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SAILING ACTIVITY IN SEA YACHT HARBOURS OF THE SOUTHERN BALTIC COAST

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to compare the yachting in three regions on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea: Vorpommern in Germany and West Pomerania and Pomerania in Poland (Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie Provinces, respectively). A survey of sail and motor yacht captains was completed during voyages with landings to one of the ports considered in the paper. The size, propulsion type and form of ownership of the yachts, the size and structure of the crew, as well as the length of voyages and time in port were studied. The results are shown in diagrams, broken down by the three regions of interest. The results and conclusions reached can be applied to the design and improvement of sea marina services and provide the foundation for developing concepts for further research and analysis. The research material was collected as part of the South Coast Baltic marketing initiative project.

Keywords: yacht harbour, sailing, Baltic Sea, South Coast Baltic.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, a marketing initiative was established that defined the South Coast Baltic, an international brand covering the yachting region from Stralsund in Germany to Klaipeda in Lithuania, via Bornholm and the Polish and Russian coasts [Forkiewicz 2015b]. The objectives of creating the brand were to promote the yacht harbours, or sea marinas of the southern Baltic coast and to identify new yachting destinations in the neighbouring regions.

The Guide to Ports and Harbours [ZMiGM – Union of Maritime Cities and Municipalities 2019] identifies more than 130 localities with yacht harbours or marinas (of varying standards and range of services) in Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, Poland and Russia, in the South Coast Baltic area, which can be subdivided by to the type of water body they are located in:

- sea marinas: directly on the shore of an open body or bodies of water, as well as on the state's internal sea waters;

- inland marinas: on rivers, canals or lakes, with organisational and logistic links to sea marinas, including ports belonging to the West Pomeranian Navigation Route (on the Oder and Lake Dąbie), in the area of the Żuławy Loop (in the Vistula delta) and on the Pregoła and Nemunas delta.

The South Coast Baltic area satisfies the criteria of a sea tourism space [Butowski 2014], being a viable geographic area encompassing bodies of sea waters and functionally tied onshore areas that are visited by tourists due to the specific sea values present there. It is also a tourist destination, understood as a tourist reception area or tourist direction [Studzieniecki and Palmowski 2019]. A tourist destination is not just geographical, it is a combination of products, services and resources that can to attract tourists to a particular location.

Promoting sea yachting tourism, developing port infrastructure and increasing the range and quality of services provided to yachts and boaters (crews and passengers) requires understanding of who port users are, what their needs and expectations are, as well as the activity in the South Coast Baltic cross-border area, especially in the German and Polish regions that form its essential part.

Unfortunately, Polish and German public statistics do not collect data on sea yachting tourism or the operations of sea marinas. Only port operators keep internal records of vessel traffic, which unfortunately are often not made public (especially in the case of private German ports).

This paper presents research results unpublished so far and obtained as part of a broader research work undertaken by the South Coast Baltic project in 2017–2018 [Forkiewicz 2020] in the three most important regions of the southern Baltic coast: Vorpommern in Germany and West Pomerania and Pomerania in Poland (Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie Provinces, respectively). It was planned to continue the research in later years, however the efforts were hindered by pandemic lockdowns on yachting tourism [Łapko et al. 2020] followed by a shift in the geopolitical situation on the Baltic Sea.

Although there has been some development of the marina infrastructure in recent years, especially in the area of the Gulf of Gdańsk [Marshal's Office of the Pomorskie Voivodeship 2025] and a navigable channel crossing the Vistula Spit has been opened [Puzdrakiewicz et al. 2024], the research – due to its cross-sectional nature and cross-border research area – has not lost its scientific value for the development of sea yachting tourism.

The focus of most publications on sea marinas includes sea yachting tourism infrastructure [Łapko 2015; Nowacki 2015; Butowski 2018], international certification standards [Heron and Julu 2013], safety in the broadest sense [McDowell 2015] and environmental aspects [Heron 2015], as well as sustainability [Łapko 2024]. However, too little attention is paid to the management of sea marinas according to the marketing and logistics concept of customer service [Forkiewicz 2016].

