

WEBSITES AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATING WITH TOURISTS – THE EXAMPLE OF YACHT MARINAS ON THE POLISH BALTIC COAST

Ewa Hącia¹✉, Aleksandra Łapko²✉

¹ ORCID: 0000-0003-4865-7901

² ORCID: 0000-0003-0235-6329

^{1,2} Maritime University of Szczecin

H. Pobożnego Street 11, 70-507 Szczecin, Poland

ABSTRACT

Motives: Businesses rely on the Internet to facilitate marketing communication, attract customers, and build customer loyalty. The Internet can be used not only as an additional channel for distributing information about the company, but also as a means of interactive communication for commercial purposes or promotional activities. This is of great importance for service providers, including tourism sector businesses such as marinas.

Aim: The aim of this study was to examine the content of websites owned by Baltic yacht marinas in the Polish voivodeships of West Pomerania and Pomerania. Marina websites were analysed based on their usefulness for potential tourists in 2018, 2020, and 2022, using the adopted criteria, and data for each year were compared to examine changes over time. The applied research methods included theoretical and analytical observations, website analysis, and a point ranking scale. A comparative analysis of the obtained results was performed. This is the first study to examine the extent to which marinas rely on social media for marketing and advertising purposes.

Results: The results of the conducted analyses provided answers to the formulated research questions. Few marinas use websites as a tool for communicating with potential customers, but their owners are beginning to recognize the potential of the Internet in this regard.

Keywords: communication strategies of yacht marinas, marketing tools, websites, social media, promotion, tourism management

INTRODUCTION

According to the Polish Central Statistical Office (CSO) data, 92.4% of households in Poland had Internet access in 2021. This percentage is growing annually: it increased from 86.7% in 2019 to 90.4% in 2020. Certainly, the necessity of remote work and education due to the pandemic contributed to this dynamic growth. For many people, the Internet is not only a work tool but also a place for shopping

and the primary source of information (CSO report, 2021). Owing to the widespread use of mobile devices with Internet access (smartphones, tablets, etc.), the Internet is now widely available regardless of time and space. Enterprises from various industries are trying to take advantage of this access. The number of online stores in Poland increased by as much as 21.5% compared to the previous year, and nearly half of the enterprises (45.6%) used social media to contact customers (E-commerce in Poland, 2021).

✉ e.hacia@pm.szczecin.pl, ✉ a.lapko@pm.szczecin.pl

The widespread use of the Internet is also apparent in the tourism industry. An increasing number of people use platforms and websites for travel purposes, such as price comparison websites and route planning tools. However, there are no studies on the scale of this phenomenon in Poland. The latest report stated that the Internet was being used to plan tourist trips by 42% of users (Deloitte, 2015). It can certainly be assumed that this percentage has increased since then. Sources of knowledge when collecting information about a potential destination are not only friends' opinions, travel agency brochures, or printed guides, but also a large portion of social media, travel blogs, and specialized websites such as booking platforms.

This article aims to present the results of the analysis of the use of websites and social media by yacht harbors along the Polish Baltic coast to promote their services. The analysis was conducted by the authors cyclically every two years starting in 2018. The websites owned by the ports were assessed using specific criteria that determine the degree of a website's usefulness for tourists, taking into account the complexity of the information presented on it, validity of information, and adaptation to the needs of various user groups. In 2022, due to the growing importance of social media in the tourism sector, the analysis was extended to the aspect of the availability and use of these tools.

THE ROLE OF INTERNET TOOLS IN TOURISM – LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of searching for information is an important factor in the decision-making process of tourists regarding the use of tourist services (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The influence of technology, social factors, and tourists' preferences regarding the sources of information used when planning trips have also changed over the years. Traditional sources are being increasingly replaced by Internet sources, which currently play an important role in the tourism economy (Buhalis & Zoge, 2007). They are a source of knowledge for tourists, a way to share

information, buy tickets, book accommodations, and discover tourist attractions. They enable service providers to obtain information about their customers, stay in touch with them, and share marketing content (Frąckiewicz, 2006; Gołąb-Andrzejak, 2016). Increasingly, it is the information transmitted via the Internet that determines the consumption decisions made by tourists (Litvin et al., 2005; Armendia-Muneta, 2014). Therefore, forms of communication and their availability must be aligned with the preferences of the customers regarding the use of tools and technology. Information must be equally accessible and legible both to customers using traditional sources (leaflet catalogs) as well as websites or mobile applications (Brumen et al., 2020). The role of social media cannot be overestimated nowadays; for many people it has become the main platform for gaining information and sharing opinions concerning destinations, tourist attractions, and tourist entities. Profiles on social media maintained by tourist entities support image creation, enable staying in touch with customers, and allow for quick responses to changing market conditions. The use of various online tools in tourism has been intensively researched by scientists all over the world for several years (Gascón et al., 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Živković et al., 2014; Li et al., 2021; David-Negre et al., 2018). It is generally understood that this medium plays a very important role in the tourism economy, and its role will continue to expand in the coming years. For several years, the idea of e-tourism has been in discussion, which is defined as the analysis, design, implementation, and application of IT/e-commerce solutions in the travel and tourism industry; it also entails the analysis of the impact of the respective technical/economic processes and market structures (Neidhardt & Werthner, 2018). Advanced solutions such as virtual reality (VR), data mining, or the Internet of Things (IoT) are also utilized in this industry (Castro et al., 2018; Antonio et al., 2022; Liu, 2022).

