



Brest Fortress as a flagship tourist product in the context of geopolitical change and heritage significance

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Abstract. The Brest Fortress represents one of the most attractive international tourist products on the Polish-Belarusian border. However, the current geopolitical situation has led to partial closures of that border, and to changes in the path of development taken by tourism. Nevertheless, this study's analysis of statistical and online sources related to tourist traffic and museum attendance, combined with in-depth interviews, shows that the Memorial Complex known as the "Brest Hero Fortress" has been one of the two most-visited museums in Belarus in recent years, attracting about half a million tourists annually. Belarusians, followed by Russians, remain the dominant visitor groups here, given that this destination is of a symbolic and ideological significance that ties in with (post-)Soviet identity. The impact of factors at different levels and historical stages influencing tourist-traffic dynamics gains evaluation here by reference to a modified Multi-Level Governance concept, plus the Tourism Area Life Cycle model. The findings suggest that, compared with local and regional factors, it is those of national or international reach that exert a greater influence on the tourism product that the Brest Fortress represents. That said, recent years have brought increased interest in the Polish side's Terespol Bridgehead Museum and Cultural Centers, representing local heritage, and mainly proving attractive to domestic tourists, German-speaking visitors, and enthusiasts of military tourism. The work detailed here also compares visitor numbers and museums within the administrative units of the so-called Bug Euroregion.

Keywords: Brest Fortress, tourist product, border, museum, Tourism Area Life Cycle, Multi-Level Governance.

Introduction

Political boundaries and border areas may equally well serve as spatial barriers for travelers, or in fact play a linking and bridging role supporting interaction between different cultures, languages, political systems, economic structures, and mentalities. Over time, renowned researchers have also come to emphasize the value of borders as attractive tourist destinations in and of themselves, given the near-universal inclination among visitors to cross such boundaries where that is possible, so as to find themselves in other countries with different traditions. Even where crossing is not possible, the aforementioned urge still gives rise to a tendency for people to "stay nearby" (Timothy and Gelbman, 2015; Więckowski, 2023). Borderlands are also of tourist significance due to peripheral locations that tend to ensure the presence of exceptional sites featuring natural and cultural heritage (Timothy, 2002; Więckowski, 2010). For its part, the latter can be divided into aspects classifiable as intangible (relating to traditions, folk culture, language, cuisine and music), or tangible (relating to architecture, monuments, landmarks and museums) (Middleton et al., 2009). This all ensures that an area's identifiable product in terms of tourism can comprise places that boast sites famous for their cultural or natural heritage,

as well as tourism infrastructure and services, a dominant theme, and suitably large numbers of visiting tourists. This tourism product may be identified as operating on levels or scales that are local, regional, national, subcontinental, or global.

A spectacular case study examined in this article involves the tourism product of the Brest Fortress, built nearly two hundred years ago in the Russian Empire, and situated where today's border between Poland and Belarus runs. In a broader sense, this attraction stands at the crossroads of diverse cultures, nationalities, religions, languages, political systems, economies, and societies, as well as at the meeting point (point of clash) between Western and Orthodox civilizations (Huntington, 1996).

Soviet-era academic work on the Brest Fortress tends to display popular-science features and is suffused with ideology (Akinchits, 1962; Smirnov, 1964; Naumenko, 1970; Felix and Tuzik, 1988). Even in recent decades, only a small number of researchers have been effective in adopting Western academic methods to engage in wide-ranging analyses of Brest Fortress-related issues surrounding heritage, remembrance, museums and tourism (Beshanov, 2009; Marples and Rudling, 2009; Ganzer and Paškovič, 2010; Ganzer, 2011, 2017a; Marples, 2012; Śleszyński, 2016; Zawadka, 2020). However, there have been some research papers concerning tourism in the Polish-Belarusian borderland more generally (Anisiewicz, 2020, 2021; Pirozhnik, 2020; Studzieniecki et al., 2022), also therefore with an inevitable focus on other well-known flagship tourist areas and products such as the Białowieża / Belovezhskaya Forest and Augustów Canal (Marin, 2011; Jalinik, 2016, 2017; Sialverstava et al., 2018; Więckowski and Cyargeenka, 2019; Cyargeenka, 2021, 2023; Cyargeenka and Więckowski, 2020; Łopatecki and Musiuk, 2025).

This article examines the significance of the Brest Fortress, as located along the eastern external land border of the European Union and NATO, as well as the western border of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Collective Security Treaty Organization. The Memorial and Museum Complex of the "Brest Hero Fortress", situated within the Citadel, is joined by the majority of the external forts and defensive structures in being on the Belarusian side of the border. Meanwhile, on the Polish side of the River Bug, there are forts and facilities of what is known as the Terespol Bridgehead, with these including the Terespol Powder Magazine and Kobylany Defensive Barracks that represent further cultural and museum centers.

The aims of this article have been to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the role and significance of the tourism product that is the Brest Fortress – in comparison with other museums, areas and regions – by way of an adapted Multi-Level Governance (MLG) framework that serves to identify key factors of influence. The specific objectives here have in turn been to trace the phases of development of the Brest Fortress product, and to evaluate its tourism value and importance – by way of an examination of tourist traffic and museum attendance, including by reference to intensity, structure and seasonality through the prism of the approach taken by Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) theory. The article showcases the attractiveness of the Brest Fortress as a tourist product, underscoring its rich cultural-heritage features and significance as a cross-border transit hub, as well as going more widely into Brest's strategic role as a gateway city.

Theoretical background

The theoretical framework underpinning this paper is multifaceted, encompassing several interconnected elements (Fig.1). The flagship tourist product of the Brest Fortress is not only rich in valuable cultural and historical features, but also functions as a heritage complex, shaping a perception of this destination as highly attractive to hundreds of thousands of visitors. In addition, the attractiveness of the tourist product under study here is influenced by factors such as transport and a borderland location. The MLG approach offers a useful lens through which to analyze all this at various levels and scales, while the TALC model allows for an examination of the phases that have shaped the evolution of this tourist area, as reflected in tourist numbers. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that it is only the aforementioned elements of the tourist product that will be developed and examined in this article, even as it is acknowledged freely that further elements exist.

