



# Wolin Island, tourism and conceptions of identity

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## KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** The study focuses on conceptions of the identity of Wolin Island, the area located in the southern part of the Baltic Sea. Identity is regarded as a complex phenomenon, and the research incorporates two primary perspectives: socio-cultural and spatial. Investigations reveal that key factors affecting the identity of the island include tourism development and a post-war history connected with significant migration processes. In consequence, the relationships between tourism and identity have been emphasised.

Investigation of the theme is accompanied by an analysis of the role of external elements posing a threat to Wolin's identity. They include worldwide factors, which embrace a cultural shift, devaluation of landscape or place meaning, and more site-specific processes, such as the local growth of the heritage industry. The discussion is followed by reflections on intrinsic features of identity and its evolution. In conclusion, main elements for construction of Wolin Island's identity are distinguished, and the lack of dependence on 'islandness' is noted.

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## Introduction

Narratives of identities usually reveal many layers of meaning. Islands constitute especially valuable fields of inquiry, they demonstrate tremendous diversity with landscapes ranging from arctic deserts or tropical forests to compact urbanised areas, and simultaneously exhibit great cultural differences. Connected with remoteness, isolation and to a large degree with uniqueness, islands form the basis of manifold captivating images. However, there can be a sharp contradiction between

reality and external associations. It is intriguing that questions regarding islands' identities frequently focus attention on their perception by 'outsiders'. Though offering considerable advantages, such an approach cannot reveal internal notions of identity, which are inseparable from inherent features of an island, including its socio-cultural disposition.

The study presented here investigates the identity of Wolin, an island situated in the southern part of the Baltic Sea. The work concentrates on Wolin's distinctiveness and stresses an 'insider view'. Great touristic attractiveness, a complicated history and the fact of being an island (one of a few in Poland) are among the most important reasons for focusing on this area. Owing to close connections of Wolin with tourism functions, tourism must receive special attention in the study. The author treats identity as a complex phenomenon, referring both to its spatial and cultural meanings; however, the socio-cultural dimension is regarded as an overriding concern, which has been complemented by spatial characteristics.

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The multidimensional character of the study required the application of a combined method of research. It included analyses of relevant scientific literature, spatial policy of the region, press materials and tourist information. Conclusions were also drawn from interviews conducted in 2011 and earlier (e.g. in 2001 and 2005). The most recent interviews with members of local communities, which provided output of close relevance to the theme explored in the current study, were focused on tourism and perception of the area. They consisted mostly of open-ended questions and embraced a group of 52 respondents. Regarding respondents' structure, a slight predominance of women (28) occurred; age distribution shows a larger share of mature people (especially those between 21–30 and 41–50 years old) and having secondary education. These interviews were augmented in 2011 by meetings with several authorities engaged in tourism development of the Wolin Island (Bożetka, 2011). The analysis has also integrated the results of two other surveys. The first examined regional identity of inhabitants and was provided by the Western Pomerania Province (Tożsamość regionalna..., 2011), the second investigated perception and attitudes to the Wolin National Park and was conducted by the Park in 2010 (Woliński Park Narodowy..., 2010). A set of observations carried out by the author in the period 1993–2011 supplements an empirical part of the research.

Since conceptions of identity play a principal role in the work, a review of the evolution of theories of identity became a significant part of the study.

### Identity and regional identity-theoretical foundations

Given the focus on the issue of island identity, in this case on Wolin, insight into the term “identity” is necessary. Identity can be explained from a psycho-cultural perspective that emphasises the individual, the group or even a culture, but it can also be regarded using a chorological approach, which is characteristic of sciences engaged in examination of spatial phenomena. The latter perspective is shared by geography; in this field of knowledge, identity is usually closely connected with a given level of a spatial scale, and as a result, concepts of local identity and regional identity have emerged. However, investigation into such a complex issue as identity requires a deeper understanding than a single discipline can provide. The author thus combines the two aforementioned positions.

Although many different definitions can be found, both sociology and psychology regard identity as the sense of self (Dictionary of Sociology, 2001; The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology, 2010). Barney Warf in Encyclopedia of Human Geography (2006: 239) links both approaches, stating that “identity is simultaneously a deeply personal phenomenon and a social phenomenon that reflects, and in turn shapes, individual and collective behaviour”. According to him, there are specific characteristics of the phenomenon. Firstly, identities both constitute and are constituted by the social world. Secondly, they are always historically specific and thirdly, they are simultaneously space forming and space formed (“Space affects not only what we see in the world, but also how we see it”, Warf, 2006: 240). These preconditions play a significant role in the present study. Interestingly, human sciences usually link identity with man, treated individually or as a group, but geography, architecture and other space-related disciplines

show that identity may also accompany any spatial unit, e.g. place, region or landscape.

Though being one of the most common forms of identity, regional identity is a very problematic construction and quite a difficult term to define. An important conceptual distinction lies between “identity of the region” and “regional identity of its inhabitants”. Identity of a region can be divided into two categories: Images, which can also be conceived as parts of regional consciousness and which have a rather subjective character, and more “objective” classifications based on physical environment, culture, landscape, etc. (Paasi, 1986, 2003; Knapp, 2003). Ipsen (1997) identifies regional phenomena processed by individual perception, which are of considerable importance for forming a feeling of belonging. These qualities originate from place properties and comprise the contour, complexity, and coherence.

As far as regional identity is concerned, notions that traditionally accompany the idea of place – such as a sense of belonging to and an attachment to a given area – play a crucial role. The relationship between identity and bonds between people and places (areas) constitute a significant theoretical issue. It seems that identity can exist even without considerable links between people and a given piece of land. Nevertheless, their presence and their strength contribute greatly to the content and values of identity. Norberg-Schulz (2000) when highlighting connections between place and region stated that identifying with a place or an area largely contributes to regional identity, since identity is closely related to the feeling of place.

Taking the above into account, two principal aspects of regional identity can be distinguished:

1. Socio-cultural, focusing on people, especially inhabitants, their feelings and perceptions as related to social and cultural systems, and adequate elements of these systems
2. Spatial, centred on characteristics of a given area, sometimes close to the concept of “landscape identity”.

Perhaps it is worth noting that the latter aspect cannot omit human activity and that the two perspectives co-exist, demonstrating important interrelationships.