Certainly, tourism companies must be guided by the characteristics of the target group when selecting communication tools for their clients. Numerous scientific studies show that online tools are much more

effective with younger potential tourists (Parra-Lopez et al., 2018; Gössling, 2021; Hysa et al., 2021). With the natural succession of generations, numerous groups making tourist decisions now include the group of people born between the late 1980s and 1990s. This generation is sometimes referred to in scientific literature as generation Y (Gen Y), millennials, or the Tech generation (Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al., 2017). The characteristics of this generation show that they are ambitious, interesting, and impatient people. Their preferred methods of communication are e-mails, social networks, and text messengers. The Internet was launched when they were young, so it is a tool they are naturally aligned with (Gures et al., 2018). Decision makers also belong to the Z generation, i.e. people born in the first decade of the 21st century, also known as the Facebook generation. This generation does not know the world without the Internet. Their world is inseparable from the Internet, where they make friends and have hundreds of contacts. They also obtain all the information and willingly share their knowledge and opinions on various products (including tourism) on social networks (Csobanka, 2016; Reisenwitz & Fowler, 2019). Tourism companies that want to attract people from the Y and Z generations must consider these factors and adapt their marketing techniques accordingly (Bae & Han, 2020; Goenadhi & Rahadi, 2020). Properly planned websites and social media presence are the basic requirements to be noticed by representatives of the youngest generations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF YACHT HARBORS IN POLAND AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNET TOOLS IN COMMUNICATION WITH TOURISTS

Within the last two decades, there has been rapid development in sailing tourism in Poland. This has undoubtedly been influenced by quantitative and qualitative changes in yacht harbors. Yacht harbors (sea or inland) are complexes of port basins, hydro technical port structures, onshore structures, and technical devices ensuring safe parking and servicing

of yachts, other recreational or tourist vessels, and floating devices (Mazurkiewicz, 2010). The Polish coast of the Baltic Sea administratively belongs to two provinces – West Pomeranian and Pomeranian provinces (Fig. 1). In the West Pomeranian province, the dynamic development of ports resulted from the implementation of the West Pomeranian Sailing Route project – a network of tourist ports in West Pomeranian (subsidised from the Operational Program Innovative Economy 2007–2013, measure 6.4. Investments in tourist products of supra-regional importance) (Zachodniopomorski Szlak Żeglarski, 2022). Consequently, nearly forty ports and sailing harbors in West Pomeranian, concentrated along the Odra, the Szczecin Lagoon, and the Baltic Sea, were created or underwent a thorough modernization. All yacht ports located in the West Pomeranian province that were examined for the purposes of this article belong to the West Pomeranian Sailing Route.



Fig. 1. Location of Polish provinces: West Pomeranian and Pomeranian

Source: own study.

An increase in the number of ports can also be observed in the Pomeranian province. This is where the Pętla Żuławska [Żuławska Loop] project (also covering the Warmian-Masurian Province) was implemented, due to which numerous harbors and marinas were built along the Vistula, Martwa Wisła, Szkarpawa, Wisła Królewiecka, Nogat, Wisła Śmiała, Wielka Święta – Tuga, Motława, Kanał Jagielloński, the Elbląg and Pasłęka rivers, and on the Vistula Lagoon (Pętla Żuławska, 2020; Gus-Puszczewicz, 2018). The Żuławy Loop includes the port in Piaski,

which was subject to this research. The availability of European Union (EU) funds has undoubtedly contributed to the development of the ports, making it possible to finance most of the infrastructure projects. The potential benefits for the region, which may have resulted from the development of nautical tourism, began to be noticed (Nowaczyk, 2018; Hącia, 2019). Currently, the West Pomeranian Sailing Route is one of the flagship tourist products of the West Pomeranian Province; it is undoubtedly the largest investment made for the development of sailing in Poland.

In the area of yacht ports, based on the specialist infrastructure, a number of services are being provided without which sailing would be impossible (Lukovic, 2013; Łapko, 2019). These services are provided to individuals as well as groups – including tourists (Hącia & Łapko, 2020). Knowledge about the services provided by a specific port allows sailors to consciously plan routes, increasing the safety and attractiveness of the cruise.

Regions and organizations responsible for both the West Pomeranian Sailing Route and the Żuławy Loop undertake a number of marketing activities as part of their management. However, individual ports should provide tools for independent communication with potential tourists, thus complementing the existing information.

