



## **MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF AIRPORTS AS A FACTOR DETERMINING THE CHOICE OF AIRPORT BY POLISH AND FOREIGN PASSENGERS**



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### Summary

In the modern economy, an important aspect of the functioning of an organization is the effectiveness of the communications actions. They fulfil a key role in the process of creating the desired image of an organization, which influences the purchasing decisions of consumers, including the selection of airport by passengers. Factors determining the positive and negative opinions about airports should be an area of searching to reveal an airport unique values (benefits) that will highlight the offer of an airport in increasingly competitive transportation market. Article presents the factors influencing opinions and choice of an airport by Polish and foreign passengers that have been identified as a result of direct surveys carried out in November-December 2015 via direct interview (PAPI) on a sample of 929 respondents.

**Keywords:** airport, communication, image, PAPI



## Introduction

The development of information technologies boosts the dynamics of social communication processes creating new challenges for an organization's marketing communication. The number of indirect communication channels available on the Internet is growing, especially in the area of media and social media. We have observed a qualitative change in the process of communication. Unilateral communication of an organization with the market, by means of traditional media (TV, radio, press) is losing its significance. Digital media, which enable fully bilateral communication with the recipient, are becoming an ever more popular communication channel for companies. Dialogue with the recipient creates the opportunity for more intensive interaction and boosts the potential for the involvement of the recipient in the process of communication. As a consequence, the development of digital media has raised the possibility of shaping a desired image of a company and its offer.

The image of an airport is the result of an image created in the awareness of recipients on the basis of experiences gathered in course of direct contacts with the company and using its offer. It is also affected by the activities conducted in the area of marketing communication. Communication activity of a company creates the image of an airport, which is an important factor determining the recognisability of a particular airport. The opinions and attitudes of passengers concerning a particular airport influence the decision-making process concerning the choice of an airport. That's why an important element for shaping marketing communication is the identification of factors which to the greatest extent influence the formation of attitudes and opinions of passengers about an airport. Communication activities exposing the significant values for passengers, which are also the advantages of a particular airport, allow building the desired image of an airport.

An airport is a challenging subject in the process of forming marketing communication. What determines this is the multitude of external conditions (e.g. requirements of institutions on the international level — e.g. IATA, ICAO, on the European level — regulations of the European Commission, and on the national level — Ministry of Infrastructure and Development), as well as the characteristics of conducted activity. Airports

should be treated as integrators of many services and should be regarded as an entity providing systemic services (paradigm of systemic services) (Żabiński L., 2012; Witzak O., Buszman-Witańska M., 2016, p. 40). An airport offers in one place the opportunity to satisfy multiple needs of passengers during just one act of consumption, among others, airplane flight, postal services, hotel services, etc. The function of a service integrator and an entity providing systemic services means that the basic challenge for the marketing communication of an airport is the multitude of entities, as well as conditions, which determine the process of delivering value to consumers. Thus, the conducted marketing communication is determined by many factors, also by factors which an airport doesn't influence much, or at all (e.g. communication activities of airlines, activities of local governments with regard to raising the attractiveness of the region for tourists, etc.). That's why creating the desired image of an airport requires precision in planning communication activities and systematic search for current information about the changing preferences of all stakeholders of an airport, in particular, passengers. The goal of this article is discussing the characteristics of marketing communication of an airport and the significance of the efficiency of communication for the formation of desired attitudes and opinions, which eventually influence the choice of an airport by passengers.

The article presents current challenges for the marketing communication of an organization. The characteristics of an airport as a subject for conducting marketing communication activities aimed at creating a uniform image of an airport are discussed. On the basis of gathered empirical material the results of surveys of recognisability of Polish airports are presented from the perspective of conducted communication activities. Also, factors influencing the formation of attitudes and opinions of Polish and foreign passengers about airports have been highlighted.

A plane for the presented deliberations are the results of quantitative surveys conducted in November–December 2015 by means of a direct interview technique (PAPI) on a sample of 929 respondents: 699 respondents from Poland and 230 foreigners. The research was conducted by a team of employees and students of the University of Economic in Katowice.

## Marketing communication — conditions and trends

Currently, dynamic environment and growing competition force many organizations to look for new ways to boost their own market position and gaining competitive advantage. In order to stand up to the challenge organizations are looking for new concepts for activity. Among them an important role is attributed to marketing communication. Efficient communication with the environment is becoming a factor distinguishing marketing-oriented organizations (Żabiński L., 2002, p. 199), and its goal is "securing durable market presence".

In literature on the subject it is possible to find numerous definitions of marketing communication. It is emphasized that it belongs to the kind of activity, which everybody is aware of, but only few are able to define sufficiently (Fiske J., 1999, p. 15). Nevertheless, the essence of marketing communication in the contemporary meaning can be boiled down to the dialogue of the company with entities in the environment with the use of particular channels and means of communication. Marketing communication defined this way covers conveying to the environment the identity of the company and information about its offer. Currently, explaining the essence of communication, the dialogue, that is bilateral and interactive character of communication and continuity of information exchange, with the recipient is emphasized (Taranko T., 2015, p. 18). Bilateral and interactive character of contemporary marketing communication means simultaneous provision of information and gathering information from the market (marketing research on needs, preferences, trends, monitoring of the environment etc.). This allows acquiring information concerning current image of an organization and better understanding of the recipients. Many authors analysing the role of communication in the strategy of an organization note that almost everything that a company does (or what it fails to do) is a marketing message conveyed to the market environment, which means that in essence all activities constitute the subject of marketing communication.

Growth of the role of communication in marketing activities has contributed to the emergence of the concept of integrated marketing communication in 1990's. According to the concept, to achieve success on the market it is necessary

to use available marketing instruments and integrate them in an optimum way. J.W. Wiktor has pointed out that integrated marketing communication constitutes "new quality in deliberations concerning the role of conditions of contemporary marketing " (Wiktor J.W., 2001, p. 58) and D.E. Schultz has recognized integrated marketing communication as a "new paradigm of marketing" (Schultz D.E., Tannenbaum S.I., Lauterborn R.F., 1994). This has become an element of daily practice of companies' communication activities. According to M. Rydel, all issued of integrated marketing communication can be boiled down to three dimensions: management, process and used tools. (Rydel M., 2004 pp. 351–359). The advantages coming from the application of integrated marketing communication are often summed up with the 4E formula: economical, efficient, effective, enhancing, or 4C formula: coherence, consistency, continuity, complementary communications (Pickton D., Broderick A., 2001, p. 70).