2. NETWORK OF SEA MARINAS ON THE SOUTHERN BALTIC COAST

Yachting tourism is a form of active tourism that involves travel by yacht on areas of water [Meyer 2015]. It can be classified according to: the body of yachting water (sea or inland), the propulsion of the yacht (sail or motor), and the main purpose of the voyage (leisure, educational, or sport) [Łapko 2015]. The nationality of a yacht is determined by the flag, which depends on the choice of home port and the country of yacht registration [Stępień 2013]. Depending on the use of the yacht and the ownership criterion, boaters can be classified into three main groups [Luković 2013]:

- boaters operating their own yachts;
- boaters on yachts borrowed from friends, sailing clubs or other organisations;
- boaters sailing on yachts chartered from charter companies specialising in this type of business.

A sea yacht harbour or sea marina is a complex of harbour waters and sites, offshore (hydro-engineering) and onshore harbour structures with technical facilities that provide safe berthing and service for yachts and other recreational or tourist vessels and equipment [Mazurkiewicz 2010]. The marina's customers (users) include yacht owners and operators, skippers (captains), helmsmen, crews and passengers, as well as members of yachting clubs and associations, customers of charter companies, participants in yachting training and courses and tourists visiting the harbour from the land.

Sea yachts making port with their crew are usually provided with facilities and systems that facilitate onboard inhabitation for days. However, even a short-term stay of a yacht in a harbour requires comfort services, the organisation of which is conditioned by the classification of boaters into two primary groups:

- residents, or yacht owners, for whom the harbour is the place of permanent berthing and/or wintering; the harbour then becomes the home (base) harbour for the yacht, and sometimes a second home for the owner;
- visitors, who are boaters making port for a short time of stay (from a few hours to a few days) during multi-stage cruises.

An important role is played by the operator (the management) of the sea marina [Forkiewicz 2015c], who, based on the marina's technical infrastructure and suprastructure [Forkiewicz 2015a] and in compliance with stringent environmental standards, provide a specific combination (package) of services to the marina's customers. There are two factors to consider in designing marina services. The first is the relatively short sailing season, which lasts approximately five months (May to October) in the Baltic Sea [Butowski 2018], which necessitates a nearly separate service design for the summer and winter seasons. A second important factor is the specific ethics and etiquette deeply rooted in the yachting community [Koczorowski, Koziarski and Pluta 2008].

The attractiveness of a marina to boaters depends not only on the range of services provided, but also on the location relative to other harbours (and the links between them), the nature of the nearby yachting waters, as well as the tourist attractions (which can be natural or cultural, meaning man-made) [Nowacki 2014] located closer and further afield.

The main tourism product of the area that is the South Coast Baltic yachting tourist destination is the network of marinas located in the towns and cities there. Trail tourism products consist of a number of locations or sites bound by some overarching idea, linked together by a defined route, usually complete with signage, and a variety of tourist infrastructure located along the trail [Kaczmarek, Stasiak and Włodarczyk 2010]. A network may constitute a kind of joint venture agreement, not leading to any legal structure or legal entity [Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet and Jasiński 2012].

In the network of marinas of the South Coast Baltic area, affiliation is based on geographical criteria, which means the location of the marina. The actors in the network are companies – marina operators or entities representing the owners of the infrastructure – who are usually local authorities (of the municipality or county), but also private businesses (as is Germany, for example). The close relationship between the destination area and the marinas requires the network to be considered on at least four levels, as:

- a network of port logistics facilities for yachting tourism;
- a network of managing entities, meaning marina operators;
- a network of localities where marinas function;
- a network of local tourism products made up of marinas and their surrounding tourist attractions.

The point of creating a network of marinas of the South Coast Baltic area, which means building inter-organisational relationships by entities retaining organisational, legal and financial independence, is based on achieving synergistic effects [Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet and Jasiński 2012] and creating added value to that which represents the total of individual activities [Sroka 2012] for external stakeholders who are customers, port users and recipients of port services.