The use of online tools for this purpose makes it possible to reach a wide audience, including the youngest users. For young sailors, digital technologies and immediate access to information hold natural appeal, which is why they show great openness to the possibility of using new applications dedicated to sailors (Report, 2016). In the website popularity rankings, Facebook ranks first (Report, 2016). This is because when planning a trip and charter, the surveyed sailors most often look for recommendations from friends on Facebook (Report, 2016). Entities responsible for the creation of nautical tourism products (both yacht ports and other entities) must use modern technologies to communicate with these tourists. Traditional printed travel guides, press advertisements, and even radio and TV broadcasts

will not reach the representatives of the Y and Z generations. These people look for information on the Internet and find it there. Additionally, the internationalization of the nautical tourism market, which requires the preparation of messages in multiple languages, should be taken into account.

Websites are the most basic and simplest tools provided by the Internet for communication with clients. There are currently over 1.17 billion websites (Siteezy, 2022) around the world, and this number is gradually growing. Therefore, their appearance, content, and design should be carefully planned. According to K.L. Keller, they should appear aesthetically attractive immediately upon being “opened” and their content should encourage people to visit them again (Keller, 2009). It is also very important to adapt the website for use by foreigners, e.g. by choosing different language versions. This is extremely important because the Internet is a global medium, so any information posted on it is potentially addressed to recipients from different countries (Wymbs, 2000). The need to ensure equal opportunities for tourism also requires adapting websites to the specific needs of people with disabilities. In 2012, The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) developed The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which sets international standards for website accessibility for people with disabilities. The guidelines are periodically updated, and the latest project comes from 2021 and is available under the name Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 (WCAG, 2022). It provides detailed guidelines to make websites perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Unfortunately, application of these guidelines is not yet common.

There is relatively less scientific research on the use of internet tools by marinas as a form of communication with customers. Researchers from Croatia were among the first to study the use of internet marketing tools by local yacht ports in 2006 (Miocic et al., 2006; Mucko et al., 2008). Later, practices of ports in other countries of the Mediterranean basin were also examined in this context (Benevolo & Spinelli, 2016; Akrivopoulos et al., 2022). Research on the use of social media by yacht ports was also conducted locally (Kolcubaşi & Akyar, 2019).

The authors of this article have already conducted research on the use of websites by Polish yacht ports in 2018 and 2020. Our results showed that these tools are still underused by the surveyed entities for customer communication, and if anything, their content is often relatively poor (Hącia & Łapko, 2018; Hącia & Łapko, 2021).

This article aims to present the results of another study that assessed the current use of websites by the Baltic yacht ports, which are key players in the development of nautical tourism. The websites are assessed on selected criteria that determine the degree of their usefulness for tourists, based on the complexity of the information provided, the validity of the information, as well as adaptability to the needs of various user groups. Additionally, an analysis was conducted regarding the fact that the examined objects had profiles on social media.

RESEARCH METHODS

The stages of the research process (Fig. 2) and the obtained results are presented as follows.

The first step in the research process was an expert study of the effectiveness of Internet tools, conducted by representatives of the five Baltic regions. The methodology and detailed results of the study were presented in an earlier publication (Łapko & Muller, 2017). One aspect of this research has become the basis for more detailed analyses of the use of websites for communication between yacht harbors and tourists. Experts or representatives of regional yacht networks rated the effectiveness of internet tools on a scale of 1 to 10, based on their effectiveness in facilitating communication with port users. Among them, three groups were distinguished: sailors, motor boaters, and charter boaters. Figure 3 shows the results of these assessments in the form of average scores based on the regions to which the experts belonged.

The obtained results showed that Polish experts from the West Pomeranian and Pomeranian provinces assessed the effectiveness of internet tools very poorly in terms of communication with sailors (only five points out of ten) and motor boaters (six points out of ten possible). The effectiveness of communication with charter boaters was rated much higher at nine

