there were 13 rows of houses interconnected with their peaks. The same equipment of all households indicated a uniform structure of Biskupin community. Currently in the museum, the interior of three reconstructed huts and household articles which were used by the villagers, can be seen [Nowakowski et al., 2005]. The Slavs and Vikings village presents the reconstructions of residential and crafts buildings from the early medieval period (from the ninth to the eleventh century). The interiors of the cottages contain replicas of furniture, tools and everyday objects from 1,000 years ago [Łukaszuk 2009]. The originator and creator of Choina-Horodyszczce Gord in Wolka Bielecka is Mr. Miroslaw Wolinski, who specifically for this purpose bought 4.65 ha of farm, and built a castle on a scale of 1:4 as a faithful replica of a medieval castle in the nearby Klarowie "with his own forces". The historic building consists of high earthen walls defining the castle and the surroundings. The whole is surrounded by a deep moat. Next to the castle, there was

reconstructed cult objects such as the tomb of a dignitary, sacred circles of stone, wooden poles bearing the animal skulls, herbal hut [Sawicki 2008].

In each of these objects, archaeological classes, workshops of old crafts, reconstructions of medieval battles, demonstrations and practice shooting with bows, or Slavic dances teaching, are organized, thus daily lives of our ancestors is played. In these facilities, old outfits, weapons, ornaments, engravings, furniture, and other tools for everyday use can be seen. According to Małecka (2011), the experimental archeology workshops differ from the normal museum or the open-air museum by the fact that all exhibits and all equipment cannot be only watched, but also touched, various tools can be tried out or one can sit on the "historical" chairs, lie down on the bed, or simply move in time for a moment. Such tourist products involve emotionally the customer of a visited place, and therefore the brand value of the region is reinforced [Pogorzelski 2012]. Research conducted by directors of these institutions show that most people visit the places due to friends recommendation, which proves the high quality of the offered tourism product. The complement of the promotion is the Internet and publications in the form of catalogs and brochures. High-quality service and professionalism of the staff in the archaeological villages was confirmed, among others, in the research by Nowacki (2010) and Sawicki (2008). According to Weidenfeld (2013), the high quality of tourism products is the basis for development of the cross-border tourism.

Based on the research and analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Goths Village in Małomęcz can serve as a flagship product of cross-border tourism, but this must be a better promotion of the product in the country and abroad, e.g. in the form of articles in Ukrainian and Belarusian newspapers, as well as radio advertising. Largest number of people discovers the existence of a theme village from friends (61.86%). This demonstrates the good quality of the services and products, as customers recommend this place to others. High-quality service and customer service is also confirmed by very good and good assessment of the respondents.
2. In order to increase the tourist traffic from neighboring countries, the website of Goths Village should also be available in foreign languages (Ukrainian, Belarusian, Russian, English, German).
3. Archaeological villages in Poland should work altogether, mutually promoting each other and forming e.g. trail of ancient settlements and communities.

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