### Tourism and identity

Looking at identity through the lens of tourism, positive and negative influences of tourism can be found, both of which are intimately connected with cultural effects. Tourism can bring considerable benefits by enriching local or regional culture with new modes of behaviour, habits, and customs. It usually introduces (and simultaneously requires) an attitude of tolerance, broadens horizons of inhabitants (Przeclawski, 1994), and intensifies cultural exchange. Furthermore, tourism in many ways emphasises the idea of culture as a negotiated and mutable phenomenon.

However, the growing impact of tourism may constitute a serious threat to local societies. This increasing pressure is widely explored in the literature. Tourism can be seen as an economic opportunity and a tool for local development as reported by many case studies (e.g. Marjavaara, 2007), but apart from this, it may lead to social exclusion and even contribute to decline of many destinations (see Agarwal and Brunt

(2006) who demonstrate changes within English seaside resorts). Changes in local and regional cultures have been analysed not only empirically (e.g. MacLeod, 2004), but also from theoretical and philosophical points of view (e.g. Murphy, 1985; Hollinshead, 1993; Przecławski, 1994; Urry, 1994; Edensor, 2001; Hunter, 2001; Wang, 1999).

Fundamental concerns involve treating culture as a commodity (e.g. Hunter, 2001), the “demonstration effect” (Murphy, 1985) connected with acculturation to the dominant interest (Nuñez, 1989; Hunter, 2001), an increasing tendency toward simulation and the proliferation of images (Urry, 1994). As Palmer (1999) has indicated, when images are marketed and sold they contribute enormously to the rapid growth of heritage tourism. The force of touristic images is very strong and it affects local people, who may be identified and encountered only through constructed images. Noteworthy, heritage tourism often employs re-constructed or created landscapes. Many researchers argue that landscapes and their images can construct national identity (e.g. Gruffudd et al., 1991).

Importantly, expansion of cultural contact can be seen as an invitation to cultural hybridity. As Hunter (2001) contends, tourism accelerates change and reinforces the subsequent cultural effects. Processes such as construction of heritage and manipulation of ideology prove the strength of these impacts.

Though it is not the intention here to enter a debate about theories of cultural change in the contemporary world, some general theses should be invoked. A shift from modernity, postulated to involve “opening out to others” (Giddens, 1991; Urry, 1994) to post modernity, with its specific and powerful desire for simulations (Wang, 1999; Hunter, 2001; Edensor, 2001) connected with consumption of images (Urry, 1994) brings about a cumulative effect that deeply influences culture and identity. Hence, tourism can be regarded as a sphere of influence “where cultures overlap and fractalise” (Hunter, 2001).

Of course, the impact of tourism on identity goes beyond a strictly cultural sphere – with high complexity of material representations it strongly influences a physical layer of a land-

scape and spatial use. In general, destination areas frequently experience growing congestion, the homogenisation of architecture and land-use patterns. Heavy consumption of space that is useful for investment is accompanied by the tendency to aestheticise everyday life and by the popularisation of “themed environments” (Urry, 1994) displaying simulated realities. Consequently, in addition to producing areas deprived of genuine character, tourism may encourage a mental detachment from the land. The human dimension of place (‘place’ seen in different scales) reflected in the presence of bonds between humans and their environment encapsulated in the Yi-fu Tuan’s concept of Topophilia (1974) may be evoked here. Affective ties with material environment differ in intensity, subtlety, and mode of expression (Tuan, 1974: 93) and are extremely important for forming the state of identification with a place, a feeling of belonging to and having roots in an exact place.

## The Wolin Island

### Geographic attributes

The island of Wolin is an island surrounded by an inland lagoon, the open sea and rivers. Varied landforms, the influence of the sea, rivers and lakes, and a mosaic of different ecosystems form a unique natural landscape. The island stretches along the southern coastline of the Baltic Sea, in north-western Poland (Fig. 1). Poland has fewer than 50 islands, of which Wolin, at 250 km<sup>2</sup> and with a population of about 30,000 – is the largest. Characteristically, as mentioned before, Wolin is situated among three different water types – The Pomorska Gulf, a part of the open sea extending to the north, The Szczecin Lagoon (Zalew Szczeciński) in the west, and the rivers of Oder and its tributaries (Świna and Dziwna) in the south and east (Fig. 1).

Wolin is adjacent to the island of Uznam, which in majority belongs to Germany. These two islands lie close to the

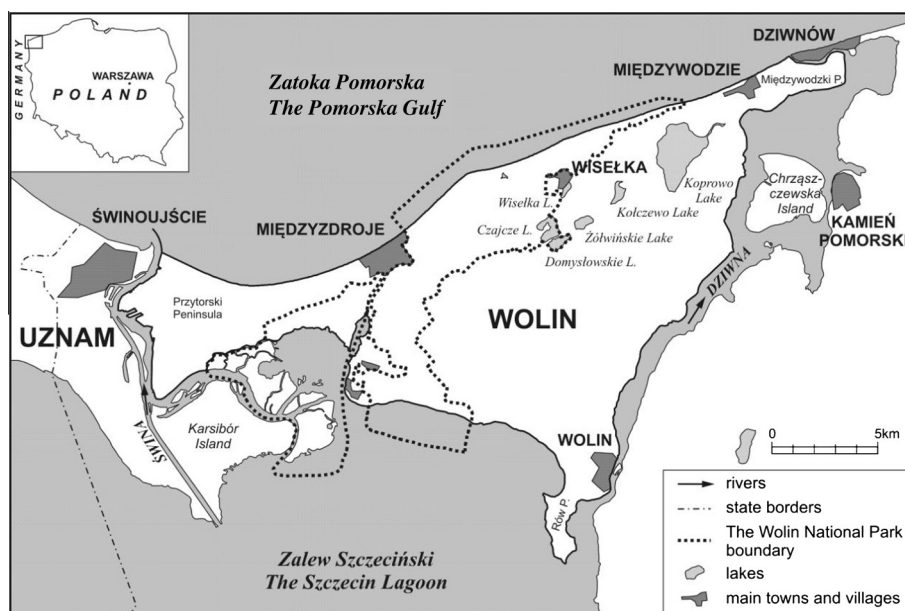


Fig. 1 Wolin (source: the author's own work).

Polish-German border and to the mainland. Wolin is a part of the Western Pomerania Province (województwo zachodniopomorskie) and a district of Kamień Pomorski. Its territory is shared by four communities: Świnoujście, Międzyzdroje, Wolin and Dziwnów.