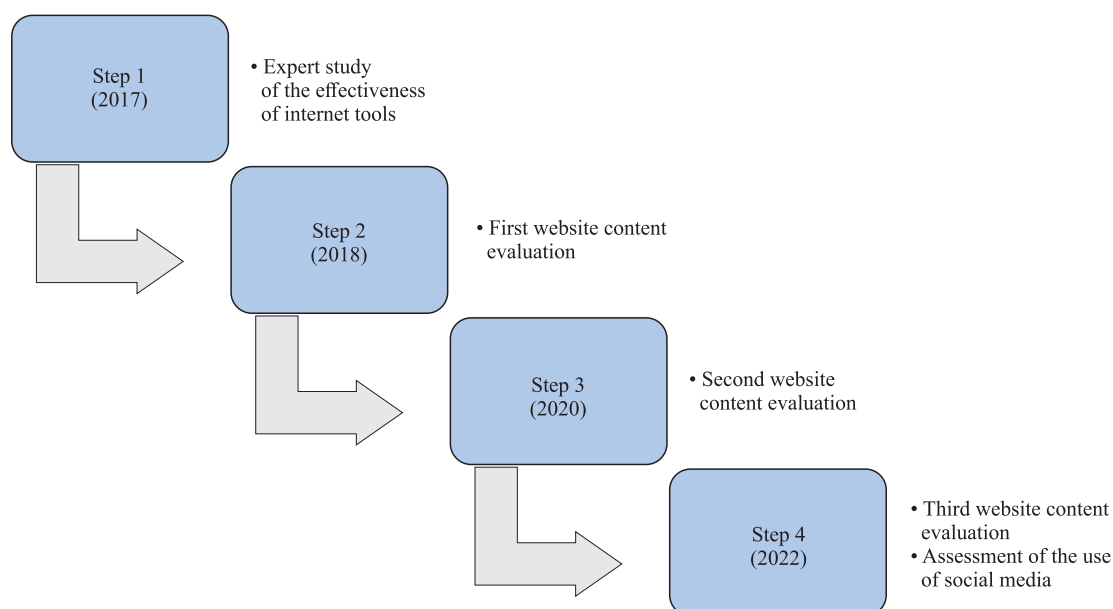


Fig. 2. Research framework
Source: own study.

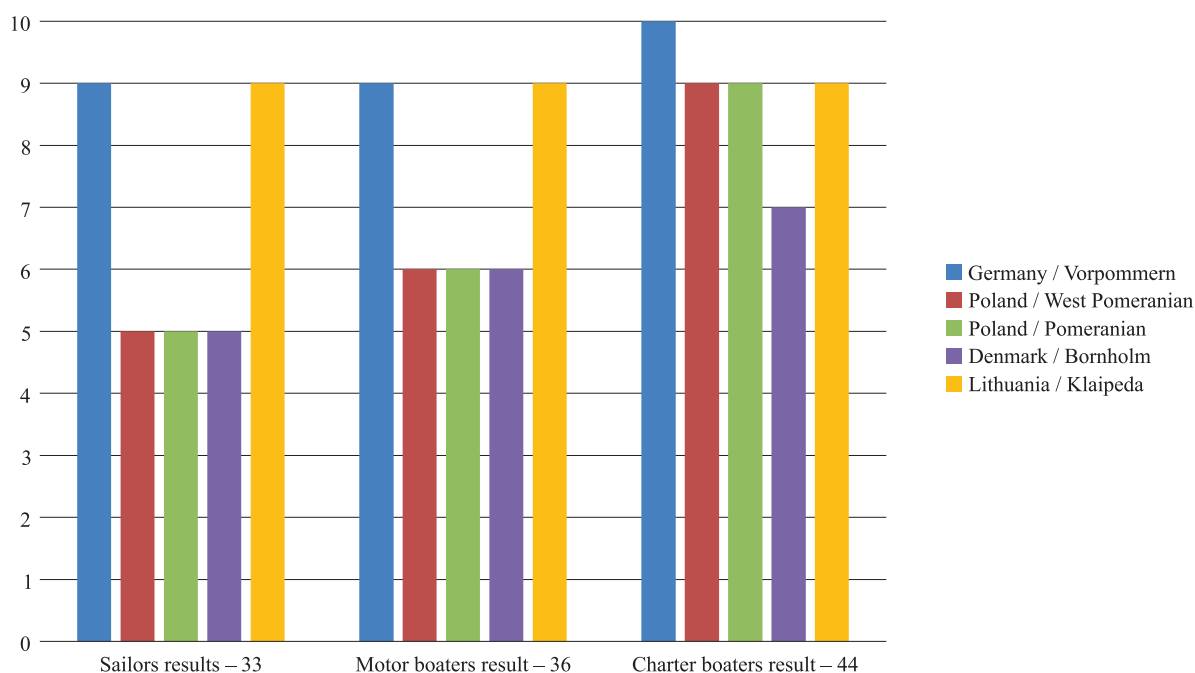


Fig. 3. Regional experts' assessment of the effectiveness of Internet tools

Source: Łapko & Muller, 2017.

points (they rent yachts from charter companies, using, among others, online tools). An important question that arises from this assessment is whether or not yacht ports are able to use internet tools adeptly, or if they neglect this aspect of communication.

The designed research process allowed for answers to the following two research questions:

1. To what extent is the website tool used by marinas? (RQ1)
2. Is there any positive change in the use of websites and social media by yacht ports as a tool of communication with tourists? (RQ2)

The formulated research questions were static and dynamic. The answer to the first question allowed the determination of the status (in 2022, and earlier in 2018 and 2020) of the utilization of websites by yacht ports. The second question focused on the changes that took place with regards to the utilization of websites between 2018–2022. The research was conducted cyclically every two years starting in 2018. This allowed for a comparative analysis of the obtained results and an indication of the observed trends.

The research focused on Polish harbors along the Baltic coast, in areas belonging to two provinces: West Pomeranian and Pomeranian. These were the ports in Świnoujście, Dziwnów, Mrzeżyno, Dźwirzyno, Kołobrzeg, Darłowo, Ustka, Rowy, Łeba, Władysławowo, Jastarnia, Hel, Puck, Gdynia, Sopot, Gdańsk, Krynica Morska, and Piaski.