The development of information and communication technologies has created a new, media-dominated environment for the system of communication of a company with the environment raising the efficiency of activities conducted in course of integrated marketing communication. What distinguishes communication in a media-dominated environment is, among others, using a set of diverse instruments of a specific character, the possibility of conducting communication on a global scale, multi-media form of messages, which can be static (image, text) and dynamic (sound, animation), high level of individualization of conveyed messages, or the scalability of the message (the message can be targeted at a small, or a big group of recipients, without limitations), as well as interactive participation of recipients in the process of conveying information and raising the speed of communication and speed of reaction to the created set of instrument (more on this subject: Wiktor J., 2013, Hoffman, Novak, 1995). It is also worth adding here that communication in media-dominated computer environment is much cheaper than interpersonal, or mass communication. In such situation marketing communication regarded as a "constructive dialogue" with entities in the environment, conducted continuously (without breaks), taking into consideration the achievements of contemporary technologies on the one hand raises a company's communication capacity and on the other hand constitutes substantial challenges. These challenges are: the necessity to follow technological changes, increased activity and

creativity aimed at developing competences in communication, as well as greater transparency of an organization's activities. In literature on the subject a thesis has been formulated that marketing communication is an instrument of marketing which in the recent years has experiences and still is experiencing the greatest number of changes (Bajdak A., 2013, p. 7).

Under circumstances of dynamic environment and growing competition, the role of marketing communication is growing substantially in the strategies of contemporary organizations. If marketing communication is conducted in course of continuous dialogue with the recipients, it contributes to not just better identification of the recipients' needs, but also becomes an important instrument in the process of building trust and forming the desired image of an organization. Currently, many market entities, becoming increasingly aware of the necessity of strengthening the flow of information "from and to" the market, reach for a possibly fullest spectrum of available marketing communication instruments and use them in the process of shaping the desired image and promotion of the service/product offer. Companies are aware that market success and achieving a competitive advantage is "reserved" for the organizations which will be able to take advantage of innovative technological solutions<sup>1</sup>. In essence this means the ability to use the appropriate kind of message directed to the appropriate places at the right time.

One of the goals of marketing communication is shaping the desired image. Airports in Poland are taking up communication activities to create the appropriate image of an airport among particular entities of the environment: clients (passengers), shareholders, investors, suppliers, national and local media, professional associations, decision-makers, universities in the region<sup>2</sup> etc. The specific character of an airport as a market entity means that communication activities should be focused more on the formation of a positive image than on the promotion of particular elements of the service offer.

## **Airport as a subject of marketing communication**

Contemporary airports are "complex, big, economic-technological organizations", sometimes compared to a "sorting machine" (Stein A., Prusakiewicz-Bech A. 2010, p. 23), serving many diverse functions (Ekiert J.,



2013, pp. 57–58). Their activity involves providing airlines and various other entities with airport facilities in exchange for payment of fees, which are determined independently by the manager himself. Carrying out his tasks associated with his function, the manager of airports follows market logics. Pro-market behaviours of airports in Poland are the effects of advancing processes of integration and globalization of contemporary economies and Poland's accession to the European Union<sup>3</sup>. As a result of these processes, the air transport market in Poland has become more competitive and the "airport sector has transformed from a domain manager by the government into a dynamic and market-oriented business" (Rekowski M., (ed.) 2011, p. 239). The business activity of airports is most often measured with such indicators as the number of handled passengers (this indicator can be researched taking into consideration the place of residence, compared to the number of inhabitants of the region where an airport operates), the volume of handled cargo traffic, or the number of flight operations. The volume of passenger traffic, cargo traffic and number of flight operations at Polish airports are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Passenger traffic, cargo traffic and flight operations at Polish airports in 2015

Airport	IATA code <sup>4</sup>	ICAO code <sup>5</sup>	Passengers	Cargo in tons	Flight operations
Bydgoszcz	BZG	EPBY	318 817	0.1	2 536
Gdańsk	GDN	EPGD	3 676 771	4 431.9	32 761
Katowice	KTW	EPKT	3 044 017	14 519.4	23 391
Kraków	KRK	EPKK	4 208 661	0.0	33 570
Lublin	LUZ	EPLB	264 070	15.0	1 997
Łódź	LCJ	EPLL	287 620	0.0	3 099
Modlin	WMI	EPMO	2 589 286	0.0	16 288
Poznań	POZ	EPPO	1 477 318	260.6	14 436
Rzeszów	RZE	EPRZ	641 146	3 863.3	6 324
Radom	RDO	EPRA	670	0.0	110
Szczecin	SZZ	EPSC	412 162	53.6	3 462
Warszawa	WAW	EPWA	11 186 688	58 282.4	124 691
Wrocław	WRO	EPWR	2 269 216	89.3	20 004
Zielona Góra	IEG	EPZG	15 500	0.0	672
<b>Total</b>			<b>30 391 992</b>	<b>81 515.6</b>	<b>283 341</b>

Source: prepared on the basis of ULC data.

As table 1 shows, the air transport network in Poland consists of the central airport in Warsaw and 13 regional airports. The biggest regional airport in Poland is the airport in Kraków, which in 2015 served 4.2 million passengers. Not only passengers, but also cargo is transported by air. In terms of the volume of handled cargo, the biggest regional airport in Poland is Katowice airport with over 14.500 tons of cargo.

In the context of the functions served by airports, the process of communication focused on forming a desired image is exceptionally difficult. Following the marketing approach, desired image is the way in which particular recipients are supposed to regard an airport operator as an entity of the contemporary market, according to the airport operator. Such definition of desired image on the one hand in some ways expresses ambitions and defines the direction which an airport should follow (see: Scott S.G., Lane V.R., 2000, p. 43–62), but on the other hand shows that it is a subjective and perceptive category. The image of an airport as a highly individualized vision of an airport created in the "minds of recipients" as a result of the process in which the recipients decode the signals sent by the airport operator. Thus, it is possible to say that the image of an airport is formed as a result of a kind of own interpretations of particular recipients. These interpretations are based mainly on "precisely defined hints" of the airport operator, but also on own, direct experiences of the recipients associated with the functioning of an airport, or on the accounts of other recipients. Particular recipients interpret particular marketing messages of an airport operator in a rational, or an emotional way (see: Dobni D., Zinkhan G.M., 1990, p. 110–119), but usually in different ways, as they have different preferences, or hierarchies of values. That's why the image is determined by "individual predispositions" of the recipients for selecting and accepting various marketing messages of an airport operator. It is possible to conclude that the image of an airport as an effect of the process of "selective perception" of signals emitted by an airport manager is a simplified way of perception reduced to the elements within the scope of interest of particular groups of recipients. Thus, we are dealing with greater, or smaller diversification of images, but the goal should be to make most