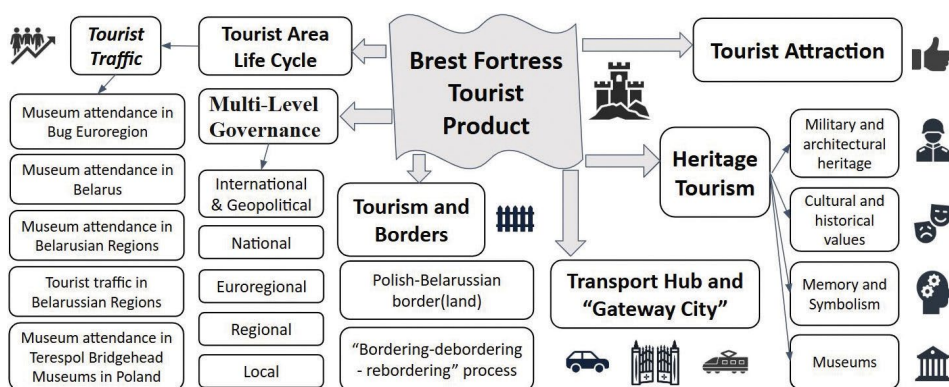


Fig. 1. Elements to the theoretical background

The Tourism Product

The relevant subject literature of recent decades has yielded various definitions when it comes to the nature of the so-called "tourism product". This is something special, composite that arises out of the perspective of area, dimension and diversity, while including a host of extra activities and processes extending beyond tourism *per se* (Fletcher, 2005). A tourism product also encompasses a diverse range of offerings, predominantly centered around the provision of memorable experiences (more than tangible goods) – with this fact merely reflecting the service-oriented nature of the industry (Nelson, 2013).

Beyond that, tourism products often involve the commercialization of historical and cultural heritage, with a leveraging of historic sites and culturally-significant landmarks as primary attractions for holiday excursions and urban getaways. This may be the theory, but the actual operation of sites for visitor use can and does throw up numerous complex challenges – in need of delicate management if tourism promotion is to be balanced with the preservation of the historic environment (Page and Connell, 2020). Tourist products can also be both *sensu stricto*, meaning all things and services purchased separately or as a package, as well as *sensu largo* – as a composition of goods and activities, valu-

es of facilities and services, significance, image of place, ideas, and the entirety of the tourist's experienced journey (Medlik, 1995). The core product is here abstract and intangible, rather than tangible, embodying an idea that fulfills the fundamental need or desire as perceived and sought by the customer – conveyed through language and visuals intended to inspire purchase, and convey the essence of the experiences it can provide (Middleton et al., 2009).

There are both simple tourist products (service, thing, object, event) and complex ones (event, route, place) (Kaczmarek et al., 2002). A tourist product of an area is a geographically-determined product consisting of selected elements of the tourism potential (or existing simple products) of a given area, connected by an underlying idea that determines originality, distinctiveness and attractiveness, having such main elements as heritage, infrastructure, added value and management (Kaczmarek et al., 2005).

In this study, it will be the latter *sensu largo* concept of a complex tourist product of an area (that of the Brest Fortress) which is invoked, where this also denotes many simpler products such as fortification facilities (citadel, bastions, bridgeheads, barracks, casemates, gates, ditches, walls etc.), monuments (the Main Entrance, "Thirst" sculpture, Main Monument, Obelisk, etc.) museums, events, and tourist routes, the organization of services, etc. – all to the extent of ensuring clear added value associated with the overarching idea, concept, image, memory and heritage. The most important event anchored in the memory, and symbolizing patriotism and the masculinity of the Soviet people (especially Belarusians and Russians) is the famous defense of the Brest Fortress of June 1941, during the Pact-breaking attack launched by Nazi Germany on the USSR, as the beginning of what is regarded as the "Great Patriotic War" phase of the 1939-1945 Second World War. The actual importance and value of the circular defense in question here is controversial and debatable, and its impact compared with other military events might even be written off as relatively insignificant, were modern scientific research to be accepted. But on the ideological side, a legend was shaped here by publicists Simonov and Smirnov (Smirnov, 1964). Many books were written on the topic, films made, and the outcome saw successful promotion among the people of the USSR, to the extent that a "life of its own" has been taken on, and exists to this day as concept and added idea. In 1965, the Brest Fortress was given the honorary title "Hero Fortress", while in 1971 a museum and memorial/remembrance complex was opened in the Citadel, symbolizing martyrdom, the masculinity and victorious nature of the Soviet defenders. This leaves the site among the most important places of national remembrance and state ideology – from the point of view of both present-day Belarus and Russia (Marples and Rudling, 2009).

Heritage tourism

Cultural and heritage tourism can be understood and appreciated in various ways by different visitors – "from mass experiences at the world's leading attractions such as The Louvre, through to individualized, highly-customized, and specialized educational tours of, say, Italian cuisine" (Cooper, 2005, p. 780). Heritage tourism is one of the new forms of activity overlapping with other products, such as cultural, urban or event tourism; but it could equally well be brought under the umbrella term "cultural heritage tourism product" (Nelson, 2013, pp. 60-65). Heritage tourism and its attractions are founded upon elements of both living and built culture, as tangible and intangible aspects of the past

are utilized for tourism. This includes present-day cultures inherited from the past, as well as intangible heritage elements like music, language, religion, and festivals, along with material remnants such as monuments, historic buildings, castles, museums, and archaeological ruins (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). Some research suggests that it is “tourism heritage products” aimed at enhancing learning, satisfying curiosity and nostalgia, fostering spiritual growth, relaxation, family time, or self-discovery that are gaining in prominence (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009, pp. 7-10).

The construction of the facilities of the Brest Fortress began in 1832, according to the design of Karl Opperman, and the work was completed in 1842 as one of the best defensive architectural complexes in the Russian Empire of that era. The Brest Fortress, together with other fortresses such as those at Bobruisk, Warsaw, Modlin, Dęblin, Osowiec, Kaunas and Hrodno were to protect the western borders and areas of the Russian Empire from external enemies (Prussia, Austria), as well as becoming points of resistance of the Russian authorities against the separatism espoused by the Polish-Lithuanian-Belarusian nobility – in the circumstances of the 1830-1831 November Uprising in particular (von Rohrscheidt, 2009). Later, and through to the beginning of World War I, the Brest Fortress was extended and modernized several times, with two outer rings of forts appearing, to make this Fortress one of the most unique historical and cultural heritage objects of military architecture of the 19th – early 20th centuries.

The Brest Fortress was added to UNESCO’s Tentative List in 2004, but removed in 2015 over a failure to align with the UN’s core pacifist and anti-war principles. Brest Fortress was viewed by Belarussian authorities more as a war memorial promoting the 1941 defense and militarism than as a 19th-century historical and cultural monument (Zdanievich, 2021). On May 20, 2024, the Belarusian and Russian heritage institutions proposed a new concept for joint nomination of UNESCO Tentative List items, which took the form of a serial transnational nomination entitled “Monuments to the Heroes of the Great Patriotic War: Brest Fortress and Mamayev Kurgan”. This included and includes two large memorial complexes in Brest and Volgograd (former name – Stalingrad), associated with the beginning of (and turning point of hostilities on) the Eastern Front of World War II (Miemoriały..., 2024). The described situation points to the very complicated nature of any perception of the heritage of the Brest Fortress, given strong connections with history, memory / remembrance and state ideology.