The research involved the assessment of the content of port websites according to the adopted criteria (Fig. 4), which constitute an original research tool. The criteria were proposed by the authors of this article on the basis of their own experiences with sailing. These were used to determine the usefulness of these websites for potential tourists looking for information about a given port and services available in its area. Research methods such as theoretical and analytical observation, website exploration, and scoring were used. As part of identifying the evaluation criteria, the brainstorming method and in-depth interview with experts – representatives of regional yacht port networks were used.

For the purposes of the research, a variant of the point evaluation method was used (Kaczmarek et al.,

K1	Existence of a direct website
K2	Availability of the list of services offered in the marina
K3	Availability of the port plan / map
K4	Availability of a price list containing information on the prices of individual services provided on the premises of the facility
K5	Availability of news, i.e. up-to-date information on events taking place in the port area or other information that may affect the choices of potential tourists
K6	Availability of information on facilities available and provisions made for disabled people by the port
K7	Translation of the website into foreign languages enabling foreigners to get acquainted with the port's offers
K8	Information on tourist attractions available near the port that may be a decisive factor when making a cruise plan
K9	Information about the telephone number of the port, which may be important for people who want to ask for help during maneuvers in the port or for people who would like to obtain additional information about the facility itself and the services provided
K10	Additional materials, such as videos and photos, which make the descriptions contained on the website more plausible

Fig. 4. Criteria for assessing the content of yacht port websites
Source: own study.

2010). According to the criteria presented in Figure 4, the ports were assessed using the binary system, i.e. 1 means they meet the criterion and 0 that they do not. The sum of the points obtained made it possible to determine the degree of usefulness of the port's website for tourists. Ratings were distributed across different levels, namely: very low (1–2), low (3–4),

medium (5–6), high (7–8), and very high (9–10), and the ports were categorized on the basis of these ratings. In addition, the criteria were used to analyze the number of ports meeting them.

In addition, in 2022, the study was expanded to include the analysis of the use of the most popular social media platforms by yacht ports. Considering

the number of active users in 2022, the world leader is Facebook (2.74 billion users), followed closely by YouTube (2.29 billion users) (Dreamgrow, 2022). In Poland, as many as 92.8% of internet users aged 16 to 64 regularly use YouTube, and 89.2% are registered on the Facebook platform (DIGITAL, 2021). Therefore, these two social media platforms were considered in the analysis performed. In addition, it was checked whether the ports have profiles on other social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained by the scoring method for selected yacht ports, they were classified according to the level of usefulness of their websites for tourists in 2018, 2020, and 2022 (Table 1). The typologies obtained indicate relevant changes that have taken place over the course of four years.

The ports for which the total number of points have changed with respect to the previous survey are marked in italics in the table.

In 2018, four ports (Mrzeżyno, Dźwirzyno, Rowy, Władysławowo) had a total score of zero, hence they were not classified into any group. In 2020, however, there were only two ports (Mrzeżyno and Rowy) and in 2022 only one (Rowy) with a total score of zero.

The most populated classes in 2018 were the second and third, i.e. low and medium level of website usefulness, while only four ports were classified in the fourth and fifth classes. The situation in 2020 had changed favorably in this respect. Both the second and third classes were still highly populated. Władysławowo Port had not scored any points in 2018, but appeared second in 2020. On the other hand, the fourth class, i.e. with a high level of usefulness, had gained as many as three ports, becoming the most populous. The rating of Yacht Harbor Dziwnów,

Table 1. Classification of yacht ports according to the website usability level for tourists in 2018–2022

Class	Website usability level for tourists	Port name		
		2018	2020	2022
1.	very low (1–2)	Piaski Harbour (1) Yacht Harbour Dziwnów (2)	<i>Piaski Harbour (2)</i> <i>Dźwirzyno Port (2)</i>	Piaski Harbour (2) Dźwirzyno Port (2)
2.	low (3–4)	Ustka Port (3) Jastarnia Port (3) Yacht Port North Basin Świnoujście (4) Krynica Morska Port (4)	Ustka Port (3) <i>Władysławowo Port (3)</i> Yacht Port North Basin Świnoujście (4) Krynica Morska Port (4) <i>Yacht Harbour Marina Gdańsk (4)</i>	Ustka Port (3) Władysławowo Port (3) Yacht Port North Basin Świnoujście (4) Yacht Harbour Marina Gdańsk (4)
3.	medium (5–6)	Darłowo Port (5) Puck (6) Sopot Yacht Marina (6) Yacht Harbour Marina Gdańsk (6)	<i>Jastarnia Port (5)</i> Darłowo Port (5) Puck (6)	<i>Port Mrzeżyno (5)</i> Jastarnia Port (5) Puck (6) <i>Krynica Morska Port (6)</i>
4.	high (7–8)	Hel Marina (7) Gdynia Marina (7) Łeba Port (8)	<i>Sopot Yacht Marina (7)</i> Hel Marina (7) Gdynia Marina (7) Łeba Port (8) <i>Yacht Harbour Dziwnów (8)</i> <i>Marina Yacht Park Gdynia (8)*</i>	Hel Marina (7) Gdynia Marina (7) Yacht Harbour Dziwnów (8) Łeba Port (8) Marina Yacht Park Gdynia (8) Sopot Yacht Marina (8) Darłowo Port (8)
5.	very high (9–10)	Marina Solna Kołobrzeg (9)	Marina Solna Kołobrzeg (9)	Marina Solna Kołobrzeg (9)