recipients share one particular image. It is worth pointing out here that the image of an airport is hardly ever identical with the image (vision) which a particular operator (airport manager) would like to achieve. That's why in literature on the subject the concept of a real image, defined as an image that can be achieved in existing conditions, has appeared (Budzyński W., 2004, p. 42.). The analysis of multiple definitions of image also makes it possible to conclude that image is dynamic in character (it is not constant), it is formed by marketing activities (mainly deliberately conducted communication activities), it is used as an element for building competitive advantage and its identification requires specially designed marketing research (Szromnik A., 2007, p. 134). Some authors point to the fact that once formed image in the awareness of the recipients is characterized by comparable durability (Szulce H., Janiszewska K., 2006 pp. 43–44). In the context of forming the image of an airport it is worth pointing out that even though this is above all a subjective category, in case of many recipients also objective factors determine the image of an airport. These factors become a basis for building various kinds of rankings. Such "objective factors" favouring the creation of the image of an airport may be e.g. indicators presented in table (number of passengers, volume of cargo)<sup>6</sup>. Such rankings highlight the position in the competitive environment, e.g. Kraków-Balice as the biggest regional airport in Poland in terms of the number of passengers, Katowice as the biggest regional airport in Poland in terms of cargo handling.

The entity responsible for shaping the image of an airport is its operator (the manager of ground infrastructure)<sup>7</sup>. Its basic task in this area is conducting planned actions aimed at, among others, raising the recognisability of the airport, communicating about the actions associated with the development of infrastructure, communicating about the "image-related" competitive advantages of the airport, e.g. the quality of provided handling services, commercial-service offer in the area of non-aviation services. Frequency and convenience of offered connections etc. Table 2 presents the most important determinants of the communication activities of an airport.

Table 2. basic determinants of the functioning of an airport as a subject of marketing communication

- the existence of diversified groups of recipients (clients) results mainly from the high complexity of the marketing product offered by the airport; among clients of the airport we can name: airlines, passengers, handling agents, cargo operators, public entities associated with the functioning of an airport, entities associated with the commercial service offer of an airport; all the above mentioned groups of airport clients have different needs and expectations; they are at the same time the recipients of the desired image of an airport and participate in the formation of the image, e.g. the presence of airlines at an airport;
- each of the main groups of recipients can be divided into smaller segments; among airline companies there are traditional airlines, low-cost airlines, charter airlines; passengers are divided into business travellers and tourists; among public entities associated with the functioning of airports there are: police, customs offices, immigration offices, air traffic control and among entities associated with the commercial service offer of an airport there are: shops, bars, restaurants, car rentals, travel agents, currency exchange points, banks, etc.; each of the above-mentioned groups of recipients have completely different expectations with regard to the offer of an airport, e.g. tourists and business travellers<sup>8</sup> (Graham A., Papatheodorou A., Forsyth P., 2008, p.169), or airlines (low-cost vs. traditional airlines), which often apply different criteria for the assessment of an airport (Augustyniak W., 2013, pp.8-12);
- the necessity to take into consideration in the communication of an airport factors resulting from the legal-institutional environment, including, among others, obligation to comply with diverse legal regulations defined by various institutions functioning both on the global level (e.g. IATA, ICAO), European level (regulations of the European Commission) and on the national level (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development and ULC), including obligations imposed by statutory requirements for the purpose of securing the functioning of an airport as a public utility;
- the necessity to guarantee security complying with national and international standard — the call for security of flight operations is becoming the top goal of image strategies of many airports in the context of a growing threat of terrorist activity;
- the character of functioning of airports determines the possibility of occurrence of various kinds of threats for the environment, including, among others, noise, pollution and threats associated with contamination of groundwater as an effect of the functioning of an airport in the area of, among others, cleaning the aprons; airports also influence the environment through, among others, occupying large areas needed for airport facilities, changing the structure of utilization of grounds on the territory and around the airport — the effect of functioning of an airport in this respect make it necessary to use in communication a range of available CSR tools, including in particular taking measures in the area of environment protection, as well as taking actions focusing on respecting the right of, among others, people residing in the so-called areas of restricted utilization. (see; Bidziński, Chmaj 2015). Research shows that companies with a positive image built on the basis of socially responsible activities are more "attractive" for the recipients;
- change in the structure of an airport's income — it results from growing bargaining power of low-cost carriers who looking for reduction of costs increase pressure on the reduction of airport fees, which limits airports' income from air transport activity and forces them to raise revenues from non-aviation activity — this is reflected by, among others, plans for expansion of airports involving the expansion of retail space;
- structure of ownership — taking into consideration the fact that this factor in such an important way influences marketing management of a university, it is particularly significant in the context of fast development of air transport services and growing competition between particular airports; e.g. in the structure of ownership of the airport in Katowice there are, among others: Weglokoks (over 40%), authorities of the Silesian voivodeship (over 38%), state-owned airport operator "Porty Lotnicze" (over 16%) and the City of Katowice (about 5%);

Source: own materials.

The conditions discussed above are reflected, on the one hand, by the aspect of current airport management and on the other hand they substantially influence the method of creation and implementation of the marketing communication of an airport. In this context it is possible to say that what is becoming an important task in the process of shaping the desired image of an airport is looking for a kind of consensus between the trends of development on the air transport market and various goals and expectations of all stakeholders. The image of an airport can be identified from the point of view of not just airlines, or their passengers, but also from the point of view of owners, investors, entrepreneurs, or the inhabitants of the surrounding region, especially the people living in the vicinity of an airport in the so-called restricted utilization areas etc. (Witczak O., 2003, pp. 318–320). The multitude of entities influencing the shaping of the image of an airport requires from the operator of the airport defining priorities and setting directions of activities and their coordination should be characterized by general acceptance of all entities functioning within an airport.

Table 3 presents the most important attributes used in the communication of an airport and examples of applications in the marketing activity of airports.