The island is featured by varied relief and different landforms. Key geomorphologic processes: aeolian and coastal form dunes, sandy beaches and high cliffs (Kostrzewski and Strykiewicz, 1986). The climate is temperate, with many oceanic features. This is the mildest climate in Poland and demonstrates high summer insolation comparing to the rest of the country. Important balneological values (thermal baths) occur locally, for instance, in Międzyzdroje (Młodzikowski, 1986; Nowacki, 2000). The island exhibits rich biodiversity: 68 fish species, more than 230 bird species and 30 species of mammals including a unique European bison (Piotrowska et al., 2000; Bereszyński et al., 2000). The role of the Wolin National Park, which protects biota and landscape and embraces a rich mosaic of habitats featuring different ecological character, with forest communities, dune plants and wetlands should be highlighted. Established in 1960 (4844 ha) and enlarged in 1966 to include coastal waters of the Baltic Sea and flood waters of the Świna's delta (10,937 ha) became the first (one of two) marine national park in the country.

The impressive landscape pattern found in Wolin- of a long beach accompanied by cliffs covered with lush forest greenery (Fig. 2), the pattern, which exposes constant activity of the sea, with its natural beauty and changeability, may be regarded as an inestimable value and simultaneously, an essential constituent of the island's identity.

#### *Historical attributes*

Wolin was well known during the Roman period thanks to amber trade routes and settlements of Goths. The ancient town of Wolin, in the south of the island, had a special reputation of being one of the richest ports in this part of Europe and the most beautiful harbour in the Baltic Sea. In the 10th century the island was incorporated into the Polish country formed by the Piasts and was granted a large degree of independence. Since the 12th century, it was troubled with many political conflicts that involved Denmark, Sweden and Ger-



**Fig. 2** High moraine cliffs in the north of the Wolin Island are covered with beech and pine forests. The cliffs have recently been affected by strong abrasion processes (photo by author).

many. In 1762, Wolin became a part of Prussia and belonged to Germany until 1945. During Second World War, the island suffered damage, and after the war, it was returned to Poland as a part of the Reclaimed Land (Northern and Western Territories).

As a result of this turbulent history, only remains of tangible cultural heritage can be found, e.g. fragments of ancient settlements (including a reconstructed “town of Vikings” in Wolin); churches in Ładzin, Prztytór, Międzyzdroje and Wolin; and a fortress in Świnoujście. Together with remnants of old Slavonic settlements, old fishermen's houses (e.g. in Wapnica), a draw-bridge in Dziwnów, lighthouses in Wiselka and Świnoujście, and rocket launchers in Wicko, these objects constitute the most important historical attractions. However, the spa areas in Międzyzdroje and Świnoujście are of special importance for tourism. Additionally, several cultural events boost the area's attractiveness: Jomsborg Wolin Festival of Vikings and Slavonic Nations (Wolin), International Choir Festival (Międzyzdroje), International Music Festival “Amber Baltic” (Międzyzdroje) and Holiday Artistic Festival (Międzyzdroje).

The island's economy has been based on harbours and sea transport (Świnoujście, Dziwnów), fishery, agriculture (Wolin commune), forestry, and tourism. Owing to its great assets, nature conservation plays a significant role, but this is tourism that tends to dominate all other activities.

#### **Tourism on Wolin**

Thanks to its extraordinary natural values as a seaside location, the beautiful landscape, favourable local climate, and established tourism traditions, Wolin is a very popular destination among Polish visitors and holiday-makers. Its attractiveness also results from the presence of a wide range of touristic facilities (Tomczyk, 2004). Tourism here follows the rule of “Sea, Sand and Sun” and shows a typical mass tourism character, particularly in the northern part of the island during the summer season (June–August). In contrast, central and southern parts of the island feature extensive rather than intensive use. Touristic traditions are linked with development of two major towns: Międzyzdroje and Świnoujście, which were popular holiday resorts before the Second World War (Figs. 3 and 4); their spa functions are reflected in the name of Międzyzdroje (which means “between spas”). Today, the majority of visitors to the island come from Poland, particularly from the regions of Wielkopolska, Silesia, and nearby Western Pomerania. However, the share of foreign visits is not modest, mainly owing to arrivals from Germany and Sweden, and in a large degree because of the development of health tourism.

Międzyzdroje performs the role of the island's major tourist centre and a beach resort. It is also a functional microregion (Budner and Kaczmarek, 1986; Sołowiej 1992) of the north-western part of the island. As Sołowiej (1992) indicated, the town exhibits specific cycles of tourism activities – a dominant cycle involves beach tourism in the summer and is complemented by spa activities after the peak season.

Wolin has great natural assets for active tourism, especially water sports (sailing and canoeing) and cycling. However, these favourable preconditions are rarely exploited. In addition to beach activities tourists prefer sightseeing, mainly in relations to the Wolin National Park's. In terms of annual



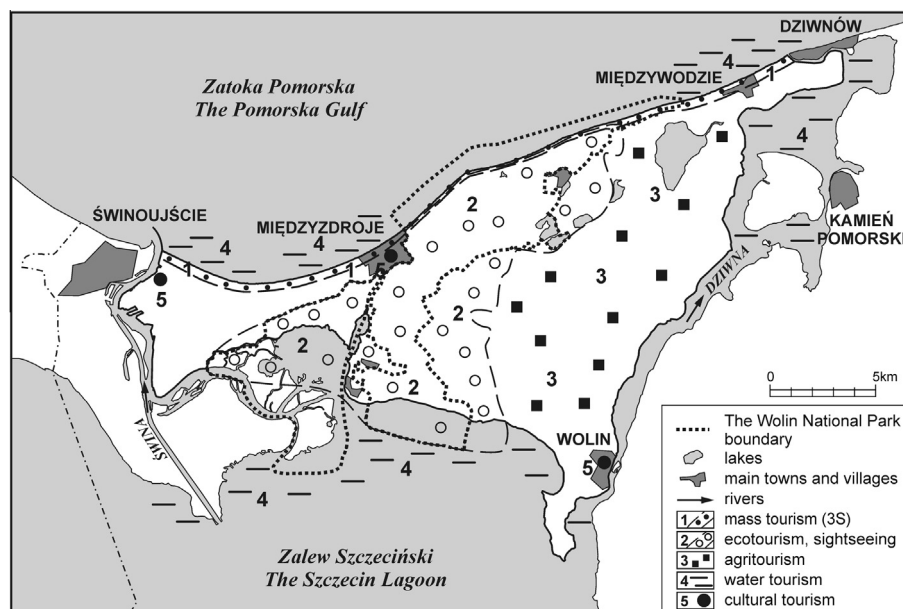


Fig. 3 Distribution of main kinds of tourism within the Wolin island (source: author's own work).