3. METHODOLOGY FOR MARINA USERS' SURVEY

The development of a concept for a survey of users of the southern Baltic sea marina network had to be of an expert nature, based on knowledge and practical experience in marina management. A uniform methodology and research tools were developed within the cross-border project 'South Coast Baltic – Establishing durable cross-border boating destination management on the basis of the MARRIAGE cooperation network' in the 2014–2020 South Baltic Program. On the one hand, the project made

it possible to carry out cross-sectional research, but on the other hand, it imposed certain implementation constraints, particularly financial in nature.

The survey of users of the South Coast Baltic marina network was based on a quantitative research strategy [Creswell 2013]. Due to the infeasibility of fully surveying the entire population of potential marina users, there was a need to survey selected parts of that population which could be directly analysed and scientifically reprocessed [Perechuda 2017].

The survey was carried out in the sea marinas of the three largest regions on the southern Baltic coast: Vorpommern in Germany and West Pomerania and Pomerania in Poland (Zachodniopomorskie and Pomorskie Provinces, respectively). It is part of a broader research project carried out under the author's leadership in the South Coast Baltic project [Forkiewicz 2020].

The objective of this paper was to compare the activities of boaters, who are users of sea marinas, making stops (for at least one night) in three regions during multi-day voyages. Due to the scale of the study, the survey questionnaire technique [Czakon 2015], which is most commonly used in quantitative research, was adopted, in which explicitly identified individuals (respondents) provide answers to questions in the questionnaire form.

The research tool being a survey questionnaire with open-ended questions was prepared in three languages: English, German and Polish. The respondents were exclusively yacht captains who, together with their crew (or alone), made a stopover in one of the sea marinas during multi-day cruises in the southern Baltic Sea. The data was collected using PAPI with a trained interviewer.

The survey was designed in two phases, and each phase was a separate research endeavour with a defined scope, implementation time and budget [Troński 2012]:

- stage one, done in one day (Wednesday, 12 July 2017) in 64 harbours in 52 localities;
- stage two, done over four days (Saturday, 16 June, Thursday, 12 July, Thursday, 16 August and Saturday, 15 September 2018) in 10 harbours, each in a different locality.

The research sample was selected in two stages. The sea marinas where surveys were carried out were selected intentionally. In contrast, an exhaustive survey was carried out in individual harbours, covering all available units in the population of yachts staying in the survey harbours on the date of the survey (excluding resident yachts).

The reasons for selecting a non-random sample were the infeasibility of conducting the survey on a representative random sample, and the knowledge of the structure of the research population, which allowed the author to identify the type of units (marinas) relevant to the research objectives. When the population (understood as the number of sea marinas/yacht harbours of an area) is finite and small, the

random sample can sometimes reach the size of the population [Mynarski 2000], which often makes it impossible to carry out surveys.

The intentional sampling technique used (the selection of survey marinas) allowed the survey to be carried out within its time and financial constraints. The inference from the results must be limited to theoretical generalisations, as non-random selection makes it possible to generalise the results to the whole population, but this cannot be done using statistical inference methods that rely on random samples [Szreder 2004].

The results from the five survey samples were aggregated and analysed by three regions: Vorpommern (Germany – DE), and West Pomerania and Pomerania (Poland – PL). This choice was justified by the cross-sectional nature of the research and the uniform structures of the groups of interest.

The survey had 831 respondents – captains of yachts on multi-day cruises (in stage one: 437 people, and in stage two: 394 people). The total number of boaters on the surveyed yachts was 2,524, including skippers (in stage one: 1,249 people, and in stage two: 1,275 people).

The predominant flags among the surveyed were German (46.6%) and Polish (39.6%). In addition, Danish yachts (3.4%), Dutch yachts (2.8%) and Swedish yachts (2.5%) were among the larger groups from other countries. The remaining countries in the surveyed population included yachts from Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, and the UK.

The regional distribution of German and Polish yachts is shown in Figure 1.

