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THE 31ST INTERNATIONAL COSMIC RAY CONFERENCE IN ŁÓDŹ: AN EXAMPLE OF CONGRESS TOURISM

Congress tourism has been defined by UNGER (1996) as a 'complex service of congresses, assemblies and symposia'. He explains that it 'fully provides for the existential and recreational needs of the participants and the organization of sessions'. Academic conferences are a particular type of congress tourism but above all they are important academic events.

ŁOBOŻEWICZ & BIĘNCZYK (2001), as well as GAWO-RECKI (2007), treat congress tourism as a part of business tourism in which a person is travelling for business purposes. Discussing the economic aspects of this type of tourism, MIKA (2007) quotes Swiss and American studies stressing its huge economic potential, especially for cities and regions, as well as its dynamic development. Polish studies mostly regard the potential base (SIDORKIEWICZ 2007, MICHALAK & WARZOCHA 2007) or establish the range of potential economic results for this type of economic activity (MICHAŁOWSKI 2005). Professional tourism literature concerns the organization of conferences, the readiness of travel offices to deal with this type of event, and discusses the necessary conference infrastructure conditions. An interesting approach was the analysis of congress tourism participants' behaviour conducted at the most popular places in Kraków (SEWERYN 2006). Congress tourism is often a form of international tourism and for this reason international statistics are based on the definition formulated by the World Tourism Organization (*Metodologia...* 1998).

The study of selected aspects of congress tourism was conducted with reference to the 31st International Cosmic Ray Conference (ICRC) held under the auspices of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics in Łódź, on 7-15th July 2009. It was organized by the Department of High Energy Astrophysics and the Department of Astrophysics, University of Łódź, in cooperation with the Łódź Division of the Andrzej Sołtan Institute for Nuclear Studies. It was a meeting in a series of world conferences organized biennially,

each time in a different country. The International Cosmic Ray Conference was being held in Poland for the second time and the previous one, organized in Kraków in 1947, had initiated this series. Conferences are the most important forum in this area of physics at which scientists from all over the world present their latest achievements and report the results of experiments carried out in laboratories.

The aim of the study was to make an analysis of selected aspects of tourism at an academic conference. They were chosen with reference to the main elements of UNGER's (1996) definition of congress tourism: accommodation standards, the organization of sessions, and conference participants' free time. Source materials included information acquired from the 31st ICRC website, the organizers' materials, as well as field research and surveys.

The conference was attended by 758 participants, 708 of whom arrived from other countries, which highlighted the international character of the event. The majority (60%) of the participants were physicists from 20 countries in Europe. However, the most numerous group - 119 (16.8%) - arrived from the United States, so every sixth participant was a physicist from an American centre. Nearly the same number of physicists came from Germany (111), followed by Japan (91), Italy (82) and Russia (73) - (Table 1).

It must be stressed that arriving from another country does not mean that the person lives there on a permanent basis as in this particular field research is international. Research projects may be run by several centres in different countries; scientific experiments are usually conducted by international teams which means that scientists travel between centres and often stay at some of them for years. Therefore the geographical origins of the conference participants stated in their application forms correspond to the location of their research centres. According to the application forms, the conference was attended by physicists from

43 countries. However, the data collected for the analysis of the participants' accommodation made it possible to verify this figure, because the document needed to check-in at hotels is the passport. The list of the countries of origin of the conference participants turned out to be longer, over 50 from all over the world.

The study of the participants' accommodation during the conference included its organization and the actual accommodation available during the event.

The organizers prepared information on accommodation available in Łódź, leaving it to the participants to

decide which hotel to choose. The participants were to contact the chosen hotel directly so in this case the organizers had acted as agents. The information was put on the conference website, in the 'accommodation' bookmark, in two segments. The first one was a link to the English version of the *Wirtualna Łódź* website through which one had access to information about accommodation available in Łódź with a list of all the hotels in the city and links to their websites. The visitors could then directly learn about each hotel, its standard and prices, as well as book a room on-line.