number of visitors, the Park usually ranks as the second or third most popular national park in the country (Jakuczun, 2004). Official data (Environment, 2012) recorded 1.5 million visitors in 2011. This protected area provides plenty of opportunity for land- and water-based ecotourism. The eastern and central parts of the island, demonstrating more of an agricultural character, are attempting to develop agritourism. Cultural tourism plays a less important role, but several events, such as Jomsborg Wolin Festival and Holiday Artistic Festival in Międzyzdroje have become very popular regional attractions. The town of Wolin should be taken into account owing to interesting exhibitions of its early medieval history accompanied by numerous cultural events focusing on traditions of Vikings and Slavonic people.

Interestingly, tourism on the island shows a specific pattern of distribution (Fig. 3). Cultural tourism is limited to major towns and villages and demonstrates a high degree of concentration. Other forms of tourism cover large areas and occupy particular zones. A network of touristic trails links the island's main attractions to one another and to waterways of the Szczecin Lagoon.

#### Post-war history of Wolin and identity issues

As previously mentioned, during its history Wolin was under various political influences, including the rules of Poland, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, resulting in waves of cultural change. From 1762 to 1945, the island belonged to Germany. After the Second World War, as a part of the Northern and Western Territories, the area was returned to Poland. This change of state borders was connected with significant migration and resettlement processes in the 1940s and 1950s. German inhabitants left (about 9 million within the Northern and Western Territories, including 4 million from Western Pomerania), and new settlers arrived (Chmielewski, 1998; Wysiedlenia..., 2008). At first, immigrants to Western Pomerania arrived from neighbouring provinces on their own, but later the migration was strictly controlled by the state. The

majority of settlers was of Polish origin and came from overcrowded provinces of central Poland or from previous Polish eastern territories, which were incorporated into the Soviet Union during the war (nowadays constituting parts of Byelorussia, Lithuania and Ukraine). A minority (fewer than 2%) arrived from Western Europe (Chmielewski, 1998). Additionally, Western Pomerania was a destination for numerous ethnic minorities, mainly Ukrainian and German. In consequence, this province is reported to have one of the most complicated socio-cultural structures in Poland (Chmielewski, 1998; Machaj 2005; Wysiedlenia..., 2008).

The results of the above changes are very serious. Firstly, cultural continuity was disrupted, since the new settlers represented other nations, cultures, and religions. Secondly, newcomers had many problems adjusting to a new land, where they encountered traditions, patterns of land-use, and architecture that were not appreciated. In fact, most of the immigrants did not accept the new situation and this reluctant attitude was continuously turning into alienation and indifference. The state of detachment from the land has two aspects: feelings of detachment from the 'core' Polish territory, and a lack of acceptance of the new area.<sup>1</sup> Groups of settlers differed culturally and large distances were established between the different groups (Machaj, 2005). It is worth noting that the new post-war communist state inhibited processes of autonomous social and cultural integration by preventing the development of local societies and identities. Reconstruction of former social

<sup>1</sup> A story of Mrs. Krystyna Łukasiewicz, who was born in Wilno (currently Vilnius, Lithuania) and in 1950s emigrated to Poland can help realize how difficult situation individuals had to face. She met her husband in Wolin, where they afterwards decided to settle. After many years Mrs. Krystyna decided to visit Vilnius with a friend, the visit evoked memories and important questions appeared soon. Asking each other 'Where is your fatherland – here or there?', they found out that the answer is the same for both of them: 'Here- in Vilnius and there- in Poland'. Mrs. Łukasiewicz states firmly, relating to old times she spent in Wilno: 'this is a bond that nobody and nothing will be able to break' (Łukasiewicz, 2002).

and cultural links was not encouraged and a common law that allowed the area to be governed by local communities was suspended (Pawłowska, 1996; Trościak, 2008). Local and regional identities were almost abandoned concepts throughout the country during the post-war decades and became a matter of special scientific insight only after the political turnover in 1989 (Trościak, 2008).

In consequence, local societies have been weak, cultural alienation has been experienced and the Northern and Western Territories have remained a kind of a foreign country for years. Weak identities or even a lack of regional identities of the inhabitants became an essential problem in the “new territories”. Along with cultural uncertainty and a lack of cohesion, important social problems have appeared. According to official reports, Western Pomerania has been the province of Poland most afflicted by crime and social pathology right up to the present day (Strategia rozwoju..., 2010). Additionally, a passive attitude to social marginalisation and low levels of local activity have been noted (ibidem). A recent survey of regional identity of Western Pomerania inhabitants (Tożsamość regionalna..., 2011) revealed that more than one third of residents (37.2%) declared a lack of attachment to any place in the province.

Fortunately, as far as social and economic problems are concerned, Wolin’s situation has not been as difficult as that of other parts of Western Pomerania. The reasons lie in possibilities opened up by tourism. Settlers to Wolin found relatively favourable economic conditions, and the area did not suffer severe physical destruction during the war. Throughout the post-war decades and today, the island has benefited from relatively high economic growth (Plan zagospodarowania..., 2002), a wider range of cultural attractions and less depopulation as compared with other areas in the province (e.g. Plan zagospodarowania..., 2002; Studium uwarunkowań..., 2010a).

### Tourism and the socio-cultural dimension of Wolin’s identity

As highlighted before, the processes of habituation of immigrants to new conditions on Wolin were ameliorated by the benefits offered by tourism opportunities. However, this could not completely eradicate feelings of detachment and alienation.

An analysis of regional planning policy confirms an influential role of tourism for development in the province (e.g. Plan zagospodarowania..., 2002; Plan zagospodarowania..., 2010), particularly in coastal areas, including Wolin Island (Plan Rozwoju Lokalnego Powiatu Kamieńskiego..., 2006; Plan Rozwoju Lokalnego Gminy Wolin, 2007; Strategia rozwoju miasta i gminy Międzyzdroje..., 2004; Studium uwarunkowań i kierunków..., 2010a, 2010b). Taking into account the role of tourism in economic development and its strong impacts on culture, tourism’s role in identity formation requires closer attention.