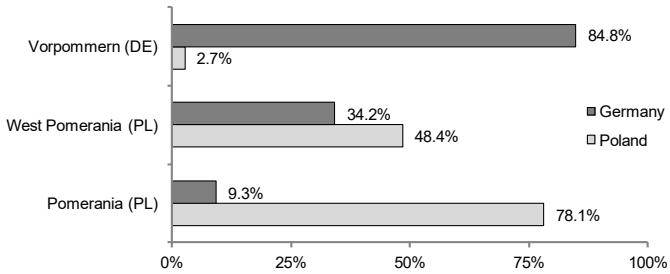

Fig. 1. Predominant countries of yacht registration in the regions

Source: own study.

Among crew members, the majority were boaters from Poland (47.9%), followed by Germany (38.2%), Denmark (3.2%), Sweden (2.2%), and the Netherlands (1.5%). The crew members included English, Belgians, Czech, Estonians, Finnish, French, Spanish, Lithuanians, Norwegians, Russians, Swiss, and Italians. The ratio of German and Polish nationals among the boaters in the regions is shown in Figure 2.

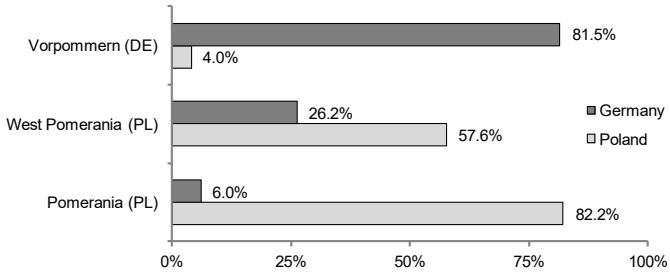

Fig. 2. Predominant countries of origin of boaters in the regions

Source: own study.

In analysing the results obtained, the flag countries of the yachts and the nationality of the boaters are important factors. In the survey carried out in Vorpommern, responses were mainly provided by captains of German yachts sailing with German crews, while in the Pomeranian region, responses were given by captains of yachts sailing under the Polish flag and with Polish crews.

Descriptive statistical methods using a dedicated database and spreadsheet were used to analyse the data collected from the surveys. The results were summarised as follows: yachts (form of ownership, propulsion type and size), crews (headcount, gender and age structure) and voyages (length of voyage and time in port). A form of illustration of the structure (in percentage terms) of sea marina users was adopted which enabled presenting characteristics from regional perspectives. Average values (medians) of the analysed quantities were also used.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE MARINA USERS SURVEY

Private yachts dominated among the vessels in the South Baltic yachting tourism. Only about 20% were chartered yachts, which were, on average, used more often in Poland (27.2%) than in Germany (15.4%) (Fig. 3). Similarly, only about 20% of the vessels were motor yachts, the share of which was very similar between regions.

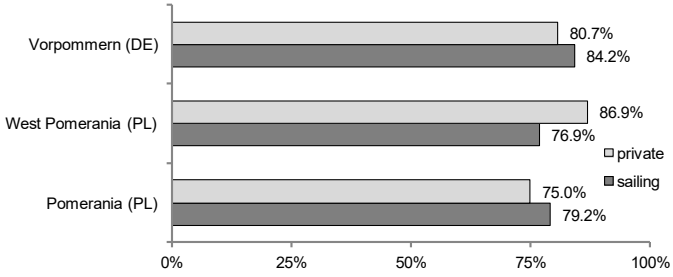

Fig. 3. Share of private yachts and sail yachts in the regions

Source: own study.

On the southern Baltic coast, yachts of 9–10 metres LOA were most common (Fig. 4). German marinas tended to see yachts that were slightly longer than those on the Polish coast. This mainly applies to yachts flying the German flag.