Tourist Attraction

Some researchers support the idea that attraction is the crucial element of the tourist product (Middleton, 1996; Kruczek, 2011). Tourist attractions are the features of a location that capture the interest of visitors and act as a magnet, drawing people to that destination. Some tourism attractions appear inherent, yet their appeal still stems from additional “given” meaning that is shaped by both visitors themselves, and the influence of tourism managers. Attractions may encompass “things to be seen, activities to be done, or experiences to be had” (Nelson, 2013, p. 40). Many researchers perceive the tourism product and tourist attraction as linked very closely, to the extent that they sometimes introduce a concept of “attraction product” (Wanhill, 2002; Fyall and Wanhill, 2005). Moreover, a nucleus, which constitutes the central element in a tourist-attraction system, may encompass any attribute or characteristic of a destination that a traveler

considers or actually visits (Leiper, 1990). This heart of the attraction product lies in its imagescape – a visual representation aiming to communicate the essence of the tourist experience to potential customers (Wanhill, 2013).

Destination attractions comprise a wide range of features, including natural attractions (landscapes and other geographical elements), built attractions (such as buildings and tourism infrastructure including historical architecture, monuments, promenades, parks, etc.), cultural attractions (encompassing history, folklore and folk culture, religion, museums, special events, etc.), and social attractions (representing the way of life, customs, language, and opportunities for social interactions of the locals and visitors) (Middleton et al., 2009). There is an extent to which all tourist attractions gauge their success by reference to the “number of visitors, the quality of the experience they give them, and the memories that take home to ensure repeat visits or the spread of, word-of-mouth, recommendation” (Fyall and Wanhill, 2005, pp. 357-358).

The idea of military fortifications serving as tourist attractions is not new, and emerged a relatively long time ago in Western Europe, where the relevant concepts and ideas evolved over decades, resulting in numerous open-air fortification museums in France, Switzerland, Germany and Poland (Zawadka, 2020). In the case of the Brest Fortress, the core of its attractiveness lies in its “added” significance, as strongly connected to Soviet ideology (Śleszyński, 2016). Among (post-)Soviet people, the Fortress is viewed symbolically as the first place at which the Nazis (violating a Pact entered into previously) engaged in brazen attack on the USSR— i.e. today’s Belarusians, Russians and other Soviet civilians who had no suspicion that such a threat existed. The history of the Fortress’s defense has already taken on legendary and heroic attributes already assuming “lives of their own”, and achieving a deep embedding in collective consciousness sufficient to grant the destination a spectacular, almost sacred attractiveness as a “Mecca for homo sovieticus” (Ganzer and Paškovič, 2010; Ganzer, 2011; Marples, 2012).

Tourism and Borders

Within the realm of (cross)border tourism studies, there is wide recognition of the idea that borders function, not solely as barriers, but also as potential attractions for tourism-product development and broader cross-border regional integration (Timothy, 2002; Timothy and Gelbman, 2015; Witte and Braun, 2015; Sohn, 2022; Więckowski, 2022). Moreover, four types of borderland attractions are delineated based on: peripherality, the representation of potential natural and cultural resources; the presence of differences associated predominantly with cross-border shopping and cultural disparities; the presence of borderline features, an embracing of a possibility of a border being crossed physically, as well as the existence of specific border markers, monuments, or infrastructure; and cross-border spaces, denoting newly-established tourist areas – all of which are highlighted as pivotal categories contributing to the allure of borders for tourism (Więckowski, 2023). Different types of border dynamics, characterized by fluctuations in relaxation or intensity, are recognized as bordering, debordering, or rebordering processes (Brańka et al., 2020; Więckowski and Timothy, 2021). The debordering process is in a position to exert significant influence on borderlands through the altering of economic and political circumstances, and even the creation of a new tourist product out of an area – within

either one border country, or more countries bordering on to one another (Więckowski et al., 2024).

Due to migration crises and geopolitical conflicts, some borders that were dismantled in the early 1990s have been re-established over the few last years, leading to the suspension or closure of emerging cross-border tourist spaces (Timothy et al., 2016). A similar process unfolded along the Polish-Belarusian border, where the early 1990s saw a phase of debordering, allowing visa-free border crossings at designated checkpoints. However, with Poland's accession to the Schengen Zone in 2004, border controls were tightened through the introduction of visas (Cyargeenka and Więckowski, 2020). Despite this, between 2015 and 2019, there was a brief period of border regime relaxation, marked by Belarus's gradual implementation of visa-free entry zones (including into the Brest Region), as well as Poland's introduction of the so-called "shopping visa" for Belarusians (Pirozhnik, 2020; Cyargeenka, 2021). From 2020 onward, a process of re-bordering began, driven by a series of negative international and geopolitical factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the falsification of elections in Belarus, the migrant crisis and (Poland's) construction of a "border wall" in 2021-2022, the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022, and other destabilizing events doing much to influence the functioning of the tourist products in the Polish-Belarusian borderland (Więckowski, 2025).

Transport hub and gateway city

As early as in the 18th-19th centuries, Brest had transcontinental "west-east" corridors running through it involving both transport (road, then railway) functions, as well as geo-strategic and military aspects. Ultimately, the link-up involved ports in Britain, France, Belgium and The Netherlands, the English Channel and the North Sea, the cities of Paris and Berlin, Warsaw, Minsk, and Moscow, and even an extension through the Urals all the way to Omsk in Western Siberia (Rostishewski, 1995; Rezmer, 2016). Terespol and Brest are also located on the A-Class European Route E30 (National Road 2 in Poland), leading *in extremis* from the Irish port of Cork to Omsk in Russia, and passing *inter alia* through London, Utrecht, Berlin, Warsaw, Minsk and Moscow (Bański et al., 2010). The E20 is in turn a railway line of international importance, considered the most important railway route from Western Europe to Moscow passing through Brest (Bański et al., 2010). A free economic zone, focusing on export-oriented manufacturing with tax incentives, was established in Brest in 1996. Since the 2010s, this has become a primary logistical point on the Eurasian Land Bridge, also known as the Silk Road, facilitating railway passage from China through Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belarus to EU countries (Liu et al., 2021; Studzieniecki et al., 2022). At the intersection of the Brest Railway, specifically at the container terminal of Brest-Severnoy Station, over 80% of cargo undergoes processing within containers transported by the Belarusian Railway to European destinations (Velesco et al., 2021). In the vicinity of Brest, there are three international border crossings. These include the Brest-Terespol railway crossing, serving both passenger and freight traffic, the Brest-Terespol road crossing, accommodating passenger traffic (by bus and car) and freight traffic of up to 3.5 tons, and the Kukuryki-Kozłowicz road crossing, exclusively for trucks transporting goods (Więckowski and Cyargeenka, 2019). Ultimately, there is a definite correlation between the development of transportation networks and the increase in tourist activity,

as transport infrastructure plays a crucial role in facilitating connectivity across border regions (Wendt et al., 2021).