The other information segment was the list of hotels recommended by the organizers. Their choice criterion was closeness to the conference venue and a variety of standards – from 3-star hotels to students' hostels. The organizers recommended the Centrum, Polonia, Savoy and Światowid Hotels, which additionally placed invitations for conference participants and links to the English versions of booking forms on their websites. On the one hand it made the procedure easier for the participants, and on the other it was an element of marketing. The other hotels suggested by the organizers included the Grand Hotel Orbis, Hotel Reymont, Hotel Ibis, and finally the newly opened Andel's Hotel. The list of recommended accommodation was completed by two offered by the University of Łódź, i.e. the Conference-Training Centre Hotel and Student Hostel no 10. The bookings had to be made personally by e-mail.

The study shows that 80% of participants used the accommodation recommended by the organizers, nearly half of them chose city hotels, and one third – University accommodation (Table 2). The hotels were situated very close to one another, next to the railway station, in the city centre and relatively close to the conference venue. The most popular was the three-star Centrum Hotel, which accommodated 177 physicists from 26 countries, mostly from Germany (39 guests), Italy (37), Japan (28) and the USA (24). The Polonia Palast Hotel (uncategorized) received 55, including 17 from Germany, seven from Russia, four from the Netherlands and four from the USA. The two-star Savoy was chosen by 54, including eight from Italy, eight from Japan, six from France, six from Finland, and four from Israel. A relatively small number chose the Grand Hotel Orbis, which was equally conveniently situated and enjoyed a good reputation. Hotels situated further from the conference venue, such as the Światowid or Reymont Hotels were not chosen, despite an attractive offer.

Over one third of the conference participants chose accommodation at the University. There were 167 guests at the 10th Students' Hostel, and they were most varied as regarded their geographical place of origin. The group there included physicists from 31 countries, the majority of whom came from Russia (48). Other

Table 1. Geographical background of conference participants

Country of origin	No of participants	%
USA	119	15,7
Germany	111	14,6
Japan	91	12,0
Italy	82	10,8
Russia	73	9,6
Poland	50	6,6
France	35	4,6
Mexico	18	2,4
Spain	15	2,0
The Netherlands	13	1,7
India	13	1,7
Czech Republic	12	1,6
Switzerland	12	1,6
Argentina	11	1,5
China	11	1,5
South Africa	11	1,5
Great Britain	11	1,5
Portugal	10	1,3
Sweden	8	1,1
Finland	7	0,9
Brazil	5	0,7
Armenia	3	0,4
Belgium	3	0,4
Iran	3	0,4
Ireland	3	0,4
Canada	3	0,4
South Korea	3	0,4
Taiwan	3	0,4
Algeria	2	0,3
Australia	2	0,3
Romania	2	0,3
Slovakia	2	0,3
Greece	1	0,1
Georgia	1	0,1
Israel	1	0,1
Kazakhstan	1	0,1
North Korea	1	0,1
New Zealand	1	0,1
Serbia	1	0,1
Venezuela	1	0,1
Hungary	1	0,1
Bangladesh	1	0,1
Egypt	1	0,1
Total	758	100,0

Source: Author based on conference applications.

guests arrived from India, Argentina, China (eight from each country), as well as Germany (14) and the USA (13). The conference-Training Centre hotel received 63 from 20 countries. Those who looked for cheap accommodation, and had even contacted the organizers about it, were offered rooms at the University hotel in Rogowska Street on the outskirts of the city (10 guests) (Table 2).

Most of the accommodation used during the conference had been recommended by the organizers, but it included only those hotels which were conveniently situated or well linked with the conference venue via city transport. The information was prepared by the organizers, but the choice was made by the participants.

Table 2. Accommodation during the conference

Hotels	Number of hotel guests	% of the total number of participants
University of Łódź	240	33.90
Student Hostel no 10	167	23.59
University Conference Centre, Kopcińskiego Street	63	8.90
University Conference Centre, Rogowska Street	10	1.41
City hotels recommended by the organizers	320	45.20
Centrum (***)	177	25.00
Polonia Palace (uncategorized)	55	7.77
Savoy (**)	54	7.63
Grand 'Orbis' (***)	20	2.82
Światowid (***)	6	0.85
Reymont (***)	8	1.13
Other accommodation	148	20.90
Campanile	15	2.12

Source: Author based on field study.