After the political turnover in 1989 a need to build and strengthen local and regional identity has become one of the most important aims for local governments. Enhancement of identity and socio-cultural integration is among the principal tasks designated for Western Pomerania for the coming years (Strategia rozwoju..., 2010). The most important concerns comprise an increase in social cohesion, and the development of cultural heritage and growth of a sense of cultural belong-

ing, which are considered to form an essential basis for regional identity (Strategia rozwoju..., 2010: 111).

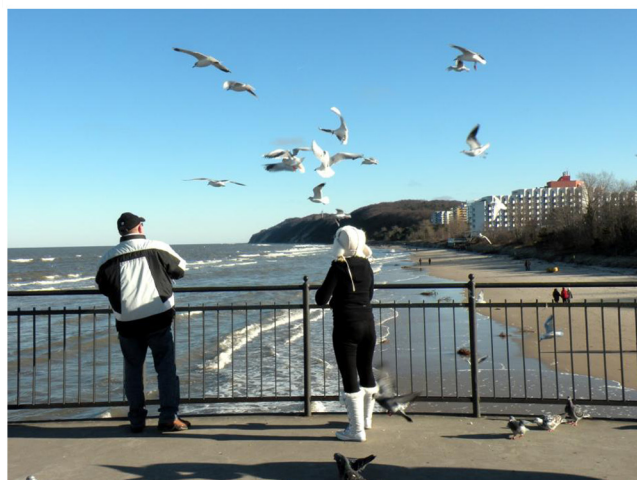
Numerous newspaper articles, formal analyses and discussions convey that the state of “looking for identity” has become prevalent in socio-cultural life. Remarkably, the search for identity is connected with a search for meaning. Elements that could help build associations and act as distinguishing marks are much needed, and in fact, almost everything is deemed helpful if it can arouse feelings of like and pride. This at least partially explains the hunger for new attractions and the really strong desire demonstrated by local people to encounter and host tourists. Attractions, events, and a feeling, that “something is taking place” has become a real need expressed by the people.<sup>2</sup>

The popularity of tourism stems in part from its provision of attractions and cultural goods. Importantly, a hospitable attitude to tourism is characteristic of the island’s communities. Sociological research on tourism development on Wolin has demonstrated a characteristic affirmation for tourism among local citizens and a willingness to invite guests (e.g. Łyczkowska, 1995; Matuszewska, 2003), though some alteration in the inhabitants’ perception of tourism has also been observed (Kostrzewski and Strykiewicz, 1986; Ewertowski, 2003). The research conducted by the author shows that the island is associated by its inhabitants mainly with tourism (94.1% of respondents declared tourism as one of the most important associations of Wolin).

Subsequently, it can be concluded that opportunities provided on Wolin by touristic traditions established before the war (Fig. 4) and because of post-war development of the sector were not limited to economic benefits. It may be assumed that the greater role of tourism was to enhance cultural exchanges and open the island to domestic and foreign arrivals. Importantly, the increase in arrivals of people from different parts of Poland helped create stronger bonds between the local population and their area than was evident in more remote corners of the “new territories”, and it also enabled the island to gradually lose its peripheral status. Tourism made possible to become closer to the ‘outside world’ and this world was viewed through encounters with tourists. This process may be understood from a psychological perspective – the outside world is seen through the encounters with visitors (seems to be ‘at hand’), and using a more concrete, physical perspective – real distances have shortened thanks to transport routes connecting the island and the rest of the country. Interestingly, only two persons examined in the last author’s research complained about isolation or a kind of territorial disconnection that frequently accompanies islands.

Tourism can emphasise local character and activate expansion of local culture, and indeed, most cultural events on the island are tourist – oriented. However, Wolin lacks unique cultural patterns, and the roots of local communities or their specific ethnic cultures are not exhibited. Although cultural events are very popular and are eventually associated with particular

<sup>2</sup> An opinion given by a 48-year old man, a citizen of Międzyzdroje, can perform as a typical formula: “Many tourists arrive at our town, even from the mountains. We can observe people on a promenade, have some conversations, a lot of things come about. Międzyzdroje is famous, but there should be more festivals and other artistic occasions, for us and our families, not only in summer. Interesting people and events, lively atmosphere, to feel the place.”



**Fig. 4** Miedzyzdroje (Misdroy in German) was a popular tourist destination before the war (Fig. 4). The pier is currently among the longest piers in Poland and offers a beautiful view on the north-western part of the island (Fig. 5, photo by author).

places, they do not demonstrate the special local values that help constitute *genius loci* or a sense of place. Rather, the events eagerly use seaside conditions and beach resorts assets, in a common and general sense, without relevance to precise places.

With one exception, the island's material traces of history do not exhibit exceptional values. The authority of the town of Wolin has implemented an ambitious project based on archeological findings and the historic reconstruction "Wolin- a Town of History" (Plan Rozwoju Lokalnego..., 2007). The project explores the early Middle Ages, an epoch of Vikings and ancient Slavonic tribes, and is composed of several elements, including the 'Centre of Vikings and Slavonic People open-air archeological museum', the 'Niedamira historic shipyard' and the 'Jomsborg Wolin Festival of Vikings and Slavonic Nations'. The undertaking results in the reconstruction of a compact medieval section in the town of Wolin. The nearby historic shipyard on the Dziwna River aims to build replicas of old ships and boats and to promote Baltic boat-building traditions. One of the points is that medieval Wolin is identified in Icelandic sagas with the legendary Jomsborg, a defensive settlement of Scandinavian and Slavonic Vikings. The Jomsborg Wolin Festival has become a spectacular event, with about 800 exhibitors and tens of thousands of tourists. It lasts 3 days and

demonstrates ancient Viking and Slavonic life, including their craft, armour and social ceremonies. Participants spend nights in tents, get involved in craft workshops, try to build goods out of purple willow, construct bows, fight, prepare Viking food, etc. The scenery is complemented by characteristic silhouettes of old ships smoothly sailing the river and lagoon.