National peripheries possess considerable fascination as tourist destinations, captivating visitors through their diverse natural wonders, strategic geopolitical positioning, profound historical narratives, and symbolic significance. They often showcase breathtaking landscapes and treasures of cultural heritage (Timothy, 2002). On the one hand, Brest is situated in a borderland; but on the other this is not a peripheral tourist product because of the number of tourists – with this being one of the largest transport and transit hubs, as well as the capital of the Brest Region.

The Multi-Level Governance concept and Tourism Area Life Cycle model

The Multi-Level (Scalar) Governance (MLG) concept encompasses three dimensions: spatial levels (primarily regional, national, and supranational), the center-periphery concept, and governmental and non-governmental dimensions (Piattoni, 2010). The spatial levels or scales mentioned may interconnect, overlap, and be expanded to local, cross-border, transborder, interregional, euroregional, bilateral, international, transnational and even global spheres (Kropinova, 2021; Studzieniecki et al., 2023). This remodeled concept is taken account of frequently in research concerning heritage tourism and border studies, distinguishing between personal, local, regional, national (domestic, subnational), and supranational (international, global) scales and levels (Timothy and Boyd, 2006; Prokkola and Lois, 2016). Furthermore, there is a scalar typology of cultural-heritage attractions, distinguishing between the global (sites iconic and recognizable worldwide), national (primarily catering to domestic and partly international tourists), local (comprising historical museums, monuments honoring local war heroes), and the smallest scales (individual and family histories) (Timothy and Boyd, 2015, p. 10).

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model was adopted here with a view to its serving analysis of the interdependence between tourist numbers and factors influencing the phases of tourism product functioning (Butler, 1980). There are the following main phases to be considered – of exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline or rejuvenation, albeit with account taken of the way in which not all of these may be present consistently and one by one. However, employing this approach requires awareness that some data may be incomplete or irrelevant (Singh, 2021). The numbers of tourists and museum visitors serve as clear indicators of the scale and significance of the Brest Fortress as a tourism product. There is a further use when it comes to identification of key stages and trends in the development of the tourist area over time, with the most significant factors influencing this process all taken account of.

In this study that combines the adapted MLG concept and the TALC model, selected levels of analysis were used. Initially, at the national level, a comparison was made of the 15 most visited museums in Belarus. This was followed by an analysis of visitor numbers at the regional level, considering the numbers of museum visitors, domestic organized excursionists and tourists across six regions (oblasts) and the capital city of Belarus. At the international and cross-border level, museum attendance was examined within the Bug Euroregion, which includes the Brest Region of Belarus, the Lublin Voivodeship of Poland, as well as the Volyn Region and two small districts of the Lviv Region in Ukraine – although since 2020, tourist traffic from Poland and Ukraine to Brest Region has been rather mar-

ginal. Finally, at the local level, analysis dealt with data on visitor numbers to museums within the Terespol Bridgehead of the Brest Fortress, located on the Polish side.

Methodology and Data Collection

The methodological framework comprised four stages. First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish the historical, cultural, institutional, and infrastructural conditions relevant to the study. The reviewed literature included both conceptual works – focusing on tourism products, attractiveness, and heritage, with particular attention paid to transportation and borderland issues; and practical studies related directly to the examined location, the functioning of tourism, and the significance of the Brest Fortress. In addition to recent publications, older sources (including travel guides) were also considered, some dating back to the Soviet era. This retrospective approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the factors and conditions that have shaped the development of this tourist destination over time (the TALC model); and at different levels and scales (the MLG concept).

Secondly, statistical data from both official and non-official sources were analyzed. Official statistics on tourist and museum attendance were drawn primarily from the Belarusian State Statistics Committee, specifically from Sections relating to Culture and Tourism. However, these data are only available from 2010-2012 onwards, contain significant gaps and inconsistencies, and lack continuity. Furthermore, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the political crisis in Belarus in 2020, the government partly restricted, concealed or minimized the publication of statistical data – not only in the medical field, but also in tourism and culture. To compensate for these gaps, a content analysis of websites belonging to major Belarusian media outlets, particularly those covering the tourism sector, was conducted. This effort aimed to estimate visitor numbers for the top 15 most-visited museums, though only partial success was achieved. Data on the Bug Euroregion were extracted from reports spanning 2005-2015, as no more-recent synthesized data are available, due to the decline in the association's activity over the past decade.

Thirdly, two field research trips were conducted to the study area, incorporating participant observation to assess the destination's characteristics, conditions, peculiarities, image, infrastructure, and accessibility. The first trip took place in July 2019, covering Terespol and Brest and including a crossing of the Polish-Belarusian border; while the second was in October 2024, focusing on Terespol and Kobylany. This comparative approach allowed for an analysis of historical and geopolitical factors operating within this period.

Finally, four in-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. Two of these interviews were held during the most recent field trip – with individuals responsible for the Museum and Cultural Centers in Terespol and Kobylany on the Polish side, while online interviews were conducted with two individuals affiliated with the Brest Fortress Complex and Foundation in Belarus. These interviews provided crucial insights into museum attendance patterns, seasonality, the structure of tourist flows (TALC), infrastructure, destination image, and other relevant aspects.

Results

The “Brest Hero Fortress” museum complex as compared with other Belarusian museums.

The initial phases of Exploration and Involvement after the TALC model began in 1956 with the establishment of a Museum of the Brest Fortress Defence that was first located within a military zone – to the extent that significant accessibility limitations were imposed (Ganzer and Paškovič, 2010). However, the 1971 opening of the Museum and Memorial Complex known as the “Heroic Brest Fortress” marked the beginning of a phase of rapid Development. By 1974, the site had already attracted a total of 7 million visitors (Beshanov, 2009). By 1991, Brest Fortress had been visited by a total of 19 million tourists, meaning the average annual attendance was approximately 600,000-700,00 visitors (Ganzer, 2017a). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the site entered a period of Decline. Interest in Soviet heritage was largely replaced by a growing curiosity about Belarusian national culture and history. As a result, by 2008, the total number of visitors had only risen to 20 million, indicating an average annual attendance of around 60,000 – more than ten times lower than during the Soviet era (Beshanov, 2009). Finally, the 2000-2010 period marked a phase of Rejuvenation, driven by a revival of post-Soviet ideology in both Belarus and Russia. This ideological shift contributed to a gradual increase in visitor numbers through to the present day – albeit if no account is taken of the 2020-2021 Pandemic period.

To accurately analyze attendance at the Brest Fortress Museum from 2010 to 2022, we used ticket-sales data from the Belarusian State Statistical Committee, supplemented by rankings from tourism organizations listing the Top 10 or Top 15 most popular museums. Secondly, to enhance the presentation of the information, the top 3 most visited museums are highlighted, and three museums from the UNESCO list are noted specifically (Table 1). Additionally, it is important to note that attendance information for some museums was unavailable for certain years. According to media interviews with the Brest Fortress management, visitor peaks occur from May through to late autumn, as well as during the winter holidays. In 2018, over 4000 Russian tour groups together made up about 40% of all foreign visitors. Poland followed with 1066 groups, Ukraine with 112 groups (over 2000 visitors), and Latvia-Lithuania with over 500 visitors (Vladimirov, 2019).