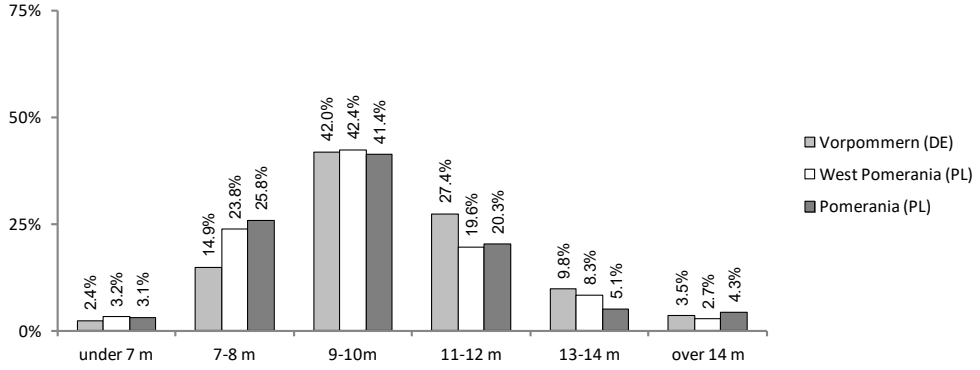

Fig. 4. Yacht LOA values in the regions

Source: own study.

The analogy was for the breadth of the boats (Fig. 5). A standard yacht was 3–4 metres broad, whether it was a sail or motor vessel. The average German yachts were slightly broader than the Polish yachts.

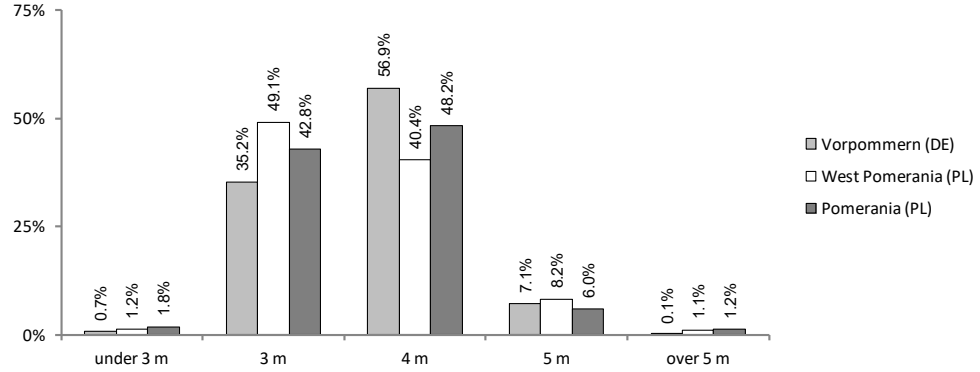

Fig. 5. Yacht breadth in the regions

Source: own study.

In most of the cases surveyed, the yacht crews were not very large (Fig. 6). German yachts usually sailed with a crew of two, including the captain. Yachts flying the Polish flag were much more likely to carry more people. While the share

of single-person voyages (a captain on a solo cruise) was not very high, on average more than half of crews could be described as small (which means a captain with one boater) [Wells 2017].

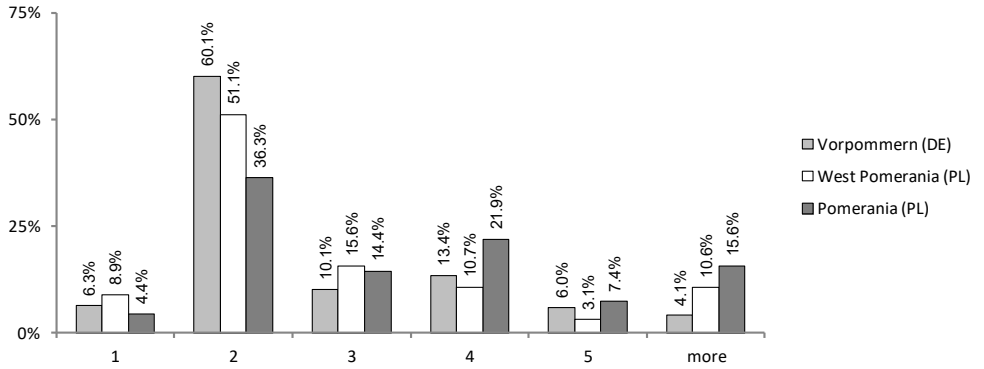

Fig. 6. Headcount of yacht crews in the regions

Source: own study.

