

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTERS IN SILESIAN REGION

The accessibility of services for foreigners
(Report from the monitoring)

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CONTENTS

General Information.....	3
Part 1. Phone call.....	4
Part 2. Website of the city/TIC (English version).....	5
Part 3. Customer Service in TIC.....	6
Part 4. Information about TIC.....	7
Part 5. Visits.....	8
Rating of TIC according to all monitoring results.....	10
Conslusion.....	11
Recommendations.....	12

GENERAL INFORMATION

The aim of monitoring: to analyse the accessibility of TIC services for foreigners. Main language of monitoring is English.

Criteria: Tourist Information Centres with 4, 3 and 2 stars were chosen, among 2 stars TIC only "Centres" were chosen, not smaller units.

The list of monitored TIC:

- Bielsko-Biała (Miejskie Centrum Informacji Turystycznej),
- Chorzów (Chorzowskie Centrum Informacji i Turystyki),
- Cieszyn (Cieszyńskie Centrum Informacji),
- Częstochowa (Miejskie Centrum Informacji),
- Katowice (Regionalne Centrum Informacji Turystycznej),
- Ogrodzieniec (Centrum Informacji - Związek Gmin Jurajskich),
- Piekary Śląskie (Miejskie Centrum Informacji i Turystyki),
- Poraj (Centrum Informacji Turystycznej),
- Pszczyna (Biuro Informacji Turystycznej),
- Racibórz (Raciborskie Centrum Informacji),
- Sosnowiec (Centrum Informacji Miejskiej),
- Szczyrk (Informacja Turystyczna),
- Wisła (Centrum Informacji Turystycznej),
- Ustroń (Miejska Informacja Turystyczna),
- Zawiercie (Centrum Informacji Miejskiej),
- Żywiec (Centrum Informacji Kulturalno-Turystycznej).

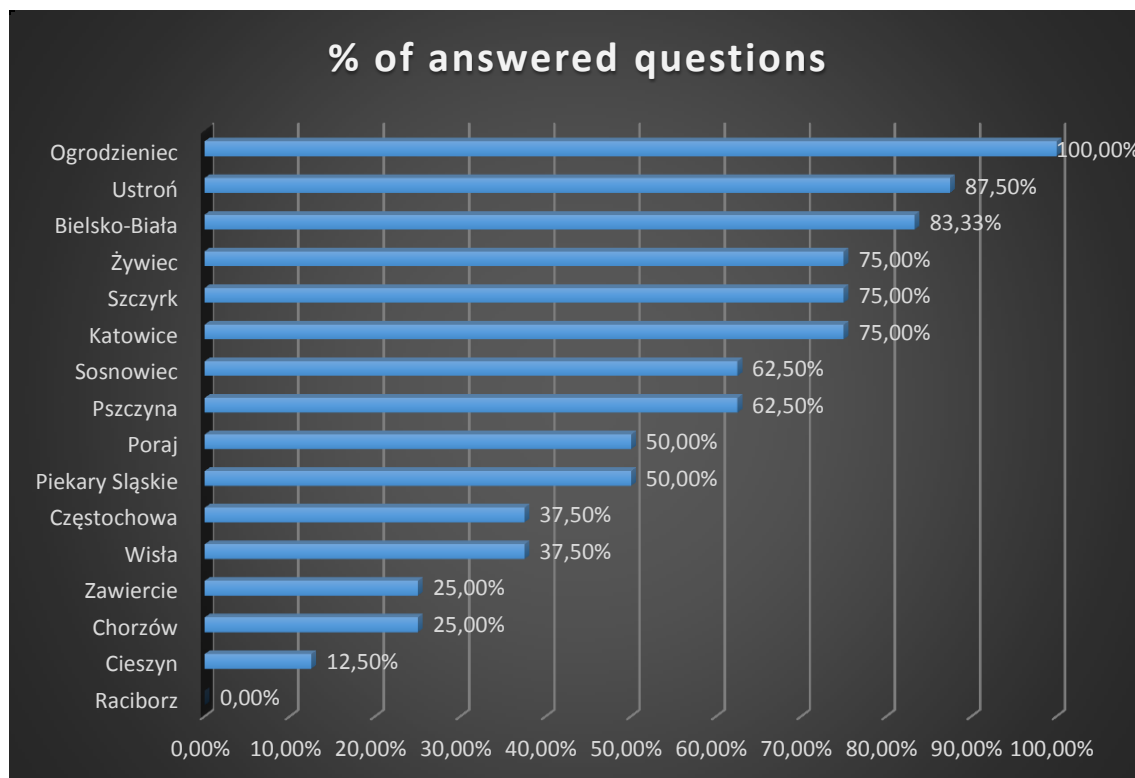
Sequence of monitoring: phone call, website check, 1st visit, 2nd visit (including customer service check and information about TIC check).