By making a post-2010 comparison of the popularity of the “Brest Hero Fortress” Memorial Complex with other museums, it is evident that its only serious competitor is the Belarusian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War History receiving approximately 300,000 to 500,000 visits every year. This museum and memorial complex in the capital city of Minsk can be considered a twin to the one in Brest, as it covers the same topic of the Great Patriotic War but on a larger national, international, and even global scale. Third among the Top 15 museums with a similar theme is the “Khatyn” State Memorial Complex in the Minsk Region, which highlights the destruction of a village and the murder of its inhabitants by the Nazis on a local level, serving as a reminder of the countless other victims in Belarus. Collectively, these three museum complexes received approximately 790,000 tourists in 2010, 1,330,000 in 2018, and 1,200,000 in 2022, accounting respectively for 13.8%, 19.1%, and 17.8% of the total museum attendance in Belarus. The next most-popular museums are the “Nesvizh” National Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum (UNESCO), the Gomel Palace and Park Ensemble, and the “Mir” Castle

Table 1. Visitor attendance (in thousands) at the most attractive museums in Belarus over the period 2010-2022 inclusive

Museum /Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
All museums attendance	4,989.7	5,299.4	5,724.3	5,731.0	6,308.8	6,664.1	6,958.4	7,085.9	3,236.6	4,854.8	6,701.7
“Brest Hero Fortress” Memorial Complex	309.4	338.6	355.4	390.0	423.3	425.2	522.4	474.1	222.6	383.4	520.6
Belarusian State Museum of the Great Patriotic War History (Minsk)	195.2	219.4	234.9	–	559.6	565.3	571.0	577.9	196.7	247.4	388.2
“Nesvizh” National Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum (UNESCO)	173.4	210.4	431.0	400*	412.4	417.4	421.9	426.1	141.1	178.0	320.9
Gomel Palace and Park Ensemble	292.8	304.4	309.2	300*	325.0	326.8	333.0	338.4	187.1	276.3	298.8
“Mir” Castle Complex (UNESCO)	186.0	195.5	275.5	–	285.0	301.5	319.7	329.0	119.6	180.0	271.8
Museum of “Belovezhskaya Pushcha” National Park (UNESCO)	–	116.8	–	–	106.0	–	–	116.1	53.8	–	–
Brest Regional Museum of Local Studies	183.6	187.3	–	–	203.3	–	–	–	–	–	–
Vitebsk Regional Local History Museum	150.0	181.1	–	–	138.3	–	–	–	82.2	–	169.6
Polotsk National Historic and Cultural Reserve Museum	258.4	243.1	223.9	200*	234.7	–	–	247.2	91.8	–	–
Grodno State Historical and Archeological Museum	–	156.0	–	–	188.1	–	–	194.4	–	–	–
National Historical Museum of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk)	–	174.0	–	–	394.5	–	–	386.4	121.9	–	–
Yanka Kupala State Literature Museum (Minsk)	–	105.8	–	–	126.0	–	–	–	–	–	–
National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus (Minsk)	366.9	182.9	215.8	–	186.7	–	–	–	–	–	–
State Museum of History of Belarusian Literature (Minsk)	–	65.0	–	–	135.2	–	–	–	–	–	–
“Khatyn” State Memorial Complex (Minsk Region)	182.0	182.0	204.5	–	235.2	240.3	237.5	251.4	–	–	283.7

*approximate data

Source: author’s own elaboration by reference to statistics of the Belarussian National Statistical Committee ([Kukharevich, 2012](#); [Medvedeva, 2017, 2022](#); [Statisticheski..., 2021](#)), as well as data from tourism industry media.

Complex (UNESCO), each attracting an annual attendance ranging from about 180,000 to 420,000 visitors.

Museums of the Brest region compared with other regions of Belarus

Another aspect of statistical data analysis focused on the regional level. Information was collected on tourist attendance (based on ticket sales) at museums in Belarus by region (6 regions and the Capital City of Minsk) from 2011 to 2022 (Table 2). In 2011, the Brest Region ranked second, and from 2013 third – in terms of museum attendances, initially trailing the City of Minsk and later the Minsk Region. The Brest Region is home to 3 out of the Top-15 Museums in Belarus, while Minsk hosts 5, even as the Minsk Region has a further 2, which are close to the capital's metropolitan area. Nevertheless, museum attendance in the Brest Region showed an upward trend, rising from 854,000 in 2011 to 1,158,000 in 2018. During the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance dropped by more than half to 567,000 in 2020, but improved to 1,108,000 in 2022. Between 40 and 50% of museum visits in the Brest Region were to the Memorial and Museum Complex of the Brest Fortress. Additionally, approximately 16% of all museum visits in Belarus over the period 2011-2022 were in the Brest Region.

Tourist traffic in the Brest region compared with other regions of Belarus

Another level of analysis focuses on domestic organized visitors to various regions of Belarus, distinguishing (in line with the approach of the Belarussian National Statistical Committee) between excursionists (day-trippers) – individuals who take a trip without an overnight stay in the country or place of temporary stay, and tourists – individuals who undertake a trip lasting from 24 hours to one year, or spend at least one night in the country or place of temporary stay. In 2012, the Brest Region was visited by approximately 83,000 domestic organized excursionists, which was fewer than in the Minsk Region (148,000), Minsk city (110,000), and the Vitebsk Region (94,000) (Table 3). However, by 2015, attendance in the Brest Region had increased more than fourfold to 479,000 – a circumstance primarily attributable to the completed modernization of the Brest Fortress Museum Complex, and the mass celebrations of the 70th anniversary of Victory Day. Since then, the Brest Region has ranked first among other regions of Belarus in terms of the number of excursionists, accounting for about 50-60% of all taken in Belarus. Thus, in 2022, for example, from among 1,401,000 excursionists, some 183,000 visited the Brest Region. The increase in attendance within the Brest Region can also be explained by the presence of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (with its Nature Museum) and the Residence of Ded Moroz (Father Frost) – an entertainment site very popular among children in particular (Cyargeenka, 2023).