**Table 3. Chosen attributes used in the communication  
of an airport and examples of applications**

Attribute	Examples of application in the process of building an airport's image
Accessibility	The accessibility of an airport is defined as the possibility of commuting easily to and from an airport using various means of transport; in the area of this attribute it is possible to build the image of an airport through, among others, informing about convenient, modern car parks around the airport and attractive parking fees; Kraków — Balice airport uses this attribute in image building by informing that it has the best railway link with the centre of the city; The attribute is important in case of most passenger segments;

Cont. table 3

Attribute	Examples of application in the process of building an airport's image
Offered network of connections from a particular airport	Airports try to build connection networks based on the offers of all kinds of airlines; traditional, low-cost, charter carriers, in order to secure not just a more diversified offer for the passengers, but also to eliminate the risk of becoming dependent on just one type of carrier(s); it is not an easy task — the offer of most regional airports in Poland is based mainly on low-cost airlines; in essence, every "entry" of a new carrier (expanding the network of connections) is subject to image-related communication, even if it concerns a less known carrier e.g. the airport in Bydgoszcz and the Italian airline Mistral Air ( <a href="http://dlapilota.pl/wiadomosci-/polska/nowy-przewoznik-na-lotnisku-w-bydgoszczy">http://dlapilota.pl/wiadomosci-/polska/nowy-przewoznik-na-lotnisku-w-bydgoszczy</a> , accessed on 10.07.2016); The attribute is important in case of most passenger segments;
Quality of passenger service	Among the key elements of this attribute there are, among others: duration of check-in and the efficiency of the passenger, baggage, customs service procedures, the presence of additional services associated with the flight; nevertheless, it is worth stressing that this attribute is associated with the structure of operations in airports — the presence of traditional airlines requires, among others, greater availability of additional services such as e.g. business lounges, fast-track check in, etc. In association with the observed trend of growing expectations of the clients, it is an attribute important for most passengers, indirectly also for airlines;
Comfort and security	This attribute means the feeling of comfort and safe stay at an airport when waiting for e.g. a flight; the feeling of comfort is supported by, among others, decoration of the interior, diversity of shops, including shops with renowned brands, the availability of restaurants, tour-operator's branches and travel agents, the availability of leisure zones, playrooms for children, or the functioning of professional visitors' centre where you can get information about the functioning of an airport; The attribute is important in case of most passenger segments;
Tourist and business potential of the city/region	The tourist and business potential of a city/region covers, among others, size and rank of a city/region, the level of economic development, number of inhabitants within the sphere of influence of an airport, level of wealth etc. Here it is necessary to point out that in essence an airport serves a monopolistic role in terms of access to air transport services on the scale of the city/region where it is located; It is worth pointing out here that the presence of an airport in a city/region is one the one hand used to build its image and this is reflected in many strategic documents e.g. in the strategies of development of cities/voivodeships and on the other hand, it is emphasized that airports have a city- and region-building function

Cont. table 3

Attribute	Examples of application in the process of building an airport's image
	<p>and play the role of a kind of "catalyst" of regional growth e.g. the presence of an airport encourages global companies to locate their outsourcing centres within the sphere of influence of the airport. The effects of the influence of airports on the economic development of a region can be divided into indirect, direct, induced and catalytic effects (Stein A., Prusakiewicz- Bech A., 2010, p.50–54). The attribute is important in case of most airlines, it is crucial in negotiations with cheap airlines in the aspect of airport fees — a thesis has been formulated that it is not the level of airport fees that is the most important factor for the choice of an airport in case of such airlines (this is the common conviction), but the relation of potential revenues which can be generated, resulting from the potential of the city/region to the level of fees (Gardiner J., 2006); e.g. Kraków-Balice airport in negotiations with airlines emphasizes the fact that the city is one of the most recognizable cities in Poland and one of the strongest tourist brands, the airport in Katowice informs about not just the tourist attractions of the region, but mainly about the economic potential of the region, this includes adding areas in the vicinity of the airport to the territory of Katowice Special Economic Zone;</p>
Natural environment factors	<p>For example, the airport in Katowice build its image by communicating that it has the best spatial and meteorological conditions for expansion; The attribute is important both for most airlines and for passengers;</p>
Modern infrastructural potential	<p>What is typical of an airport's infrastructure is, among others, technical and economic indivisibility, spatial and functional immobility, high asset and capital intensity, as well as long duration of the process of design, construction and exploitation (K. Wojewódzka-Król, E. Załoga 2016, p. 241). What is becoming an image-related challenge for an airport is securing a level of infrastructure corresponding to the continuously increasing requirements of passengers and carriers, as well as continuously increasing standards in international traffic, which forces airports to continuously invest in modernization and expansion of particular components of infrastructural equipment<sup>9</sup>; currently, there is an expectation that infrastructure should be adapted to serve passengers and airplanes in a 24/7/365 cycle; here there is a necessity to combine in development strategies "the long-term elements with the temporary elements" (Stein A., Prusakiewicz-Bech A., 2010, p. 63); The attribute is important in case of airlines, including cargo carriers, it is comparably less important for passengers;</p>

Source: own materials.

It is worth pointing out here that many regional airports in Poland are trying to shape their marketing communication so that the image of the airport reflects most closely and is most coherent with the adopted business model. In case of passengers this can be achieved thanks to, among others, creating an attractive network of connections, securing a comfortable and safe stay at the airport, securing the efficiency of the processes of passenger, baggage, customs services as elements of broadly understood quality of service. In case of airlines above all the following factors are portrayed as "competitive image-related advantages": potential of the city/region in which an airport is located, the infrastructural potential of the airport, or factors of the natural environment etc. It is also necessary to emphasize that what should be an important task of an airport operator is conducting continuous monitoring of the perception of an airport among all its recipients, in particular among passengers and airlines as the main clients of the airport. It is also worth remembering that the image of an airport is formed not just as an effect of an operator's actions, but it is the "image of an airport" formed to a large extent also by events and actions of other entities functioning with an airport<sup>10</sup> and their traits resulting from the business model (e.g. cheap airlines), which an airport operator doesn't influence in any way, or which an operator influences in a very limited way. It is also necessary to point out that these activities can both improve and deteriorate the current image of an airport. Moreover, an important conclusion is that in course of forming the image of an airport, its operator is forced to function in the environment of various groups of interest coming both from the private and local/national government sectors. We shouldn't also forget that due to the fact that an airport is a service organization, what influences its image to a large extent are own experiences of airport clients, including passengers. In time of modern technologies, passengers not just assess the service processes of an airport for their own benefit, but they also "share" their opinions in e.g. the social media. Many clients regard these assessments as very credible, as they think this information is resistant to manipulations and the influence of the company.



## Attitudes and opinions of passengers with regard to Polish and foreign passengers — survey results

The presented results are the effect of a project covering quantitative research conducted by means of the direct interview technique (PAPI) on a sample of 929 respondents divided into two groups: group I — 699 respondents (Poles); group II — 230 respondents — foreigners (surveys on foreigners were conducted in English, Russian and German).

The respondents of the survey were clients of the Katowice International Airport, defined as people visiting the airport (both the people using air transport services and people greeting and saying goodbye to passengers). Table 4 presents the basic social-demographic characteristics of the surveyed respondents. The share of both sexes in the sample group is almost equal. Women constituted 50.6% of the respondents and 49.4% of the respondents were men.