The 31st ICRC was a large-scale, lengthy event, therefore it required proper organization, a well-thought out timetable and a good synchronicity of its individual parts. It was composed of a one part addressed to all the participants and included plenary sessions, presentations of leading topics, as well as lectures given by guest speakers invited especially for this purpose. The other part of the conference consisted of presentations of research results. It was divided into seven main topic areas, and each of them consisted of several narrower thematic blocks. All in all, the conference featured about 450 presentations. Another form of presenting research results was the three poster sessions which showed over 570 posters.

The overall organization of the 31st ICRC, as well as the entire infrastructure that was used, were the

responsibility of the University of Łódź. The venue was the biggest and the best furnished new university building. There were four lecture halls to use, the largest of which could accommodate 500, another – 400, and the two smaller ones – 200 each. They were convenient facilities to use during meetings in sections, while the plenary sessions required further organization and were held in two lecture halls simultaneously. This was possible due to the use of audio-visual technology, such as tele-screens, a large TV-set and a special PA system. Other advantages of the infrastructure included 'accumulated' presentations of papers for each session and access to wireless internet, which made it possible for physicists all over the world to take part in the conference in real time. It must be stressed here that it was the first such conference broadcast as regards this particular event, which additionally added to the prestige of Łódź.

The body responsible for the organization of the conference, both as regards the presentations and the functioning of such a large group of people was the university – above all the employees of the Physics Department, supported by the administration sector, as well as a small department specializing in new media.

The 31st ICRC was long lasting nine days from Tuesday, July 7th to Wednesday, July 15th 2009. The week days were filled with sessions, while the Sunday was free. There were two options for the participants to fill their free time. The first was to follow the organizers' suggestions, the other to organize their free day independently.

The organizers prepared a number of suggestions, some of which were entered in the timetable, others were optional. Apart from two occasions to socialize, the other ideas offered a chance to learn more about Łódź and Poland in general. In order to make the participants familiar with the history of the city, the organizers presented Wajda's film, *Ziemia obiecana* (The Promised Land). The film was screened in the largest lecture hall, on the third day of the conference after all the sessions finished. It was watched by the majority of the participants.

Another suggestion was a tour of Łódź, but it was scheduled at the same time as the sessions, therefore it took place twice – on the fourth and the fifth days, in the afternoon. The itinerary included sites related to the history and development of the city, and the trip lasted two hours. The guests had a ride along some streets and stopped three times in order to have a closer look at some buildings. The tour was organized by a professional travel agency in Łódź and attended by about 50% of the conference participants. The cost was included in the conference fee.

As for the free Sunday, the organizers suggested trips outside Łódź, to Kraków, Toruń, Żelazowa Wola

and Nieborów. They were operated by a travel agency in Warsaw, and paid separately from the fee. This particular idea to organize the free day had been advertised many months earlier on the internet and, as was in the case of accommodation, the organizers were only responsible for preparing the information. Each participant contacted the travel agency personally, booked a trip and paid for it directly to the agency's account. In the end the only trips that did take place were those to Kraków for 32 and Toruń for 12 (4.6% and 1.8%, respectively). They were not very popular probably due to the high price.

The way the participants organized their free time themselves was studied through a survey, conducted on the last but one day of the conference among those who were staying until the very end. At that time their number had fallen below 500. Over 250 questionnaires were distributed, so they were given out to every second participant. 66 filled in questionnaires were returned, which made 26.5% of the distributed copies and ca. 13-15% in relation to the number of participants at that moment. The questions followed the organizers' recommendations, i.e. the participation in the tours of Łódź and trips outside Łódź, the way of spending time on the free day, and the sites visited in Łódź and Poland. Another question was on sources of information about Łódź.