* Marina Yacht Park in Gdynia as a separate yacht port was added to the survey in 2020, as it opened in 2019.

Source: own study.

one of the ports in the fourth class, increased by the most (6 points). It is also worth mentioning that these changes are also related to the opening of the main website of this harbor (criterion K1). These changes are in line with the standard set by K.L. Keller as mentioned earlier: the website (as well as the port itself) should be useful enough to encourage users to visit it again. The same group (the fourth class) also includes Marina Yacht Park Gdynia, which was not subject to examination in 2018. It is an investment that was completed in 2019 and the port's website was created right away.

According to the latest survey, there have been further positive developments in 2022. The fourth class is still the most populous, with the harbors' websites rated high in terms of usefulness for tourists. This class gained one port (Darłowo Port), which moved from the third class, and currently accounts for almost 40% of all surveyed ports.

The highest rank was achieved by Marina Solna Kołobrzeg (West Pomeranian province). The class with a high level of suitability mainly includes ports located in the Pomeranian province: all three in 2018, five (out of six) in 2020, and five (out of seven) in 2022. Analyzing changes over time, this group has grown and has consumed ports from the West Pomeranian province.

The only negative change was observed in the case of Yacht Harbor Marina Gdańsk, whose total number of points fell by two. However, the website assessed in 2020 is a direct party and operates parallelly with the one surveyed in 2018. In 2022, nothing has changed in this respect.

In the study conducted in 2022, the highest increase in points was observed for Port Mrzeżyno. In the two previous surveys, this port did not receive any points as it had no website. Eight ports (42%) scored the same number of points in all three

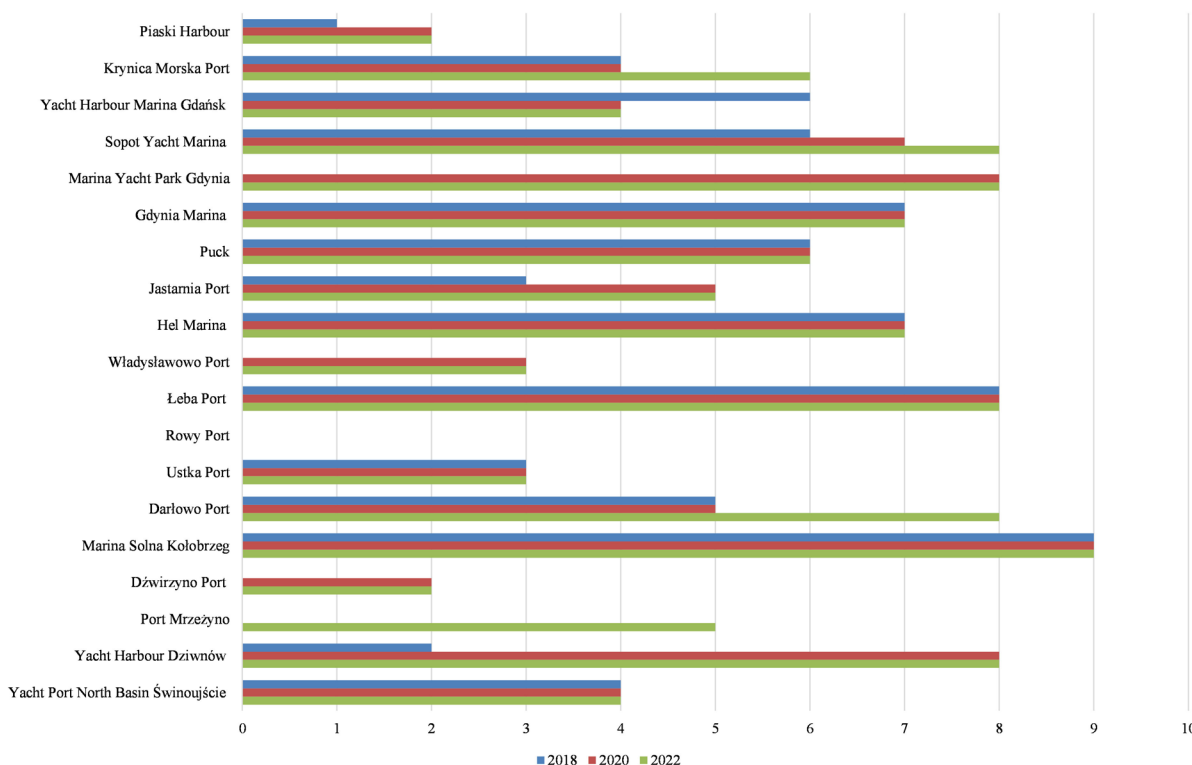


Fig. 5. The results of the scoring of the content of yacht port websites in 2018–2022
Source: own study.