Among foreigners the most numerous nationality were Germans (over 11% of all the respondents), further most numerous groups of respondents were citizens of Great Britain (4.5%) and Holland (2.4%), Sweden (1.4%). It is worth pointing out here that in the group of foreigners there were representatives of 21 countries.

The dominant group of respondents were people aged 18 to 29 (38.5%) and the smallest group were people older than 60 (4.2%). Respondents aged 30–39 and 40–49 constituted 23.8% and 23.5% of the respondents, respectively. Respondents aged 50–59 constituted 10% of the surveyed.

Vast majority of the respondents are professionally active people (70.8%). Students constituted 22.2% of the respondents, pensioners and annuitants constituted 4.8% of the respondents, unemployed constituted 2.2% of the respondents.

For over a half of the surveyed the purpose of a visit to the airport was air travel. Almost 27% of the respondents were on a business trip and for slightly more than 12% of the respondents, the visit to the airport was associated with picking up other passengers.

Table 4. Basic characteristics of respondents in quantitative research (N=929)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>SEX</b>		
Woman	470	50.6
Man	459	49.4
<b>NATIONALITY</b>		
Poland	699	75.2
Foreigners including:	230	24.8
Germany	104	11.2
UK	42	4.5
Holland	22	2.4
Sweden	13	1.4
Belgium	8	0.9
Czech Republic	8	0.9
Others*	33	3.5
<b>AGE</b>		
18–29	358	38.5
30–39	221	23.8
40–49	218	23.5
50–59	93	10.0
Over 60	39	4.2
<b>PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY</b>		
Active	628	70.8
Unemployed	20	2.2
Pension/annuity	45	4.8
Student	206	22.2
<b>PURPOSE OF VISIT TO THE AIRPORT</b>		
Private trip by plane	516	55.6
Business trip by plane	250	26.9
Picking up passengers	116	12.5
Other	6	0.6
Lack of response	41	4.4
<b>INCOME PER HOUSEHOLD MEMBER (NET)</b>		
Up to PLN 1500/up to EUR 350	122	13.1
PLN 1501–2500/EUR 351–600	202	21.7
PLN 2501–3500/EUR 601–800	157	16.9
PLN 3501–5000/EUR 801–1200	129	13.9
More than PLN 5000/over EUR 201	105	11.3
I don't know	214	23.0

\*The group of foreign respondents was formed by the representatives of a total of 21 countries, among the respondents there were representatives of such countries as: China (5), Spain (4), Russia (3), Ukraine (3), Italy (3), Austria (2), France (2), Portugal (2), Slovakia (2), Switzerland (2) there was also one respondent from Afghanistan, one from Israel, one from Canada, one from Mongolia and one from Scotland.

Source: own materials.

The survey made it possible to identify the respondents' income per member of their household. The results have been divided into five income brackets (Table 4). The incomes of the respondents were diversified: every fifth respondent declared he had an income ranging from PLN 1.501 to PLN 2.500 (EUR 351–600), there were over 11% respondents with incomes exceeding PLN 5.000 (more than EUR 1.201) net per household member. Respondents with small incomes below PLN 1.500 (less than EUR 350) constituted just over 13%.

### Level of recognisability of Polish airports

An important aspect in research on the efficiency of conducted marketing activity is the indicator of so-called spontaneous awareness of the name/brand showing the level of awareness of name/brand in the surveyed population. It indicates what percentage of respondents mentions the brand (name) spontaneously, or what percentage of the respondents thinking about airports recalls and mentioned the name of a particular airport.

The most recognizable airport in Poland among the respondents was Katowice Airport. Over 92% of the respondents mentioned it as an airport known to them. The following positions, in terms of the number of responses were Chopin Airport in Warsaw (over 83% of responses), John Paul II International Airport Kraków-Balice (over 78% of responses) and Lech Wałęsa airport in Gdańsk (over 44% of responses).

The recognisability of airports among the respondents is closely tied to the number of served passengers. All four airports mentioned most often by the respondents are the biggest airports in Poland in terms of the number of served passengers.

High recognisability of the airport in Katowice among the respondents is situational in character. This is because the survey was conducted at this particular airport. At the same time the high recognisability of Chopin Airport in Warsaw and the airport in Kraków is supported by the frequent appearance of the names of these airports in mass media, e.g. on the occasion of arrival/departure of Polish athletes

to, or from important international competitions. It is even possible to find in the media publications encouraging fans to greet the sportsmen arriving from various sports events at an airport.

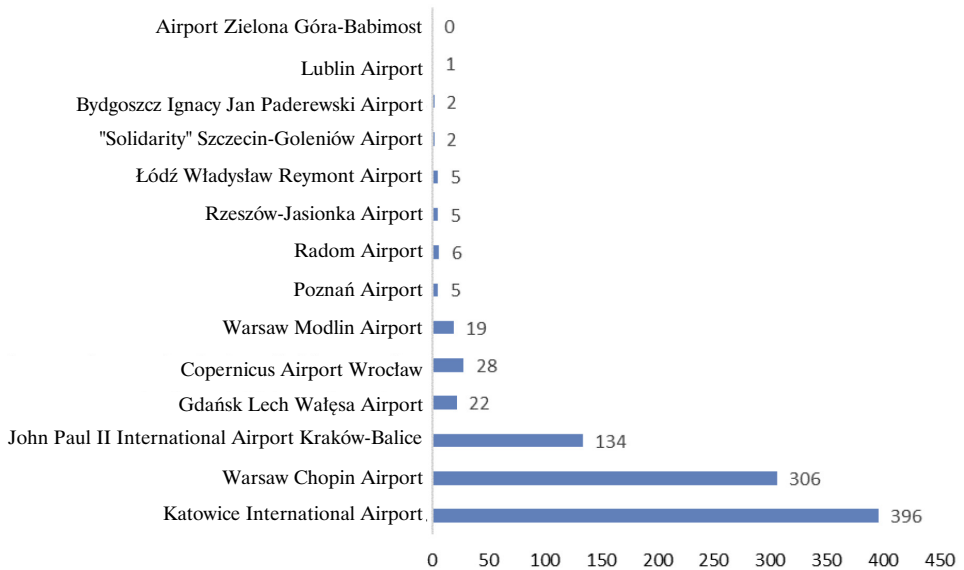
What may be a surprise is that a group of 132 respondents mentioned Radom-Sadków airport, even though in 2015 the airport served merely 500 passengers. It seems this is associated with a high number of publications in the media, including social media, concerning the airport. It is worth pointing out that a lot of information concerning the airport in Radom is critical, or even humorous in character (e.g. a flight from the Radom Airport to Prague organized by about a dozen bloggers from whole Poland, following the initiative of Marcin Wesołowski a travel blogger <http://wesolowski.co/>; this event was described on the Internet website of Gazeta Wyborcza, (<http://radom.wyborcza.pl/radom/-1,126564,19410698,blogerzy-poleca-z-radomia-do-pragi-a-moga-i-do-dubaju.html?disableRedirects=true>).