On the other hand, any discussion of organized domestic tourists should emphasize numbers about 6-13 times smaller than those of domestic organized excursionists during the observed period (Table 4). The Brest Region ranked second, with 12,300 organized tourists in 2012, after Minsk with 25,100, and third with 19,700 in 2022, after Minsk (50,900) and the Vitebsk Region (26,800). This situation can be explained by the possibility of the region and city of Brest being reached rapidly by road or rail transport from other emission tourist centers in Belarus, and returning within the same day. An interesting

Table 2. Number of visits to regional museums in 2011-2022 (in thousands)*

Region/Year	2011	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Republic of Belarus	5,299.4	5,731.0	6,308.8	6,384.5	6,664.1	6,958.0	6,496.6	3,236.6	4,854.8	6,701.7
Brest Region	854.3	947.4	986.1	1,021.4	1,022.1	1,158.3	1,024.4	567.7	857.5	1,108.6
Vitebsk Region	752.2	701.7	699.7	701.7	702.4	752.9	802.1	411.4	539.0	791.8
Gomel Region	616.1	664.6	722.8	740.8	755.4	787.8	819.7	505.7	718.8	812.2
Grodno Region	613.4	711.9	773.1	779.5	809.6	839.4	868.0	296.9	491.3	841.2
Minsk City	1,204.6	1,241.7	1,614.0	1,627.9	1,674.9	1,629.4	1,404.5	538.1	726.9	1,166.1
Minsk Region	832.0	1,011.9	1,049.3	1,050.8	1,221.8	1,307.0	1,089.2	627.8	1,193.9	1,614.5
Mogilev Region	426.8	451.8	463.8	462.4	477.9	483.5	488.7	288.9	327.2	367.2

Table 3. Number of domestic organized excursionists traveling along tour routes within the Republic of Belarus in 2012-2022, as broken down by regions*

Region/Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Republic of Belarus	602,490	578,848	647,489	745,248	918,293	894,654	942,612	1,034,473	494,508	1,049,530	1,401,785
Brest Region	83,267	111,959	96,835	339,720	479,361	488,327	535,815	605,178	326,023	608,389	783,447
Vitebsk Region	94,426	66,959	79,953	41,247	79,718	87,184	81,834	86,431	58,369	121,716	160,960
Gomel Region	30,497	20,818	30,232	23,034	20,932	18,690	22,733	24,212	11,939	42,103	56,321
Grodno Region	43,252	38,757	42,854	40,448	47,688	41,925	45,580	44,551	14,835	64,767	74,979
Minsk City	110,326	125,502	154,311	131,249	136,112	110,029	112,589	122,268	37,183	90,153	135,349
Minsk Region	148,501	139,348	155,903	104,025	100,161	98,264	88,797	93,291	29,942	71,977	108,788
Mogilev Region	92,221	75,505	87,401	65,525	54,321	50,235	55,264	58,542	16,217	50,425	81,941

Table 4. Numbers of domestic organized tourists traveling along tour routes within the Republic of Belarus in 2012-2022, with a breakdown by region*

Region/Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Republic of Belarus	61,048	76,246	56,213	91,528	83,555	82,126	65,233	72,379	76,985	138,398	128,612
Brest Region	12,352	8,163	5,023	19,083	15,844	16,913	10,198	13,846	16,033	22,961	19,737
Vitebsk Region	4,008	9,808	10,470	20,354	15,898	15,004	14,647	14,589	19,066	27,693	26,805
Gomel Region	4,556	3,792	5,066	7,416	5,742	5,196	2,955	2,966	2,822	7,394	10,224
Grodno Region	3,650	9,021	2,384	1,858	1,131	1,549	3,123	2,110	362	2,121	3,350
Minsk City	25,187	35,902	27,290	22,653	24,217	23,285	26,494	33,791	30,358	49,881	50,898
Minsk Region	7,429	6,234	4,150	18,895	18,221	16,397	6,494	3,708	5,852	12,687	12,931
Mogilev Region	3,866	3,326	1,830	1,269	2,502	3,782	1,322	1,369	2,492	15,661	4,667

*Source: author's own elaboration based on data from the Belarusian National Statistical Committee.

circumstance is that, during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021, in neither Belarus nor the Brest Region did numbers of organized tourists decrease. Indeed, the figures suggest that they even increased slightly.

Museums in the Bug Euroregion

Another level of analysis involves data from statistics relating to the Bug Euroregion being considered. That includes the Brest Region of Belarus, Poland's Lublin Voivodeship, and Ukraine's Volyn (Volhynia) Region plus two small districts of Lviv Region (that were not included in the analysis). Between 2005 and 2015, the administrative units in question experienced an increase in both numbers of museums and numbers of visitors, with only minor fluctuations and occasional declines (Table 5). From among these areas it was Lublin Voivodeship that recorded the highest museum attendance, along with a notable growth in the number of museums — from 39 in 2005 to 59 in 2015. During the same period, museum attendance rose from 992,600 visitors in 2005 to 1,131,900 in 2015, despite a slight decrease in visits between 2010 and 2012. This trend can be attributed to the fact that Lublin Voivodeship not only hosted the largest number of museums, but also benefited from a demographic and economic potential stronger than anywhere else within the region under study.

However, a comparison of the capitals of the sub-regions shows that it was Brest attracting the highest numbers of museum visitors between 2005 and 2015 – recording attendance figures two to three times higher than those characterizing Lublin, over in Poland. Interestingly, this occurred despite Brest having fewer museums than Lublin – albeit from 2 in 2005 to 6 in 2015, as compared with Lublin's increase from 8 to 10 museums over the same period. This trend can be explained by the significant role Brest plays as a tourist and symbolic hub for museum-related visits, largely due to the presence of the Brest Fortress Museum Complex.

Table 5. Numbers of visitors and of museums in the sub-regions of the Bug Euroregion and their capitals in the years 2005-2015

Region/Year	2005 (v)	2005 (m)	2010 (v)	2010 (m)	2011 (v)	2011 (m)	2012 (v)	2012 (m)	2015 (v)	2015 (m)
Brest Region	714.1	14	783.2	25	854.3	20	908.2	21	986.1	33
Brest	402.1	2	479.3	6	534.3	3	555.0	3	606.4	6
Lublin Voivodeship	992.6	39	948.0	45	935.9	46	836.1	43	1,131.9	53
Lublin	344.5	8	341.4	9	298.7	9	313.3	8	432.2	10
Volyn Region	124.0	10	172.4	15	185.5	17	232.8	17	228.3	17
Luck	48.5	1	87.2	2	92.5	2	143.7	2	147.4	2

(v) – number of visitors; (m) – number of museums

Source: author's own elaboration based on (Tucki, 2007; Jakubowski, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017).

Tourist traffic to the Cultural and Museum facilities of the Terespol Bridgehead

On the Polish side, there are approximately ten external structures of the Brest Fortress (forts, powder magazines, barracks, etc.), collectively known as the Terespol Bridgehead,

as their primary purpose was to prevent enemy forces from crossing the Bug River. Most of these structures are in a state of neglect and damage, with two exceptions. The first is the Powder Magazine, built in 1913 in the center of Terespol. Thanks to the efforts of the local Society of Fortifications and History Enthusiasts, this has been renovated, and has been opened to visitors since 2010. This site now holds the status of a Museum, and functions as a branch of the Municipal Center for Culture, Sport and Recreation. Visitor statistics have been recorded since September 2019, when the site was visited by 596 people¹. During the lockdown years of 2020 and 2021, visitor numbers were 702 and 950, respectively (Table 6). In the following years, the number of tourists increased to 1,765 in 2022, 2,116 in 2023, and 2,004 in 2024.