rankings. It is worth noting that half of them were classified as having at least a high degree of website usability. The results of the research conducted in 2018–2022 are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 6 shows the total number of points scored by all ports under each criterion separately. It is worth noting that the only criterion that was not met in the analyzed ports in the first two studies, including the port with the highest score, was the availability of information on facilities for disabled people. This can be regarded as an oversight, owing to the aging of European societies, because of which there is an increase in the average age of people who practice sailing. In Germany, the average age it was already 60 years old in 2016 (GA-MA, 2018), and in Poland there is a growing tendency in this respect. Older adults often have reduced physical fitness, which entails the need to use special amenities in ports. Additionally, a large and growing group of disabled sailors should be taken into account, whose members are guided by the safety and convenience

features of yacht ports when planning a cruise route. Information on the availability of facilities, or at least a declaration that the port is adapted for use by people with various disabilities, could contribute to increasing interest in the facilities. Without in-depth research, it is difficult to determine whether the lack of such information is due to mere oversight, or if there are other factors involved. The more so, as there is a tendency to provide information about facilities for the disabled, e.g. on Google maps markings of facilities friendly to the disabled are introduced (Grodecka, 2020). Unfortunately, this has not yet been established in Poland, but it is likely only a matter of time. The results obtained in 2022 confirm this because the first port appeared (Darłowo Port), which informs tourists on its website about adapting the infrastructure to the needs of elderly and disabled people. According to the information posted, Darłowo Port has three-wheeled bikes with a shopping trolley, steps/gangways to facilitate descent and boarding, and loading/unloading trolleys (Darłowo Port, 2022).

The criteria that were met by almost all ports in 2018 were the availability of the list of services (K2) and information about the telephone number to the port (K9). The telephone number was usually placed together with the address under the contact details tab. It was similar in 2020. The popularity of placing additional materials on websites, such as films and photos, has increased (K10). The results from 2022 confirm this. In addition to the three indicated criteria, those related to the availability of the port plan (K3), price list (K4), and information about attractions (K8) were also met in at least half of the examined ports.

Regarding the list of services, different ways of presenting it have been observed at different ports. Most often, the selected services were listed on the main page or subpage of the port, constituting part of the description of the facility; the rest could be found in the price lists. Such solutions were adopted, among others in Świnoujście and Łeba. In the case of Kołobrzeg, active icons with photos have been placed on the port's main page. Tourists need to click them to find a detailed description of selected services, such as yacht charter or diving schools.

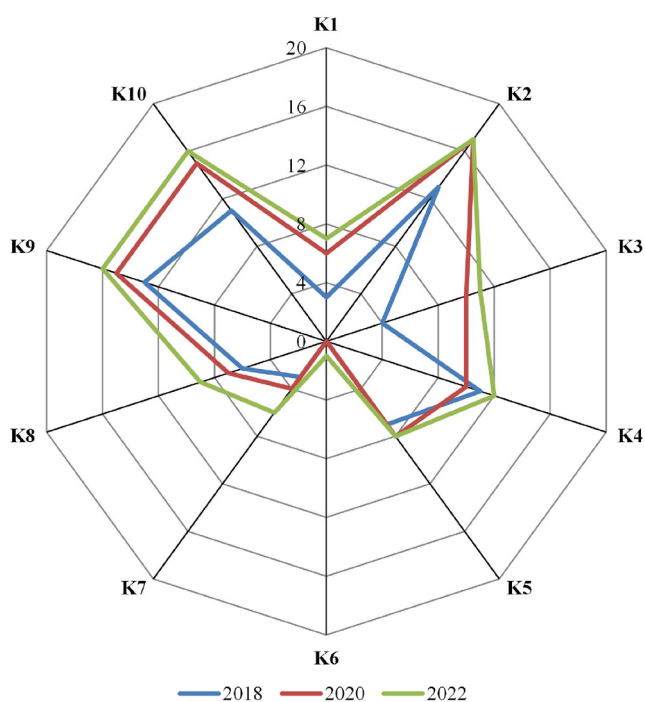


Fig. 6. The number of ports meeting individual criteria (K1-K10) in the research in 2018–2022

Source: own study.

The dominant lack of translations of port websites into foreign languages is surprising (K7). However, positive changes regarding this have been observed. Translations were only available on three websites in 2018 and four in 2020 (for ports with high and very high relevance). As of 2022, there are already six ports that address this communication aspect, including Port Mrzeżyno that was classified for the first time. Darłowo Port also added this functionality, which happened simultaneously with the creation of a new direct website that was rated highly useful. However, the lack of translations for most websites of the analyzed ports can be considered a large oversight, since they are ports located on the Baltic coast that is adjacent to the transboundary basin. These facilities have excellent conditions for attracting foreign tourists, e.g. from Germany, Sweden, or Russia.