Analysis of the recognisability of the biggest airports in Poland among national and foreign respondents doesn't reveal significant differences. A noteworthy fact, which may have an impact on the recognisability of Chopin Airport in Warsaw among foreigners is the fact that the airport runs a separate Facebook page in English. Taking into consideration the current huge strength of influence of the social media, the decision to run such a fanpage seems fitting.

An important supplement for the research on spontaneous brand awareness is the so-called indicator of first mentioned brand. It shows what percentage of respondents spontaneously named a particular brand (here the name of an airport) as the first one. This research makes it possible to determine which brand (name of an airport) is best remembered by the respondents and thus which brand (airport) is the main representative of the category for the respondents. The significance of this fact for marketing communication is that there is a high likelihood that the respondents who name a particular airport as the first one, recall it also as the first one in purchasing situations. What had a big impact on the results of the research was the origin and place of residence of the respondents and contextuality of the place where the survey was conducted. As the vast majority of the respondents are the inhabitants of Silesian voivodeship, recalling Katowice Airport as the

first airport known to them, may have been an element of "regional patriotism", or thinking about airports they simply mentioned the one closest to their place of residence (see picture 1).

Picture 1. Priority of airports in the respondents' answers



Source: own materials.

Respondents coming from Silesian voivodeship could have had comparably little awareness of other airports, located further away from their place of residence. The fact that people mention airports in Warsaw and Kraków in the first place also comes from the fact that they are perceived and known in Poland for big number of international connections and the cities themselves are known for the presence of headquarters of foreign companies (the possibility that airports will be mentioned by people travelling to them on business), or for a large number of sports, musical, or cultural events (the possibility that these airports will be mentioned by passengers participating in such events and choose air transport to reach the target place).

What was verified in the survey along with the fact that the name of an

airport was mentioned was the correctness of the name of an airport (Table 5). The analysis of research results shows that the names mentioned by the respondents are closest to the official names in case of Warsaw Chopin Airport and Katowice Airport. The percentage of correct names of these airports is far from the percentage of correct names mentioned by the respondents for the remaining airports. In case of Warsaw airport this has been caused by, among others, activity in social media associated with the airport. The latest example is the subject of meal prices at the airport mentioned by singer named Kayah. (<http://www.tvn24.pl/ciekawostki-michalki,5/kayah-oburzona-cena-zamowienia-na-warszawskim-lotnisku,583819.html>).

Tabela 5. Correctness of the mentioned names of airports in Poland

Name	Percentage of correct mentions of the name
Warsaw Chopin Airport	44.9
Katowice Airport	40.9
John Paul II International Airport Kraków-Balice	20.6
Warsaw Modlin Airport	16.3
Gdańsk Lech Wałęsa Airport	11.1
Compernicus Airport Wrocław	4.2
Rzeszów Airport	2.6
Poznań Airport	2.3
Lublin Airport	1.7
Radom Airport	1.5
Łódź Władysław Reymont Airport	1.4
Bydgoszcz Ignacy Jan Paderwski Airport	0.9
"Solidarity" Szczecin-Goleniów Airport	0.8
Airport Zielona Góra-Babimost	0.4

Source: the results of own research.

High percentage of correct mentions of the name of the airport in Katowice was caused certainly by, among others, the exposure of the airport's logo with name on the grounds of the airport where the survey was conducted.

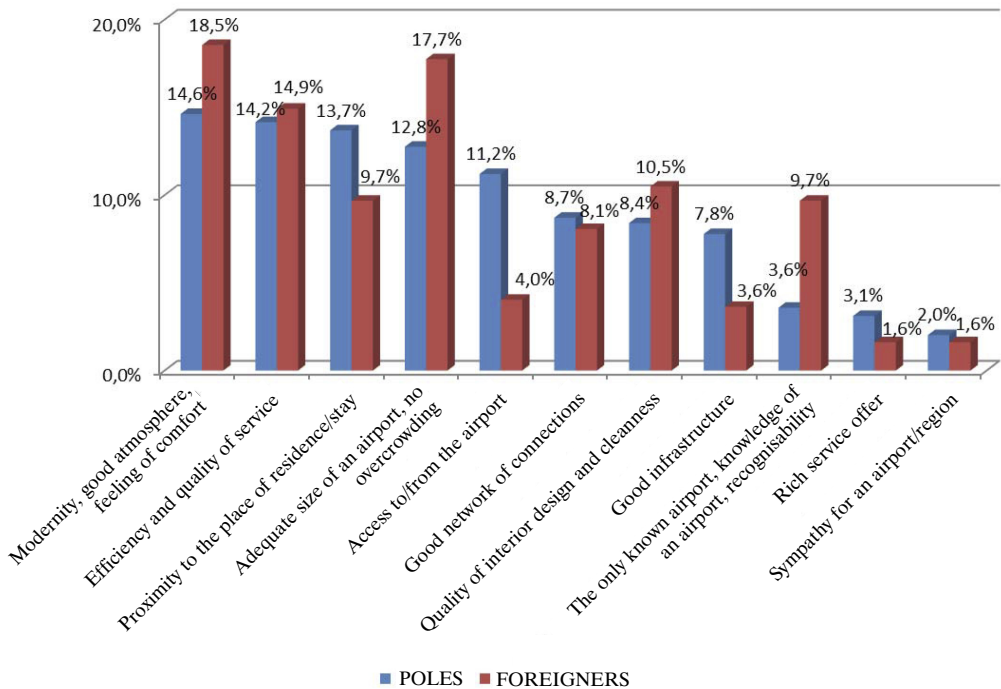
An interesting fact is that Poles more often mentioned the correct name of Warsaw Chopin Airport than the correct name of the airport in

Katowice (50.0% and 40.9% correct mentions, respectively) at the same time foreign respondents more often mentioned the correct name of the airport in Katowice than the correct name of the airport in Warsaw (41.7% and 29.6%, respectively).

### Factors determining the image of Polish airports

Analysing data concerning factors determining the positive image of an airport among Polish and foreign respondents we can notice certain differences. The most often mentioned factor determining positive opinion about an airport is in case of Polish and foreign respondents the factor described as "modernity, good atmosphere and feeling of comfort" (14.6% of responses and 18.5% of responses, respectively) (see picture 2).

Picture 2. Factors determining respondents' positive image of airports



Source: own materials.