However, it is surprising that along with this ambitious initiative, the commune organises another attraction in the form of a Western City theme park located in the small village of Sułomino near the town of Wolin.<sup>3</sup>

The developing "Wolin- a Town of History" project fuels the imaginations of tourists and local people. No doubt, it exploits the island's heritage and presents a simulation. Such advanced operations of the heritage industry necessarily affect identity. As it is acknowledged, relationship among tourism, identity (exceptionally, place and political identity) and heritage resources are very close (e.g. Ashworth, 1995). According to Palmer (1999: 318), museums, theme parks and related attractions can provide an opportunity to reaffirm a sense of belonging. However, managing the imagination can involve the manipulation of social awareness, making the effects of heritage tourism on identity ambiguous. To what extent does the enterprise conducted in the Wolin commune influence regional identity? The answer is not simple. The project may strengthen people's links with the island by highlighting its interesting history and it can promote the island in Scandinavia, but it may be very difficult for contemporary citizens to identify with Vikings. Although these events and places create the sense of uniqueness, this is only partly rooted in the culture of today's inhabitants (fortunately, though not always focusing on it, the event exhibits some traditions of Slavonic tribes). Nevertheless, a key function of the project consists in creation of attractions and fulfillment of demands expressed by locals as well as tourists. Local residents view the enterprise as a positive impact on the island's attractiveness (Bożętko, 2011). Importantly, Wolin's interest in the Viking heritage is not connected with national preferences, which for example characterises Shetland Islands (Grydehøj, 2008).

The process of heritagisation usually raises many questions, which tend to focus on the degree of authenticity, the relevance of the past to the present and manipulation of images of the past. It is asserted that islands are especially inclined to be under influence of heritage tourism (e.g. Ronström, 2008) and some of them experience enormous production of pasts. Ronström (ibidem), discussing a case of Gotland shows that heritage became not only a special interest, but also a major industry in this island.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Incompatibility of the Western City Park with the Wolin Festival of Vikings and Slavonic Nations is noticeable. Popular adverts claim that Sułomino transforms into 'a real American Saloon' during summer season (and about two or three weeks before the Wolin Festival). A main attraction is formed by the Western Piknik, a musical event with folk, blues and country music tireless performance. This event is usually accompanied by activities arranged for visitors who prefer 'heavy duty pastime' such as car, motor and quad racing.

<sup>4</sup> Creation of the ancient town and the festival in Wolin is related to heritage production, however, the process and its consequences are not comparable to Gotland. Reconstruction of past makes a contribution to Wolin's touristic attractiveness, but is far from advanced heritagisation illustrated for example by the demand for a retardation of time (that can lead to control over public space) experienced by Gotland.



The influence of tourism on the island's identity must be regarded in terms of the impact of foreign cultures. The open attitude to tourism held by Wolin's inhabitants is followed by an easy reception for patterns of behaviour and cultural impacts that come from abroad. The influences embrace such typical cultural activities as dance and music, displaying a widespread tendency to employ international pop and rarely demonstrate more ambitious inclinations, for instance to ethno music. Foreign influences also affect gastronomy, as numerous national cuisines compete successfully with local seafood.

Interestingly, the habit of celebrating important dates commemorating war and particularly, the post-war period of 'regaining' the territory, which used to be highly respected by the communist state, has been replaced by an enormous popularity of new festivals typical of Western countries, such as Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day. According to the author's study (Bożętka, 2011), majority of respondents appreciated the presence of new cultural forms, especially these connected with music and gastronomy, however, some interviewees considered the changes to be rather odd and their rate to be too fast.

Different cultural patterns are mixed and frequently resemble a state of chaos, but foreign influences do not yet dominate core elements of Polish culture. However, the predominance of German visitors among foreign arrivals, and the island's closeness to Germany leads to this national group having major impacts, both on tourism and on the economy of the island. The popularity of the German language grows alongside the increase in a number of German tourists. Nowadays most cultural information, including descriptions of landmarks and menus in restaurants is bilingual. Preferences of this nation play a great role in tourism management on the island. The prices of many goods, including real estate, are directed at this market segment, and such a process is not appreciated by Polish visitors. German influences are not, however, caused only by tourism, because many people from Western Pomerania and from Wolin itself work in the neighbouring country and even live there with their families. Nonetheless, in light of the history of the island, this impact may be considered to have serious consequences on identity and on the sociocultural sphere, not excluding emergence of hazards for national self-recognition.

Influences from abroad can be observed in the changes leading to adoption of less traditional ways of life, whereas affirmation of traditional values seems to be characteristic of Poland. Besides that, it must be noted that this sort of changes usually results from the operation of many factors, and frequently occurs in tourist areas.

### Spatial dimensions of identity

Tourism overwhelmingly influences spatial aspects of identity. This theme constitutes a very contentious problem that requires further elaboration, which exceeds the scope of the current study. Nevertheless, the following section will focus on the contribution of spatial elements to socio-cultural identity.

The impacts of a tourist function on spatial use and the landscape of Wolin are strong and widespread. The growth of tourist areas has a dynamic character, but the rate of change is not assisted by efforts to maintain adequate landscape values. In fact, a loss of the visual quality and individuality

of the island's spa resorts has been characteristic of the post-war period (Bal, 2009). Deterioration in the form and in the content of sea resorts involves both their general architectural idea and aesthetic qualities. Chaotic and eclectic character of architecture is accompanied by a loss of spatial coherence and connections with nature (Bal 2002, 2009). The great popularity of new, multicultural patterns marginalises old, historic objects and invites a cosmopolitan scheme of "anywhere places". Sadly, acceleration of these changes can now be observed in Międzyzdroje (Fig. 5). For instance, the famous "Amber Hotel", a symbol of spatial and economic transformation in the beginning of 1990s, even considered to be a landmark is now surrounded by many other similar uniform hotels.

Tourism threatens also outstanding natural landscape values, not excluding the area protected by the Wolin National Park. Several zones, for instance in the vicinities of Międzyzdroje and Wiselka have been facing serious conflict between tourism and nature protection for decades (Sołowiej, 1992; Bożętka, 1995; Macias et al., 1995). Noteworthy, along with the pressure for economic growth the role of natural values decreases in social awareness. Tourism can thus be seen as a source of physical degradation of a natural landscape and furthermore, of its mental devaluation. Obviously, this poses a danger for nature and the landscape, but it is also harmful for the island's socio-cultural identity. The great capacity of the island's nature and landscape for creating or strengthening identity is underestimated. It should be noted that none of the examined spatial documents and formal plans for development in the region indicated the role of nature in the self-recognition of the inhabitants, even though problems of identity are frequently stressed.