The result of the research on the first criterion (K1), i.e. the existence of one's own (direct) website, is very interesting. It might seem that in the era of universal Internet access, having websites by service facilities is already a generally accepted standard. In this case, however, only three of the surveyed facilities had their own website in 2018. Most often, the information was posted in tabs on the websites of individual communes, centers, or commercial ports that are operators of the surveyed yacht ports. Therefore, finding them is not easy for potentially interested people. Tourists looking for yacht ports usually do not recognize the operator of a particular port and search for direct websites. Unfortunately, this also applies to large ports with considerable tourist traffic, e.g. in Świnoujście. In this case, the situation improved, because already six ports had their own website in 2020. However, in 2022 this number increased by one – the already mentioned Darłowo Port.

The criterion that has “improved the most” in two years is the availability of the port plan/map (K3). In 2020, this information was posted by more than half of the ports surveyed. Contrastingly, in 2022, in relation to the previous study, the greatest increase was observed in the criteria related to the availability of the price list (K4), translation into foreign languages

(K7), and information about attractions (K8). In all three cases, it was an increase of two ports.

In 2022, the degree of social media usage as a communication tool for yacht ports with tourists was additionally examined. As indicated in the description of the research methodology, it was checked whether the analyzed ports have a profile on Facebook and a YouTube channel. More than half of the ports have active profiles on the former media. This mainly applies to ports that have obtained at least a high degree of usefulness of the website. By contrast, only three ports use the YouTube channel. These ports scored at least eight points in the website rating. One of them additionally has a profile on Instagram and another one on Twitter. It can be concluded that these facilities appreciate information technologies in communication with tourists and want to develop in this area to expand the group of customers.

CONCLUSIONS

The research results presented in the article allowed us to answer our research questions. Yacht ports make little use of websites as a communication tool with potential customers; however, positive changes in this respect are observed. Research conducted at two-year intervals (in 2018, 2020, and 2022) allows us to conclude that the number of yacht harbors whose website usability was considered medium or high increased from seven (in 2018) to 11 (in 2022). Over the years, the website usability of only one port has been defined at a very high level (Marina Solna Kołobrzeg). Still, many ports do not use the Internet to communicate with tourists. It is puzzling because the utilization of this tool is already common; for many people, it is the basic and obvious source of information and time management when planning tourist trips or during them (including cruises). At the same time, it should be noted that the criteria for evaluating websites referred only to the existence of individual content. The form of their presentation was not assessed, which is also important due to the marketing message, positioning of websites in Internet resources, ease, and intuitiveness of use and appearance.

The conducted research allowed stating that:

1. Only a few ports have their own website.
2. The websites assessed were not very functional for users from outside Poland, as most of them were not translated into foreign languages. This should be considered a serious flaw. Due to their location, all researched yacht ports have a great potential for servicing foreign sailors.
3. In 2022, for the first time one of the surveyed websites (Darłowo Port) published information about facilities for disabled people that are available in the port area.
4. There has been progress in graphical content such as plans/port maps as well as videos and photos. This should be considered a very positive change. Certainly, these elements facilitate making tourist decisions and the subsequent usage of the services of a given port.
5. More than half of the ports (10 out of 19) have active social media profiles and the Facebook is the most commonly used by them. YouTube was used only by a few ports and those with websites rated eight or more points, which lead to the conclusion that these facilities appreciate information technologies in communicating with tourists and want to develop in this area to expand the group of customers.

It should be noted that only websites directly related to a given port were analyzed in the research. However, some of the ports surveyed belong to the West Pomeranian Sailing Route or the Żuławy Loop and (as most of the surveyed ports were covered by one or the other project), information about the ports is available on the Route or Loop websites. In addition, ports are promoted on the Internet thanks to various initiatives implemented as part of international cooperation in the cross-border, transnational, and interregional dimensions. This should not, however, replace own initiatives. Individual port websites are their showpieces. It can be expected that potential tourists, wishing to find information about a given unit, will look for the direct website rather than search for information through project websites. The increasingly complex websites of marinas can also play an important role in the process of managing them.

The importance of having websites by yacht ports may be confirmed by the fact that keeping a website updated on an ongoing basis is one of the evaluation criteria in both international and regional port categorization systems. A website is usually required from ports seeking higher than average categories, examples include international categorization systems such as IMCI Blue Stars and The Gold Anchor Scheme (Blue Star Marina, 2022; Gold Anchor, 2017) or the regional system of Amber Anchors used to categorize ports belonging to the West Pomeranian Sailing Route (Marinas, 2022).

The study on the utilization of websites by Polish Baltic yacht ports will be continued in 2024. An in-depth study on the use of social media by ports is also planned, including an analysis of the content posted.

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