Second place in case of Polish respondents was taken by "efficiency and quality of service" (14.2%) and in case of foreign respondents by "adequate size of the airport, no overcrowding" (17.7%). The Polish respondents name "proximity to the place of residence" as the third most important thing (13.7%) at the same time foreign respondents mentioned "efficiency and quality of service" as the third most important thing — 14.9% of responses. Among the least important factors determining the positive image of an airport, both among Polish and foreign respondents, there are "rich service offer" and "sympathy for an airport/region". Foreign respondents have mentioned such factors as: "the only known airport, knowledge of an airport, recognisability" — 17.2%; "efficiency and quality of service" — 17.2% and "adequate size of an airport, no overcrowding" — 15.6%. An interesting fact is that foreign respondents to a greater extent appreciated the quality of design and cleanness of airports than Poles. Moreover, what for foreign respondents is less important is rich service offer, or good infrastructure.

One of the airports receiving the worst assessments from Polish respondents is John Paul II International Airport Kraków-Balice, which received 18% of responses (see picture 3). Further airports receiving negative assessments from Polish respondents were the airports: in Katowice (9.7% of responses) and Warsaw Chopin Airport (6.9% of responses). It is worth pointing out here that respondents were not eager to share negative opinions about airports as 53.6% of Poles didn't give an answer to this question.

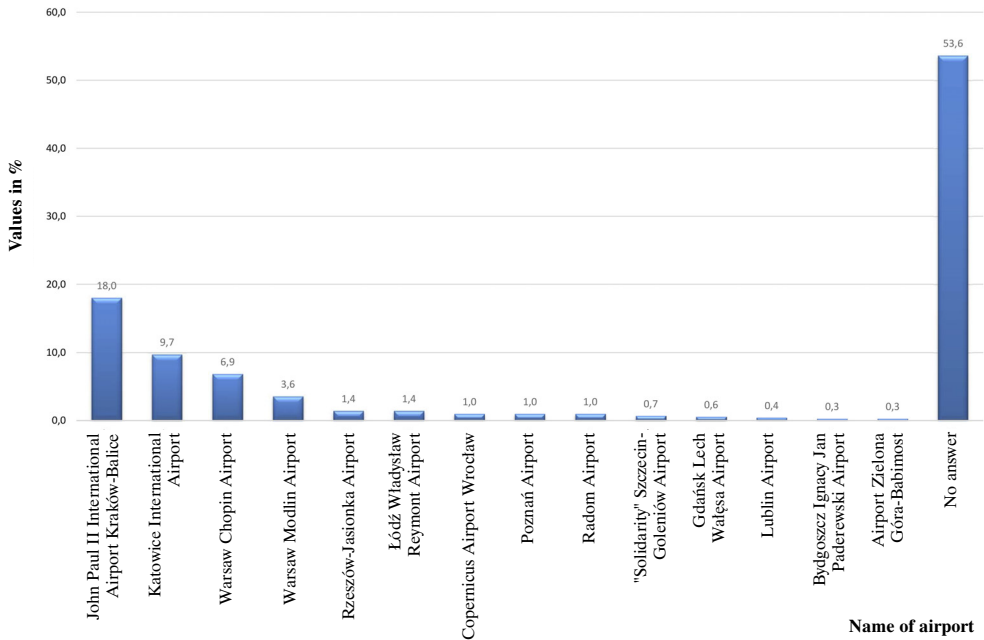
The most important factor behind negative opinions of airports both among Polish and foreign respondents was the size of an airport (19.5% and 29.7% of responses, respectively) (see picture 4).

For Polish respondents further factors behind negative assessments of an airport were: problems with organization, long waiting time, organizational chaos (16.9% of responses) and own negative experiences (13.6%).

At the same time foreign respondents name as important such further factors as: negative own experiences (12.3%), problems with organization, long waiting time, organizational chaos (11.6%). An important aspect influencing negative assessment of an airport by foreign respondents was the factor described as "difficulties caused by renovation works" (11.6%).

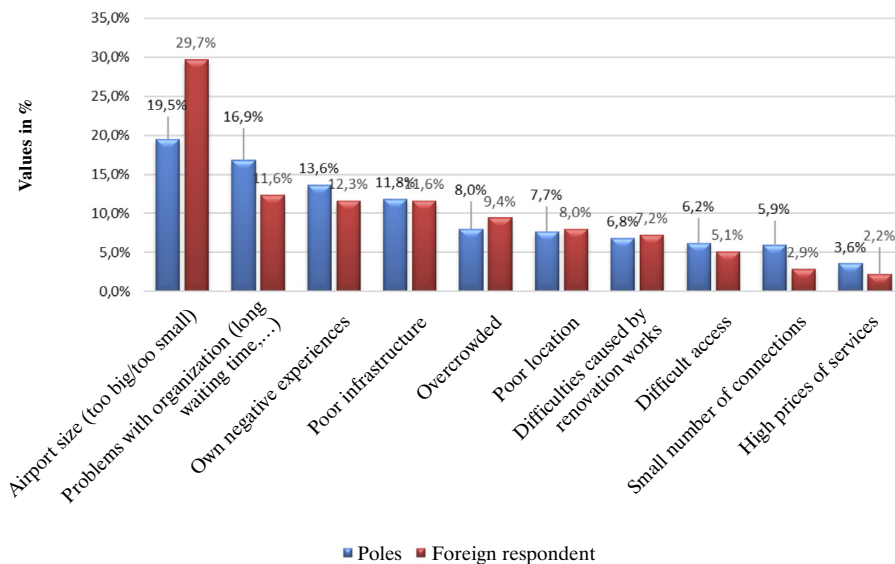


Picture 3. Worst airports according to Poles



Source: own materials.

Picture 4. Factors determining respondents' negative opinions of Polish airports



■ Poles ■ Foreign respondent

Source: own materials.

## Conclusion

Communication skills in form of conveying a message to passengers and creating the desired image of an airport may determine whether passengers will take a particular airport into consideration as the place where they start, or end their journey. In case of individual passengers who visit an airport on the occasion of tourist travels the image of an airport will be of key importance. Comparably low frequency of using a product, or service means that purchasing decisions are to a greater extent based on the image of a company and not on the traits associated directly with the product/service offer. That's why airports' marketing communication plays an important role.

Information appearing in the media has an impact on the airports' position in the ranking of recognisability, that's why it is necessary to monitor the media and regularly diagnose the perception of the airport among the stakeholders. The example of comparably high level of knowledge of Radom Airport, despite the fact that the airport serves a very small number of passengers, is the effect of influence of the media on the environment. The image of Radom-Sadków Airport wasn't formed on the basis of passengers experience with using the services of the port, but is based on the information conveyed by the media.