Tourism trends show that in spring and summer, the site attracts many cyclists and vacationers, while in autumn and winter it primarily hosts retirees and school groups. Visitor numbers are distributed relatively equally throughout the year. Among foreign visitors, the largest group comes from Germany, specifically to explore the forts of the Brest Fortress and learn about military history. Each year, over a dozen visitors from China also arrive, driven by interest in the “Silk Road” transport project. Additionally, Jewish visitors come to search for their ancestral roots, as many of their forebears emigrated from this area before World Wars I or II. In spite of the vicinity of the border, in the time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and later the war in Ukraine, only about three visitors per year have come from Belarus.

Another significant site is the Defense Barracks – i.e. the Kobylany I Interfortification Construction, built between 1912 and 1915 directly on the protective line, with a view to a gap between forts being filled. Construction took place along the Warsaw-Brest main route, a key communication artery. Currently, this site was managed by the Terespol Commune Cultural Center, located 300 meters away. In 2018, it was renovated with EU funds and has been operating as a Memorial Chamber since 2019. Though it does not have official museum status, it presents a permanent exhibition and hosts various cultural activities, including patriotic ceremonies, community picnics, and games for children.

The highest number of visitors was recorded in 2019, when there were 2,200 guests, while the lowest was in 2020, with 894². Due to the lack of permanent heating, the site is open only from May to September. Over the past five years, the barracks in Kobylany have been visited by approximately 20 Belarusians, 2-3 Russians, and a group of 30 Germans touring eastern Poland, as well as individual citizens of other countries. An important

Table 6. Annual numbers of visitors to the Museum in the Terespol Powder Magazine and the Cultural facility at the Kobylany Inter-fort Defensive Barracks

Object/Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Kobylany Defensive Barracks	1,243	2,200	894	1,128	1,803	1,557	1,273
Terespol Powder Magazine	–	596*	702	950	1,765	2,116	2,004

Source: data from those taking care of the cultural and museum facilities

*data from September to December

¹ According to the in-depth interview with an employee of the Municipal Cultural Centre responsible for the Terespol Powder Magazine Museum, conducted on 18.10.2024.

² According to the in-depth interview with a Cultural Events Specialist from the Commune Cultural Centre responsible for the Cultural facility in Kobylany Defense Barracks, as conducted on 18.10.2024.

transportation route that supports tourism to both sites, particularly in the summer season when visitor numbers peak, is the GreenVelo cycling trail, which runs north-south along the Polish-Belarusian border.

Discussion

Any analysis of the role and significance of the Brest Fortress as a tourism product will have to note its undeniable value as regards cultural and historical heritage. As an architectural site and a work of fortification art with over two centuries of history, this site has the potential for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List and a function as a Polish-Belarusian cross-border brand tourism product. The tourist attraction of Brest is further enhanced by its favorable location between Eastern and Western Europe and its position as a key transport hub. On the other hand, the attractiveness of the Brest Memorial Complex in Belarus is also connected to an imposed “added” significance, which has served and continues to serve the political and propaganda purposes of authoritarian regimes endangering historical memory (Ganzer and Paškovič, 2010; Ganzer, 2017b).

Based on the data on visitor attendance at the Brest Fortress in Belarus, it is possible to achieve an approximate identification of the following phases according to the TALC model and key factors on different levels (MLG) in its functioning (Fig. 2). First, the initial Exploration and Involvement phases were influenced significantly by the creation of the Soviet myth emphasizing the crucial role of the Fortress’s defense in 1941. The opening of the Museum in 1956 and publications by Smirnov and Simonov from the mid-1950s onwards marked the beginning of this process (Akinchits, 1962). In 1965, the Brest Fortress was awarded the title of “Hero Fortress” (Naumenko, 1970). A decisive turning point came in 1971 with the construction of a massive museum and memorial complex, triggering the Development phase in the 1970s. A major factor contributing to the rapid

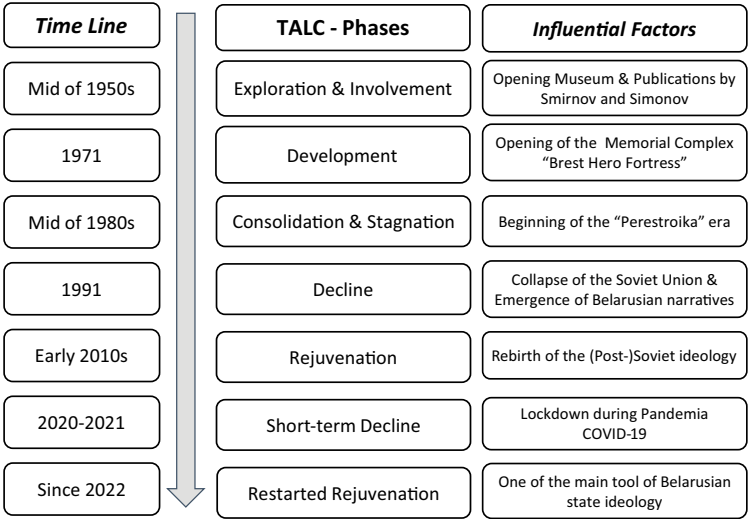


Fig. 2. Tourism Area Life Cycle Phases of the Brest Hero Fortress Memorial and key Influential Factors

increase in tourist numbers was Brest's favorable geographical position, well-developed infrastructure, and transport connections that made it a "gateway city" for emerging tourism flows from both Soviet countries and Western Europe along the Berlin-Warsaw-Brest-Minsk-Moscow corridor. This phase lasted until the "Perestroika" era in the mid 1980s transitioning into Consolidation and Stagnation phases.

During the Decline phase after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s and 2000s, a shift from Soviet narratives to Belarusian national ideology had the temporary impact of reducing visitor numbers considerably (Beshanov, 2009). However, since the early 2010s, a Rejuvenation phase has been in progress, influenced strongly by the geopolitical revival of Soviet-era narratives and symbols promoted by both Belarusian and Russian authorities. This resurgence continues today, with the exception of a minor Decline phase in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, even a lengthy list of geopolitical tensions impairing tourism in Central and Eastern Europe, such as deteriorating relations between the EU (including Poland) and Belarus after the 2020 presidential elections, economic and transport disruptions, border restrictions, the political-prisoner situation and pressure on the Polish minority in Belarus, the migrant crisis along the Polish-Belarusian border, and the War in Ukraine – have not led to a decrease in visitor numbers. On the contrary, they have contributed to an increase in attendance at the Brest Fortress Museum Complex. This trend highlights the site's role as a substantial tourist product linked to the rebirth of post-Soviet ideology, as evidenced by how well the place was frequented in 2024, when there were over 600,000 in attendance (Boleje..., 2025).