The predominant group among crew members were men aged between 12 and 64 (Fig. 7). On average, just under 40% of crew members were women, regardless of nationality. There was a noticeably higher share of seniors (aged 65 and over, designated '65+') among German boaters. In contrast, a higher share of children (aged under 12, designated '11-') was found among Polish boaters.

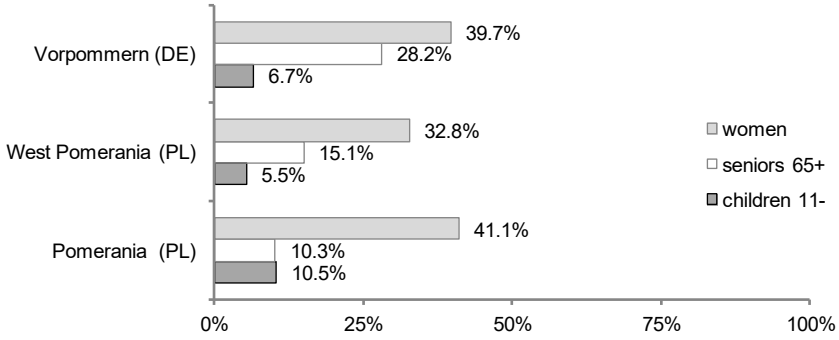

Fig. 7. Share of women, children and seniors in the boaters in the regions

Source: own study.

Polish boaters preferred cruises lasting a week, while German boaters preferred much longer trips (Fig. 8). Cruises lasting more than a month mainly featured German and Dutch boaters.

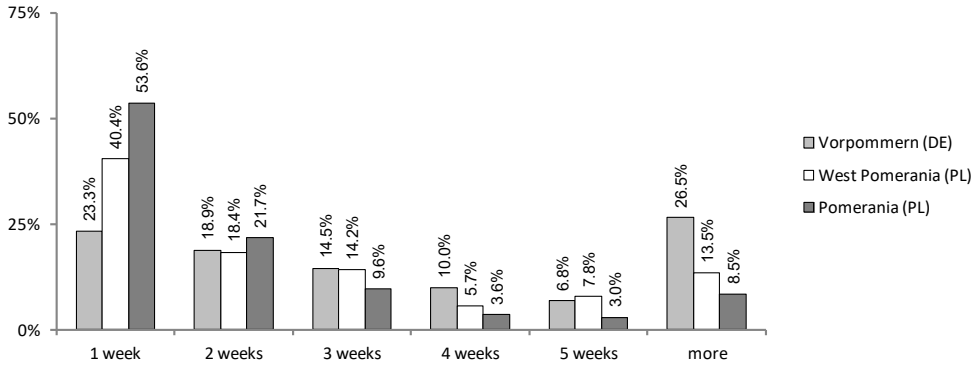

Fig. 8. Length of voyage in the regions

Source: own study.

The standard berthing time of a yacht in port lasted one or two days (Fig. 9). Polish boaters and crews of chartered yachts usually limited their berthing time to one day. German yachts on average stayed for two days, preferring a calmer pace of travel.

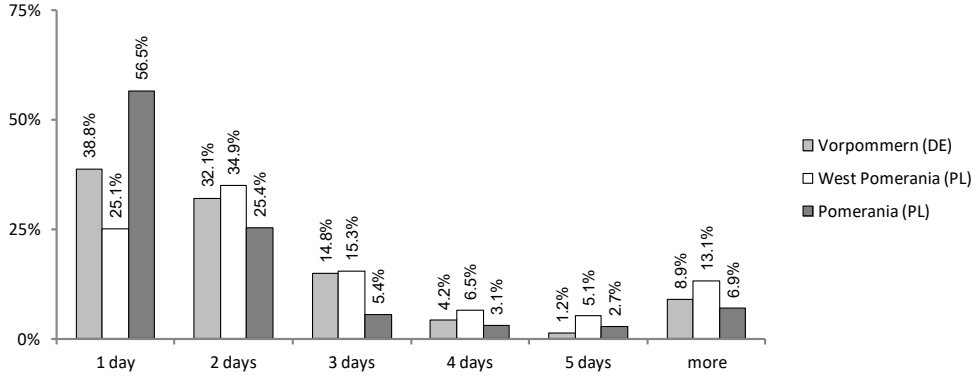

Fig. 9. Berthing duration of yachts in port during voyages in the regions

Source: own study.