However, this doesn't mean that communication activities of airports should be focused solely on creating the desired image of an airport in the media by means of image-building advertising, which presents the values close to the management of the airport. It is essential to regularly monitor the changing expectations of passengers with regard to the services offered by the airport, including all entities functioning on the premises of the airport and participating in building value for the passengers. The deliberations presented in the article suggest that the offer of an airport should be analysed in a complex way, from the perspective of all entities forming value for the passengers. Passengers' preferences are evolving, which is reflected by the identified differences in the revealed determinants of the assessment of an airport's between Polish and foreign passengers. Clients from more developed markets (foreign passengers) are more sensitive to the factors associated with the comfort offered by an

airport. At the same time Polish passengers to a greater extent pay attention to issues associated with infrastructure, including the fact whether it is easy to reach an airport. We can expect that in the nearest future the significance of comfort and the development of tourism-related services of an airport will have a stronger influence on the opinions and attitudes of Polish passengers.

It is likely that renovation works and airport expansion works conducted in the recent years and in particular the works carried out at the biggest regional airports, i.e. at Katowice-Pyrzowice and Kraków-Balice had a strong negative impact on the image of airports. Negative experiences gathered by passengers will have a negative impact on the image of airports for a long time, which strengthens the need to take communication-related actions focused on the improvement of opinions of airports in Poland.

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<sup>1</sup> In association with the Internet and mobile telephony as crucial technologies behind the development of new media, in literature on the subject the concept of e-image of an organization has appeared. It can be defined as an image created by means of new media, including, among others, Internet websites, electronic mail, Internet communities, electronic kiosks, digital cameras and video recorders, integration of digital data from phones, virtual reality environments, including video games (see Witczak O., 2013, p. 91). It seems that currently the new media can be recognized "officially" as a part of the so-called "communication mix" and building an image based on the utilization of these services is becoming a necessity and a basis for appropriate communication of contemporary organizations with the environment.

<sup>2</sup> GTL S.A. as the operator of the airport Katowice-Pyrzowice is an organization actively cooperating with universities in the region, including University of Economics in Katowice. One of the goals of cooperation is offering students trainings and internships in GTL S.A, as well as allowing them to develop practical skills and competences through participation in various research projects. A tangible example of cooperation is, among others, the research project ordered by GTL and carried out by the University of Economics in Katowice, which was conducted by students and employees of the University of Economic in Katowice. Some results of the project are presented in this article. The signing of an agreement on cooperation with the European Union and the completed research project have strengthened the positive image of GTL S.A.

<sup>3</sup> Some authors think that the air transport sector and the Internet constitute the pillars, or even the "infrastructure of globalization". They also emphasize that it creates and speeds up the processes of globalization and at the same time the air transport sector is subject to these processes itself (Wojewódzka-Król K., Załoga E. (ed.), 2016, p. 269).

<sup>4</sup> IATA airport code is a 3-letter alphanumeric code assigned by the International Air Transport Association. The purpose of code designations assigned by IATA is, among others, facilitating the organization of air transport e.g. in case of handling passengers' baggage ([www.iata.org](http://www.iata.org), accessed on 15.05.2016).

<sup>5</sup> ICAO airport code is a 4-letter name of the so-called location indicator, introduced by the International Civil Aviation Organization. ICAO location indicators have a regional structure. First letter means a part of the world (E-Europe), the second letter designates countries (P-Poland). The remaining two letters identify a particular airport (Katowice- KT), (more information: <http://www.icao.int/Pages/default.aspx> accessed on 15.05.2016).

<sup>6</sup> Rankings based on statistics of passenger traffic and cargo are prepared by, among others, Airports Council International (ULC within the country). The organization prepares the rankings on the basis of data from 2200 airport in 160 countries around the world. According to ACI the biggest passenger airport in the world in 2014 was Hartsfield-Jackson in Atlanta, USA (96 million travellers), and the biggest airport in the world in terms of the number of passengers in international traffic was Dubai International (see. <http://www.aci.aero/>). <http://podroze.onet.pl/aktualnosci/najwieksze-lotniska-na-swiecie-w-2014-r-tu-jest-najwiecej-pasazerow/70cqsx> (accessed on 10.07.2016) At the same time, The Guide to Sleep in Airports, a portal functioning since 1996, presents, among others, the rankings of ten best (and worst) airports on particular continents, as well the best "airports for sleeping" preferred by the passengers who happen to change at night and don't want to go to a hotel. The ranking is prepared on the basis of questionnaire surveys (research tool available on the website: <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/2817989/2016-Best-Worst-Airports>) and takes into consideration such elements as cleanliness, facilities, security, quality of passenger service, comfort and "best for sleeping" criterion. According to the portal, the best airport in the world in 2015 was Singapore Changi International Airport. (<http://www.sleepingairports.net>, accessed on 10.07.2016). A criterion in airport rankings is also the surface of airports. According to this criterion the biggest airport in the world is Ad-Dammam in Saudi Arabia covering 78,000 hectares. (<http://www.topnaj.pl/najwieksze-lotniska-swiate>, accessed on 10.07.2016).

<sup>7</sup> It is worth pointing out here that the leaders in the chain of value of the sector of air transport services, are, it seems, airlines and it is airports which, according to many passengers combine the resources of particular participants of the chain of value for the purpose of creating a unique offer for the end customers. Here airlines play two roles: the offeror of air transport services (supply) and the buyer of handling services and infrastructure available at an airport (demand) (see: Augustyniak, 2013, p. 8).

<sup>8</sup> It is worth pointing out that this classic division of passengers may be "deepened" and among business passengers it is possible to distinguish the subsegment of "lower- end business travellers", who are sensitive to prices, more flexible with regard to time of travel and display sensitivity to the utilization of loyalty programmes and into "high-end" travellers who are less sensitive to prices, but appreciate high frequency of offered connections, direct connections and who often display loyalty to particular carriers (see Jankiewicz J., 2013, p. 30–33).

<sup>9</sup> For this purpose some airports use the opportunity of partial financing of infrastructural investments with EU, government and local government funds. They have this possibility thanks to membership in Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). Currently, eight Polish airports (WAW, KTW, KRK, GDN, WRO, POZ, SZZ, RZE) belong to the network (www 2, www 3).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. a post on [wykop.pl](http://wykop.pl) portal from the employee of an external company, which handles ground service for airplanes at the airport in Katowice. In the post the employee claimed he put a metal pipe into the engine of an Airbus A320 airplane. Even though this was a joke, it could have modified the image of the airport, sending the message that it doesn't guarantee full security. The incident was discussed a lot in traditional media and on the Internet. After the incident the manager of the airport decided to change procedures associated with employment of candidates for work at the airport.

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