It was found out that nearly all the respondents had visited Łódź for the first time and only two had been there before. The majority followed the organizers' suggestions, but this was mainly the tour of the city. Only six (9%) went on a trip outside Łódź and 29 (44%) did not make use of any of the tourist recommendations made by the organizers.

The free time organized individually was mostly (80%) devoted to visiting Łódź and Poland. However, in every fifth questionnaire it was vaguely stated, and in two clearly declared, that the participants were not interested in visiting the city. On Sunday, the free day, 19 respondents (28.8%) left Łódź individually, six to Warsaw, four to Krakow, three to Toruń, five to Auschwitz and one to Częstochowa. The rest of them spent that day in Łódź and half of them had a walk around the city.

As regards sites visited in Łódź, all respondents mentioned a walk along the streets of the city and a walk along Piotrkowska Street, and nearly all of them a visit to a restaurant or a pub. Over half of the participants (53%) visited shopping centres, every fifth one went to a museum (21.2%), and every tenth to a church (10.6%). Two went on an excursion to the city outskirts (Fig. 1). Every second went to a park but, what is interesting, nobody used the swimming pool although it was a hot summer day and information about the university swimming pool very near the conference venue was easily accessible in the main

hall. Some stated that they had spent that day at the hotel. As for the museums, the participants chose the Factory Museum in *Manufaktura* and the Museum of Cinematography. A few also mentioned places such as the Botanical Gardens (Palm Tree House), the Jewish cemetery and the ghetto area.

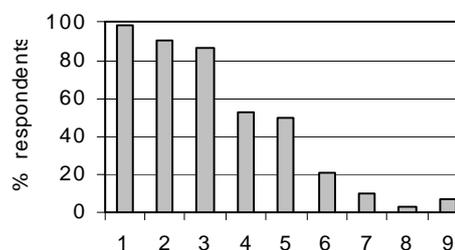


Fig. 1. Sites in Łódź visited by conference participants: 1 - a walk along Piotrkowska Street, 2 - pub or restaurant in Piotrkowska Street, 3 - a walk along the streets of the city, 4 - shopping centre, 5 - relaxing in a park, 6 - museum, 7 - church, 8 - excursion to the city outskirts, 9 - other (source: author based on survey)

Another aspect examined in the survey was sources of information about Łódź. It was found that nearly all the participants were looking for information about the city in one way or another, only one person expressed no interest in the city and two did not respond to the question. Most people obtained information from several sources. 25 were satisfied with information from one source, 21 used two sources and 17 used more than two. The most popular was the internet (60%), 15 (22.7%) looked into the guidebook from the hotel, and a large group (16) obtained information from acquaintances (24.2%). Over half of the respondents used the city plan and the information it contained (Table 3). It is interesting that every fifth respondent (13) had brought their own guidebook from home.

Table 3. Sources of information about Łódź in %

Sources of information about Łódź	No of answers	% responses
Internet	39	59.1
City plan	35	53.0
Acquaintances	16	24.2
Guide-book from hotel	15	22.7
Guide-book from home	13	19.7
Other sources	6	9.1
No response or interest	2	3.0

Source: Author based on survey.

For many participants coming to an academic conference in Łódź was an opportunity to learn more about Poland. Two thirds of the respondents combined the stay in Łódź with travelling to other

places in Poland; the most popular destinations were Warsaw (27) and Kraków (18), followed by Auschwitz (6), Toruń (4), Częstochowa and Wrocław (one each), but 24 (over one third) did not have plans. Among the respondents, seven (over 10%) did not go on any trip or visit any city on Sunday, as they were not interested.

The results of the survey presented above, on a large academic conference, concerned only a few aspects of congress tourism. They allowed us to draw a number of conclusions however. The participants combined their participation in the conference with visiting the city and the country. For the majority of the participants this was a conscious decision. They were not interested in staying at the highest standard hotels, preferring medium standard, and many chose students' hostels. The organization of the conference was the responsibility of the university, with only a small involvement of travel agencies. Internet information played a significant role in the organization of the conference and in a whole range of tourist aspects. Apart from its main objective, academic exchange, an academic conference involves a strong tourism component.

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