This, in turn, raises a debatable issue concerning the politicizing and reliability of Belarusian statistical data, especially in regard to the Brest Fortress. Places of National Remembrance, like National Parks, count visitors predominantly through headcounts taken by staff or volunteers, ticket sales, and modern tracking technologies such as scanners (Miazek, 2020). Until the mid-2010s, designated staff or security personnel counted visitors entering through the main gate, which was subsequently replaced by scanners³. This count included museum employees while omitting visitors who entered through other access points. Visits to the Memorial Complex have always been free of charge, while the four museums located within it and one outside require paid admission (Gosudarstwiennoje..., 2025). However, specific ticket-sales figures are absent from official statistics.

Additionally, the Ceremonial Square in the Citadel of the Complex as a core of the tourist product has served historically as a venue for political and ideological events, gatherings, manifestations, concerts, and reenactments, drawing tens of thousands of attendees⁴. This was the case during the Soviet era and has remained so over the past 10-15 years, particularly on significant dates such as June 22 (anniversary of the start of the Great Patriotic War), May 9 (Victory Day), and July 3 (Independence Day). Many attendees do not participate voluntarily, but rather under directives or obligations dictated by their superiors. These include students, government employees, state enterprise workers, members of trade unions, and various pro-government socio-political and patriotic organizations, not only from Brest but from across Belarus. During the Soviet era, participants also came from throughout the USSR, and even today pilgrimages here are made

³ According to the in-depth interview with a Cultural Manager, employee of NGOs connected with Brest, and former employee of the Memorial Complex "Brest Hero Fortress", conducted on 03.12.2024.

⁴ According to the in-depth interview with a Cultural & Creative Manager, former employee of the foundation connected with Brest Fortress, conducted on 13.12.2024.

from Russia. Furthermore, the Brest Fortress serves as a place for official oaths to be taken by soldiers, police officers, border guards, firefighters, and medical students. Youth organizations also maintain an honorary guard at the “Eternal Flame”. These practices align with (post-)Soviet patriotic and ideological traditions, reinforcing loyalty to the state authority. Therefore, it may be stated that the huge turnout to this destination is, on the one hand, difficult to identify precisely, while on the other hand rather possible, because visits to the Brest Fortress are to a large extent an obligation for various groups of Belarusians – as part of the history and heritage policy pursued by the Lukashenko government.

Another debatable issue is the selection of statistical data for comparison. Data on museum attendance and tourist traffic in Belarusian regions illustrate the scale and dynamics of these processes. Given the lack of other more concrete and reliable data, these figures remain the key source for analysis. Research points to significant tourist activity in the Brest Region. However, it is important to note that, besides the Brest Fortress, this region is also home to another flagship tourist product in the Polish-Belarusian borderland, i.e. the Białowieża / Belovezhskaya Forest. In 2018, the Belarusian side there recorded 570,000 visitors, and in 2022, after the COVID-19 pandemic, this number stood at 518,000 (Cyargeenka, 2023). These figures, like other Belarusian statistics, may be subject to criticism, as they are often estimated and also potentially inflated by the authorities. For instance, available data on museum attendance within the Forest suggest significantly lower numbers – approximately 120,000 visitors in both 2011 and 2019. Nevertheless, these two major tourist destinations, well-connected in terms of transportation, and located relatively close to each other within the Brest Region, often complement each other’s cultural and natural attractiveness, serving collectively as a strong draw for a vast number of visitors.

Finally, around 15 years ago, the tourist value of the Terespol Bridgehead sites was questioned due to their poor condition, abandonment, and lack of renovation – with it being judged that the forts were entirely unsuitable for tourism (Bytniewski and Belniak, 2010). However, field research conducted in 2024 showed significant improvement thanks to the efforts and engagement of persons and associations dedicated to military architectural heritage, local, regional and national authorities, EU Funds, and other stakeholders. The Terespol Bridgehead complex, included two local museum and cultural centers, has evolved into a key part of an emerging regional cultural hub and tourist network around Terespol, which also includes the Sanctuary in Kodeń, the Equestrian Center in Janów Podlaski, the *GreenVelo* route etc., as confirmed by museum attendance data.

Conclusions

Currently, most visitors to the Memorial Complex that is the “Brest Hero Fortress” are Belarussians, primarily excursionists (day-trippers), as followed in second place by Russian tourists. Before 2020, Polish and Ukrainian citizens ranked third and fourth respectively, reflecting overall growth in both tourist numbers and national diversity. There was even an early phase to the development of cross-border tourism, particularly after the introduction of the Brest Tourism and Recreation Zone in 2018, with this allowing visa-free entry for Poles, and citizens of 70 other countries. This was further expanded in 2019 to include the Białowieża/Belovezhskaya Forest, Grodno, and the Augustów Canal (Komornicki et al.,

2022). However, between 2020 and 2022, the aforementioned geopolitical challenges led to the closure of all pedestrian and passenger border crossings between Poland and Belarus, except for the Brest-Terespol crossing, which became heavily overloaded. Tourist seasonality at Brest Fortress is tied closely to commemorations of (post-)Soviet holidays, including May 9, June 22, July 3, and September 17 – all as linked to World War II.

Additionally, high visitor numbers and museum attendance in the Brest Region are influenced by the presence of other key attractions, such as the Brest Regional Museum of Local Studies, with three branches in Brest and one at the medieval Kamenets Tower. Most importantly, the Brest Region itself is home to the UNESCO-listed Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, a well-connected place, and one of the most-visited attractions in the Polish-Belarusian borderland. On a local scale, factors like renovations, infrastructure upgrades, and temporary exhibition changes have little impact on visitor numbers, as they only affect accessibility briefly.

The analysis of museum attendance data in the Bug Euroregion indicates that the Brest Region and City, as compared with similar territorial units in Poland (Lublin Voivodeship) and Ukraine (Volyn Region), demonstrate a high level of tourist activity and significant potential for the Belarusian part of the Euroregion, particularly Brest, which is the most visited city. However, the Bug Euroregion, as a cross-border entity, has been operating with low intensity since the late 2010s, and after 2020–2021, cooperation with the Belarusian side was suspended.

Regarding the Polish Terespol Bridgehead Museums, the Exploration and Involvement phases can be identified clearly in line with the TALC model, with signs of an emerging Development phase. However, factors such as the negative perception of the destination due to the migrant crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border started from 2021, while poor local and regional public-transport connections, especially to Kobylany, will play a limiting role in increasing tourist traffic. Nevertheless, museum custodians and local authorities are aware that, for now, these sites are primarily serving domestic visitors and the local community, functioning as cultural and social hubs. Their seasonality varies, with the Terespol Powder Magazine operating year-round, peaking in summer, while the Kobylany Barracks are open only during the summer due to a lack of heating. In recent years, most international visitors have come from Germany, while only a handful of Belarusian tourists have been recorded annually.

Of course, the research conducted so far is not entirely complete, as there are statistical gaps and a need for deeper qualitative and quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, what is presented here can be seen as an important step, and a foundation for new ideas, the application of different methods, and an opening-up of further development approaches.

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