On the other hand, tourism can contribute to enhancement of place identity-this process is observed in the town of Wolin's efforts to emphasize heritage. Tourism in this case serves as a crucial factor leading to a far-reaching transformation of the mental landscape and leading to the occurrence of a new element that extensively influences the island's image.



**Fig. 5** A growth in tourism leads to disturbance of composition of built-up areas. Contrasts between old residences and new apartment blocks in the spa of Międzyzdroje cause visual tension (photo: author).



The image can exist far away from their origins, being encapsulated in visitors' minds. Regrettably, Wolin lacks research on its image, but some information can be found indirectly, in analyses devoted to touristic attractiveness of the island. The works of Sołowiej (1992) and Łyczkowska (1995) distinguish the beach, The Wolin National Park, and its cliffs and animals (especially bison), which perform as principal elements of the island's image. Matuszewska (1995) investigating perception of the national park observed poor recognition of the area and its boundaries. She revealed that many respondents were not aware that they spent their holidays on an island.

Islands, as Hay argues (2006) may be regarded as special places. Meanings, which transform islands into place may be more pronounced, better articulated, and more effectively defended than in other areas (p. 34). Noteworthy, the metaphorical idea of an island possesses a great power (see e.g. Baldacchino, 2008), and the role of landscape for creating image and identity of the island may be enormous. The Caribbean provide a particular instance of a strength of the associations built upon a vision of a tropical landscape – the visual landscape has long been a central focal point in narratives about these islands and instigated a rise of tourism (Nelson, 2011). We can expect that the emphasis in islands' images is put on an island. However, Wolin does not completely fit in this thesis. The analysis of official statements and plans, including incentives for tourism development, shows that the fact of being an island does not play an important role, it is overshadowed by general assets of location by the sea.<sup>5</sup> That sounds quite surprising regarding islands' advantages tourism industry frequently and eagerly exploits. It seems that one of few representatives of the idea of islandness is weekly *Wyspiarz* Niebieski ('The Blue Islander', 2006-2011), which puts some energy into highlighting a special character of Wolin, Uznam and adjacent islets. The magazine reports and advocates elections of 'The Islander of the Year', frequently mentions deficiency of sea issues in regional policy and sometimes publishes recollections of citizens regarding 'a life on 44 islands'.

### External situation and threats for identity

Identity is a very subtle phenomenon, absorbing a multitude of influences. It can be both fragile and persistent. Furthermore, it depends not only on site-specific factors, but also on worldwide processes. The impact of interrelated multi-scale processes can bring many threats to numerous areas, especially those which are isolated, underdeveloped, and faced with strong external influences. Certainly, this is the case of many islands. As far as Wolin Island is concerned, the unstable and immature character of its identity may cause problems, leading to increasingly negative impacts in the future.

Enhancement of identity and strengthening the links between people and places in an epoch of strong globalisation and influential multicultural patterns do constitute challenging tasks. Two contemporary tendencies can extensively impact Wolin's identity. One of them is connected with intense emi-

gration of Polish citizens to Western Europe since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. Although Wolin's rate of depopulation is slower than that of other parts of Western Pomerania, emigration abroad, especially of young people, is taking place. Another factor is the global cultural tendency toward multiculturalism.

The strength of multicultural influences on Wolin is noticeable, though perhaps not so unbearable as in many other parts of the world. Importantly, multiculturalism does not only affect the community level. Adler (2007) poses a question concerning a new type of personality, contrasting the multicultural individual with the culture-bound individual. According to his research, the identity of a multicultural person is more fluid and mobile, more open to variations. It is based on a cultural context rather than on "belonging to". A multicultural person recreates his identity, changes easily to fit the context, exhibits great mental flexibility and adaptability. Adjustment replaces belonging and traditional values. The multicultural individual's world lacks coherence: he or she seems to live on the boundaries of societies. This convincing description provides only a small modicum of hope for those who regret the disappearing links-with culture, landscape, and a piece of land.

Negative influences on the island's identity are also caused by the continuous loss of spatial identity in Poland in the post-war period. During the socio-economic transformation after 1989, new forms of landscape degradation were set in motion, resulting for instance from attempts to privatise public space. An increase of conflicts around the Wolin National Park and efforts to devalue its mission illustrate a side-effect of economic growth.

Moreover, architecture and spatial planning in Poland has been in a serious crisis for years. As a consequence, uncontrolled settlement sprawl is accompanied by occurrence of numerous places, which are familiar to nobody and that are unable to evoke feelings of attachment and to form positive impacts on identity. The introduction of familiar patterns is particularly recommended in areas that, like Wolin, suffer problems with identity. Unfortunately, architecture in Poland rarely employs regionalistic and vernacular tendencies (e.g. Pawowska, 1994, 1996; Basista, 2001). The above mentioned loss of identity in Polish towns and cities is widespread (Basista, 2001; Bal, 2009) and rises serious threats to maintenance of heritage. Noteworthy, the problem of spatial identity is especially important, since the flow of homogeneity appears to be a main feature of post-modern landscapes (Antrop, 2005).

There is also one more danger for identity. It has a general character and comprises denying the role of identity, regardless the subject it involves: individuals, societies, regions, places or landscapes. Sadly, strong concentration on today, contemporary problems and economy can suppress more elusive notions such as memory, nature and identity.

### The evolving character of identity

Identity may be considered an evolutionary process. It is constructed, contested and negotiated over long periods of time and is vulnerable to changes; with generational shifts being of high importance. New generations have grown up on Wolin Island without the experience of war or of dislocation from land. Though aware of their ancestor's history of migration, the younger age groups have become accustomed to the Wolin

<sup>5</sup> More, according to the output of the survey focused on regional identity (*Tożsamość regionalna...*, 2011), Wolin and other islands were not included to the group of objects having primary importance for identity and attachment to the region, though respondents admitted appreciation of several towns and beaches.

area. However, a lack of place-based roots and tradition lasts longer than the life-span of one generation and as a result, it affects the descendants. The social problems of Western Pomerania and the continuous state of “looking for” underline the importance of this problematic process.

Notably, the Northern and Western Territories are increasingly characterised by a process of substituting the search for identity with the search for material status (Machaj, 2005). Such a change may support the thesis that multiculturalism offers a new type of identity (Adler, 2007). As a consequence, there is a need to discuss the question of the potential deconstruction of the immature cultural identity of Wolin. Furthermore, general theory can prove that the opposite direction of evolution-devolution is also possible.