On the southern Baltic coast, chartered yachts tended to be longer and wider than private yachts (Tab. 1). They were operated by a larger crew, but the voyages were shorter and the boaters spent less time in port. In contrast, the survey found no significant differences between the use of sail and motor yachts for tourism.

Table 1. Comparison of yachting tourism using private and chartered yachts

Feature / attribute	Private yachts	Chartered yachts
Average LOA	9.7 m	10.3 m
Average breadth	3.2 m	3.5 m
Average crew size	2 people	4.5 people
Average voyage length	14 days	7 days
Average time in port	2 nights	1 night

Source: own study.

Sailors on Polish yachts (Tab. 2) preferred shorter voyages and spent less time in marinas. German yachts tended to be longer and wider than the average Polish yacht, but sailed with smaller crews.

Table 2. Comparison of yachting tourism between German and Polish flags

Feature / Attribute	German yachts	Polish yachts
Average LOA	9.9 m	9.0 m
Average breadth	3.2 m	3.0 m
Average crew size	2 people	3 people
Average voyage length	18 days	7 days
Average time in port	2 nights	1 night

Source: own study.

The results of the survey suggest that the structure of the vessels used in sea yachting tourism in the southern Baltic is dominated by private yachts. Chartered yachts are more common on the Polish coast than on the German coast. Similar proportions apply to motor yachts, whose share fluctuated around 20% and remained similar in the two countries analysed.

An analysis of the technical specifications revealed that the most common vessels are 9–10 m long and 3–4 m wide. Yachts flying the German flag have slightly larger dimensions than their counterparts under the Polish flag. The difference is

in both hull length and breadth, which could be a consequence of the different ownership structure and yachting preferences.

The surveys of the crews confirmed that cruises are usually made in small groups. German yachts are usually crewed by two people, while larger crews are more common on Polish vessels. The demographic structure of the crews is dominated by men aged 12–64, with a relatively constant ratio of women, averaging around 40%. A higher share of seniors is noticeable among German crews, while Polish crews feature more children.

Significant differences were found in the way voyages were organised. Polish boaters prefer week-long voyages and keep the number and duration of port stops to a minimum. German boaters undertake longer voyages, often in excess of a month, and are more prone to longer stopovers, reflecting a more leisurely and relaxed yachting style. Chartered yachts, despite their larger size and larger crews, go on shorter voyages and make fewer port stops.

The survey found no significant differences between the use of sail and motor yachts in the context of sea yachting tourism. Polish-flagged vessels are on average smaller and operated by larger crews, while German yachts are larger but operated by fewer people.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The survey provided valuable information on yachting activity at marinas located along the southern Baltic coast in the key regions of Germany and Poland: Vorpommern, West Pomerania and Pomerania. The data collected revealed significant differences between the areas in terms of the types of yachts, crew makeup and preferred yachting habits.

The results of the survey are of particular scientific value due to the limited availability of statistical data on regional, national and cross-border sea tourism. It should be noted that the results are not fully representative, which calls for caution in their interpretation. However, they can provide a useful stepping stone into an assessment of the user structure of the sea marina network and thus support the decision-making processes of infrastructure owners, harbour operators and public policy makers.

The findings presented also have important practical implications. They can contribute to better adaptation of infrastructure and design of services intended for both vessels and crew members, which can consequently increase the competitiveness of local harbours and the entire southern Baltic marina network. Moreover, the data provides a sound basis for future interdisciplinary research and planning for the long-term strategic development of the region, with consideration of the principles of sustainability and the demographic changes in the yachting community.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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