Two additional remarks should be expressed here. Firstly, although the fulfilment of economic requirements tends to play a leading role, this should not necessarily exclude other needs and values. Secondly, although identity is intimately connected with history, it is nevertheless a future-oriented process, exhibiting an open character and inviting changes and modifications.

## Conclusions and discussion

Issues of identity usually raise many discussion points. Identity is ascertained to build a value system and to be a value itself. However, narratives of identity involve a hidden hazard, which is instrumentalization, or the design of an instrument to meet one's goals. Identities demonstrate close connections with associations and images, are frequently embedded in heritage and its construction, and can be subordinated to governing powers. As Bauman (2004) indicates, social identities remain open, subject to negotiations and conflicts that are immersed in power relations. Noteworthy, any effort to construct identity, especially national identity, may be regarded as being opposed to a more desirable, autonomous and spontaneous process of identity formation. Essentially, from the perspective of ethics, adoption of an attitude towards identity that insists on control and development of steering mechanisms may lead to a highly awkward situation and may compromise the independence of individuals and groups.

Identity depends on many factors and cannot avoid being influenced by changing power structures. The case of Wolin illustrates how external changes can exert a great influence on evolution of identity. Transformation of the ethnic structures of Poland and the surrounding region, a shift of political systems and subsequently, of economic systems have significantly affected components of identity. Additionally, rapid changes in conditions in the 20th century were exacerbated by the steady influence of tourism on the life of the island. The strength of these influences can be seen in the dual nature of Wolin's identity: a pronounced spatial identity that can be stated in geo-physical terms is accompanied by a less definite socio-cultural aspects.

Tourism, as it was outlined above, accelerates change. It can therefore be anticipated that tourism development will lead to alterations in identity, some of them negative. Disadvantageous processes in Wolin may include the deterioration in natural values and a strong impact of German visitors on local economy and culture. However, the role of tourism on the island cannot be restricted to negative influences, rather,

tourism can become a decisive factor in the creation or reinforcement of bonds between people and the area. A history of nostalgia for the Eastern Territories and a feeling of detachment gradually lose importance, as the attractiveness of the touristic region increases. Tourism, being both an external demand and a tool to meet expectations of local people, has a very strong and generally positive influence on public awareness of island identity. Acceptance of and a desire for the atmosphere and activities that tourism provides, predisposes this industry to play a vital role in constructing identity. The tourism-driven development of identity on Wolin has the potential to change thinking concerning the identity of the province, producing new aspects and positive values. More controversially, from a theoretical point of view, identity of the island can be regarded as a vast container absorbing a wide range of tendencies, attractions, and activities. In addition to that, one should discern potential dangers inherent in tourism's simulations and the manipulations of identity that are involved.

Importantly, Wolin does not demonstrate relations of power frequently found in islands, which consist in opposition of ‘island-mainland’, an impact of colonisation and problems of dependency (described for instance by Baldacchino, 2008). Its identity cannot be recognized only through the context of islandness. It is noteworthy that, in spite of being an island, Wolin is rarely associated with relevant descriptions. This is another weak point not only in attempts to enhance identity, but also in undertakings connected with tourism development. Thus, there is rather a need to strengthen the awareness of being an island, bearing in mind that treating any territory as an island can enhance socio-cultural cohesion. Focus on an ‘island’ should also incorporate a concern of the role of the sea in constructing identities. Providing people on the mainland with a perception of Wolin as an island and introducing people the theme of sea and identity would bring a new dimension to the analysis and to the process of identity formation.

More specifically, it should be noted that the notion of islandness is frequently employed in the processes of heritagisation as in the case of Gotland (Ronström, 2008). Again, Wolin does not completely adhere to the rule. Though construction of past observed in the town of Wolin involves the plot of an island, this does not constitute a key element of the enterprise; islandness accompanies ‘contemporary Vikings and Slavonic people’, but ancient ships would be built and battles would be fought even if the town had been located on the mainland (nevertheless, Wolin's islandness did have importance for genuine Vikings and ancient Slavonic people). Certainly, interrelations between identity and islandness are usually both interesting and significant, however, a loose link of Wolin with its own islandness shows that they are not unambiguous. This confirms Baldacchino's intuition, who writes that ‘the state of islandness per se does not necessarily create the community basis for a unified island identity (Baldacchino, 2004, after Grydehøj, Hayward, 2011). Indistinct, weak or pale identities of islands may occur more frequently than it is expected- Grydehøj and Hayward (ibidem) in an analysis of the historical process of identity building of the Isle of Wight reveal considerable problems with recognition of the island's distinct character (the Isle of Wight is viewed in a very non-specific way, usually in the context of English countryside and seaside tradition).

Most of all, Wolin's identity cannot be compared to produced identities of many islands. An impact of tourism branding, heritage organisations, marketed and sold images has not been overwhelming here. Evolution of identity has depended in Wolin on more intrinsic features of societies and processes taking part in the state. Nonetheless, the situation may change with reorientation in economy and growing pressure of tourism industry. This is one of the reasons for making efforts to reinforce and highlight the island's identity, no matter what the stage of evolution of identity is. Maintenance of identity is essential in the context of a globalising world, some of islands have much experience in identity protection, for example Jersey, which implemented cultural strategy centred on its distinctive and unique character (Riddell, 2007).

In general, Wolin's identity depends on three main constructs: (1) natural features, (2) history and culture, (3) economy and land-use. However, these principal elements are shaped by more specific issues: post-war history and migration processes; tourism; islandness; nature and landscape. The following study reveals that these factors are featured by a varied intensity of influence. The impact of post-war history connected with migration processes, and tourism tends to play a leading role. This is noteworthy that island generally are strongly connected with migration processes (see e.g. King, 2009). Characteristically, a considerable discrepancy between socio-cultural and natural domains of the Wolin's identity constructs is found. Official documents on many occasions declare that cultural factors are of primary importance for the area's identity (even though if economic forces appear to be pre-eminent), but the role of natural assets is underestimated, despite the fact they hold great potential for creating identity. Particularly, the capacity of the Wolin National Park deserves more attention in formal analyses as well as in social discourse.

It seems that the cardinal question on the chances of the Wolin Island to retain its identity will be followed by the answer embracing maintenance and construction, while maintenance refers to Nature, construction to Culture.

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