Part 1. Phone call

Questions:

Types of information what a client wants to gain from TIC representative:

- phone numbers and addresses of cheap hotels and guesthouses;
- possible ways to get to other cities from Katowice using public transport (ticket prices, travelling time, train / bus timetable);
- cultural events held in the city;
- cultural events held in nearby cities;
- other.



Good practices:

- **Ogrodzieniec** (all the information provided);
- **Ustroń** (all the information provided, except for possible ways to go to the city from Katowice).

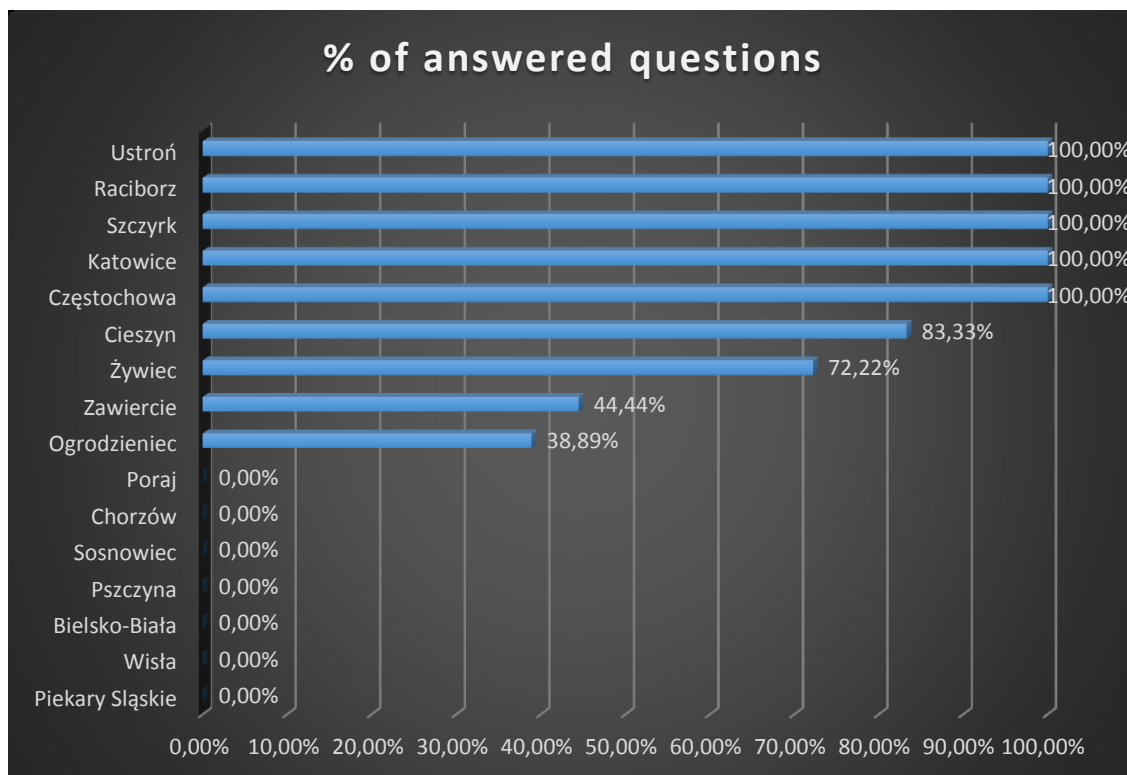
Bad practices:

- **Raciborz** (phone call failed – TIC representative didn't speak English and asked to call back in about 5 min. – but no one answered the phone during the 2nd call);
- **Zawiercie** (TIC representative asked to send the information by email (didn't provide by phone!) but didn't send anything);
- **Cieszyn** (accommodation – only address provided, the rest information wasn't provided at all, TIC representative didn't speak English);
- **Chorzów** (for half questions an incomplete information provided, half – wasn't provided at all, the 1st TIC representative didn't speak English, passed the phone to the 2nd, whose English was just basic).
- **Wisła** (all the details were provided only upon request, but incomplete, they don't know about the cultural events in nearby cities, wrong number of TIC on the website, only 3rd person spoke English (basic);
- **Katowice** (no information about cultural events in nearby cities).

Part 2. Website of the city/TIC (English version)

Questions:

- Is a TIC address shown on the website?
- Is a TIC phone shown on the website?
- Is a TIC e-mail shown on the website?
- Are opening hours and days shown on the website?
- Is there any information about city main attractions on the website?
- Is there any information about accommodation on the website?
- Is there any information about cultural events, held nearby on the website?
- Other information shown on the website (list every piece of information):
- Highlight all the languages which the website is translated into:
 - English/Russian/German/French/Spanish/other
- Does the English version of the website have more pieces of information than other language versions? (compare information content in the English version to any other version) (if yes - list of changes)



Good practices:

- **Szczyrk** (the website in 6 foreign languages, all the information provided, equal in English and Polish);
- **Raciborz** (the website is in 4 foreign languages, all the information provided, equal in English and Polish);
- **Częstochowa** (all the information provided, equal in English and Polish);
- **Katowice** (the website is in 3 foreign languages, but in foreign languages there are less information than in Polish).
- **Ustroń** (all the information provided, the website is translated in English by google translate; website very beautiful).

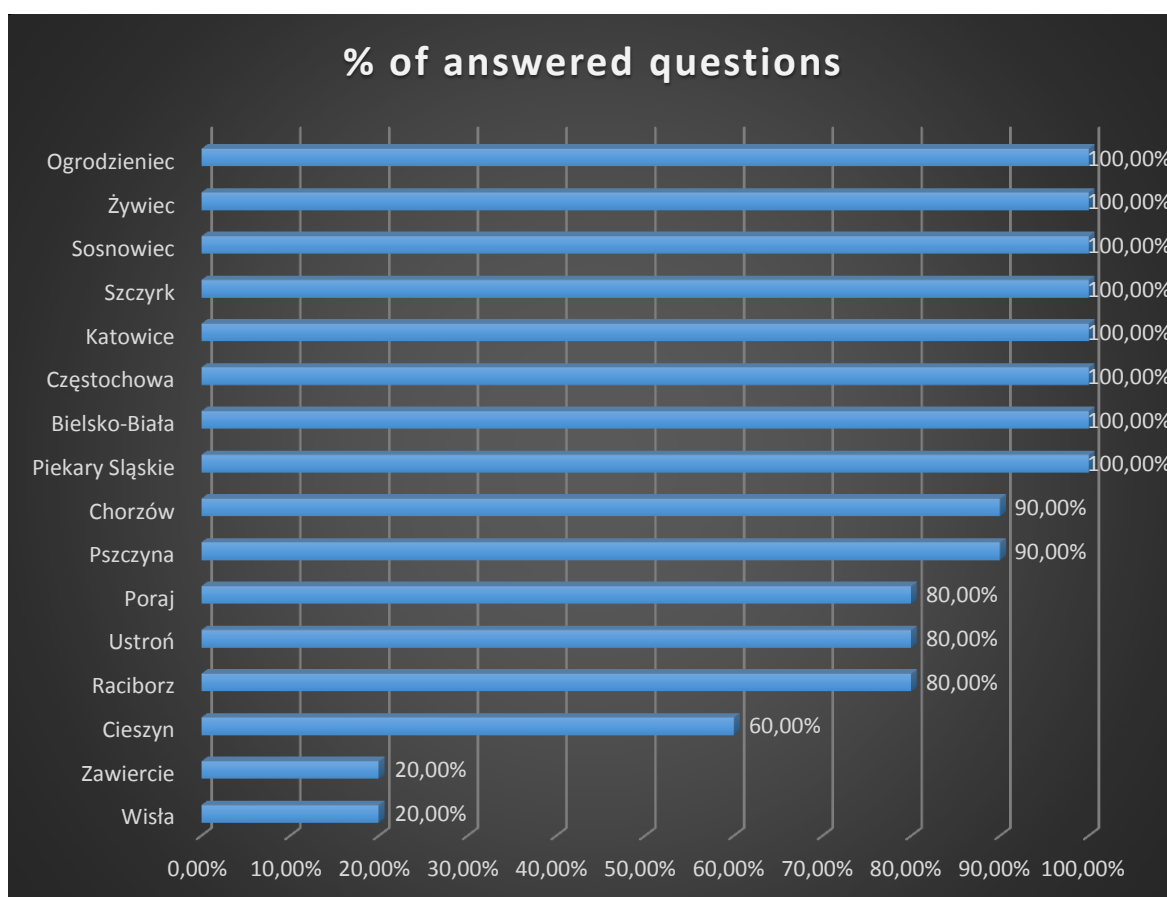
Bad practices:

No English version of the website - **Chorzów, Piekary Śląskie, Poraj, Pszczyna, Wisła**, website only in polish and german – **Bielsko-Biała**, the buttons to switch the languages exist, but don't work – **Sosnowiec**.

Part 3. Customer service in TIC

Questions:

- a) Was TIC representative kind and nice?
- b) Was TIC representative smiling?
- c) Was TIC representative, in case of incomplete information, looking for it on the Internet?
- d) Did TIC representative give a customer folders (leaflet, booklets) they talked about?
- e) Did TIC representative show places which they talked about?
- f) Did TIC representatives know the following languages?
- g) -English (a) yes, fluently (b) yes, communicatively (c) yes, barely (d) no (f) I don't know
- h) -Russian (a) yes, fluently (b) yes, communicatively (c) yes, barely (d) no (f) I don't know



Good practices:

Bielsko-Biała, Katowice, Szczyrk, Sosnowiec, Ogrodzieniec (all the questions answered, fluent English); **Piekary Śląskie and Żywiec** (all the questions answered, but intermediate (communicative) English, TIC representatives used the dictionary when needed).

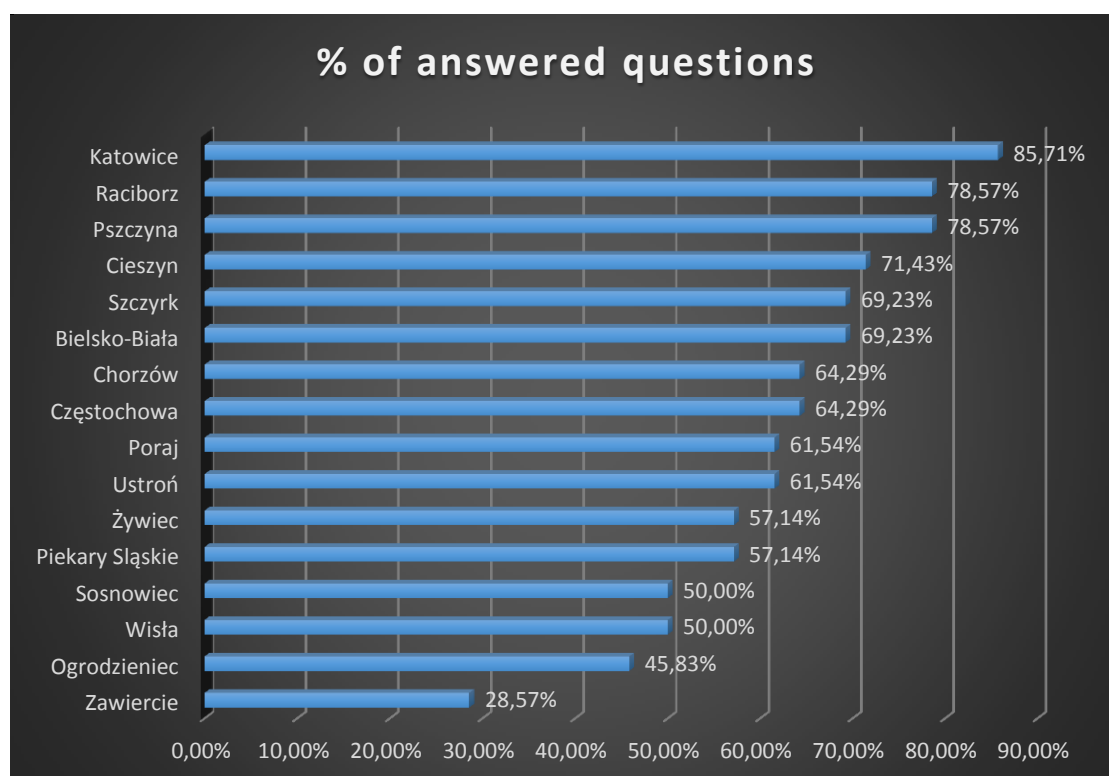
Bad practices:

- **Wisła** (TIC representative was neither kind nor nice, didn't smile, provided almost all brochures only in polish, but the 2nd representative, who spoke Russian, didn't take the initiative to help in the native language of a visitor);
- **Zawiercie** (in the end TIC representative left the visitor alone, went to the back office and didn't come back!, was neither kind nor nice, didn't smile, also after each question went to the back office to bring brochures, neither showed nor explained the location of the mentioned places);
- **Częstochowa** (quite controversial, during the 1st visit – all the questions answered with fluent English, during 2nd visit – TIC representative was neither kind nor nice, didn't smile and spoke English barely).
- **Poraj, Raciborz** (low level of English language).

Part 4. Information about TIC

Questions:

- Is TIC located in the city centre?
- Is TIC wheelchair accessible?
- Is TIC marked with the big „I” sign?
- Are there any signs directing to TIC in a city?
- In which days and hours is TIC open
- Is any free map in TIC?
- Is any free map of region in TIC?
- Are any free folders (leaflets, booklets) concerning the most attractive places of the city in TIC?
- Is any information in TIC about accommodation?
- Is any free WiFi spot in TIC?
- Is any basic information outside TIC (an entrance door or a window) about accommodation possibilities?
- Is any city plan outside TIC (an entrance door or a window)?
- Is any map of a whole region outside TIC (an entrance door or a window)?
- Is any electronic information point/ bulletin board service in the TIC neighbourhood?
- Other



Good practices:

- **Katowice** (there is all the information, but NO signs found in the city directing to TIC and no basic information about accommodation outside the TIC);
- **Pszczyna** (there is all the information, but some information not found: a free map of the region in TIC, basic information about accommodation outside the TIC, map of the whole region outside the TIC);

Bad practices:

Zawiercie (most answers – “no”, for e.g. not wheelchair accessible, no any information outside the TIC, no brochures in foreign languages inside the TIC (only in the back office)).

Part 5. Visits

Questions:

Visit 1st

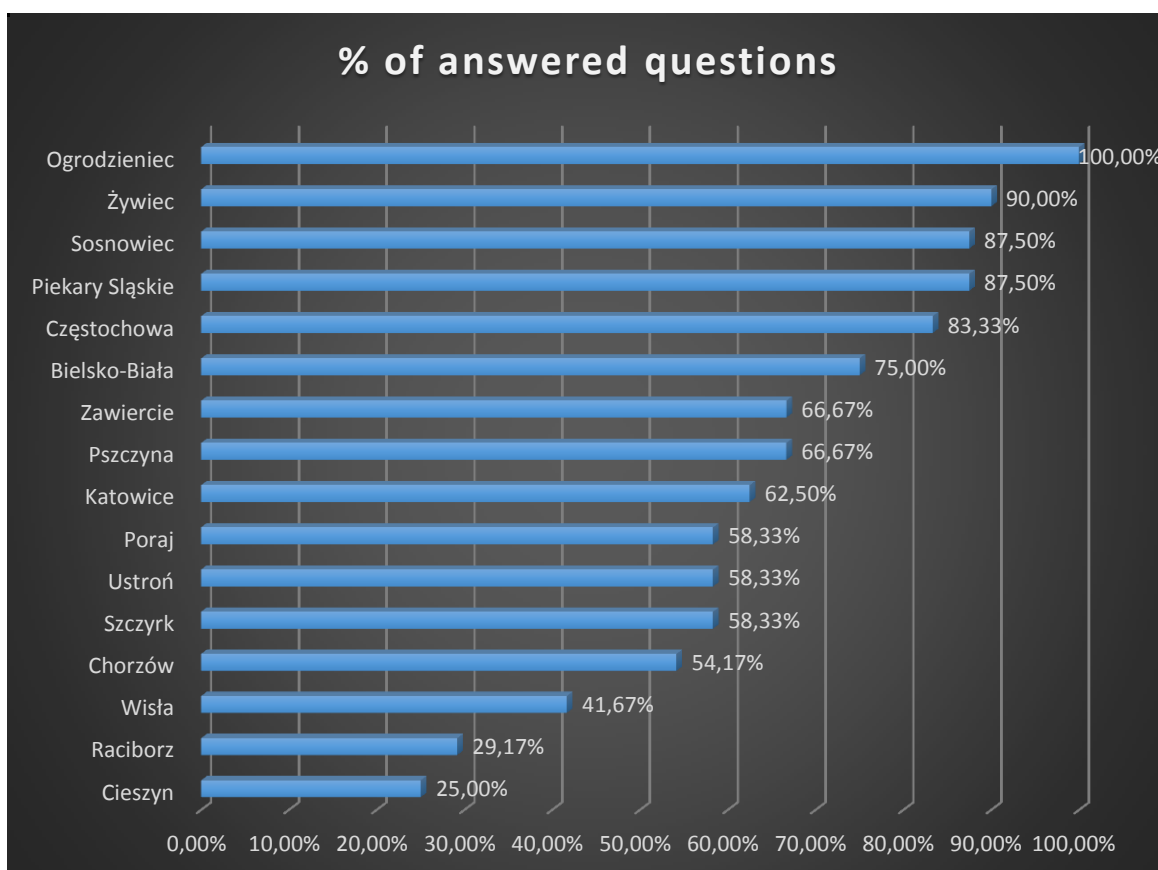
Types of information what a client want to gain from TIC representative:

- a) nearby saunas (addresses, prices, opening hours, information about extra attractions e.g. sauna, aquapark, something that they have to find in the Internet)
- b) nearby discos, music clubs (addresses, entrance fees, information about music played there)
- c) Is it worth to visit (Katowice)? (why/ why not?) What is worth to see in Katowice? If not why isn't not worth seeing? List of recommended attractions.
- d) Which cities in the region (voivodeship) are worth visiting and why?
- e) List of recommended cities with justification (explanation)
- f) Which places (towns, cities) could you personally recommend – not touristic ones -
- g) But as a local
- h) Where is a nearby study farm where is possible to ride a horse, where can I rent a bike? (opening hours, prices, how to get there)
- g) Is there a toilet in TIC? If no – where can I find it in a city/town?

Visit 2nd

Types of information what a client want to gain from TIC representative:

- a) touristic attraction of the region: castles, mines. List of recommended sights with explanation
- b) interesting route for 2-3 hours of walking (with 5-year old child)
- c) nearby attractions for children (attraction offers, prices, location, opening hours)
- d) Where is a nearby hospital, a healthcare facility? (Indicated on the map/explained)
- e) Where is a nearby pharmacy? (Indicated on the map/explained)
- f) restaurants with local food (location) (Indicated on the map/explained)
- g) other



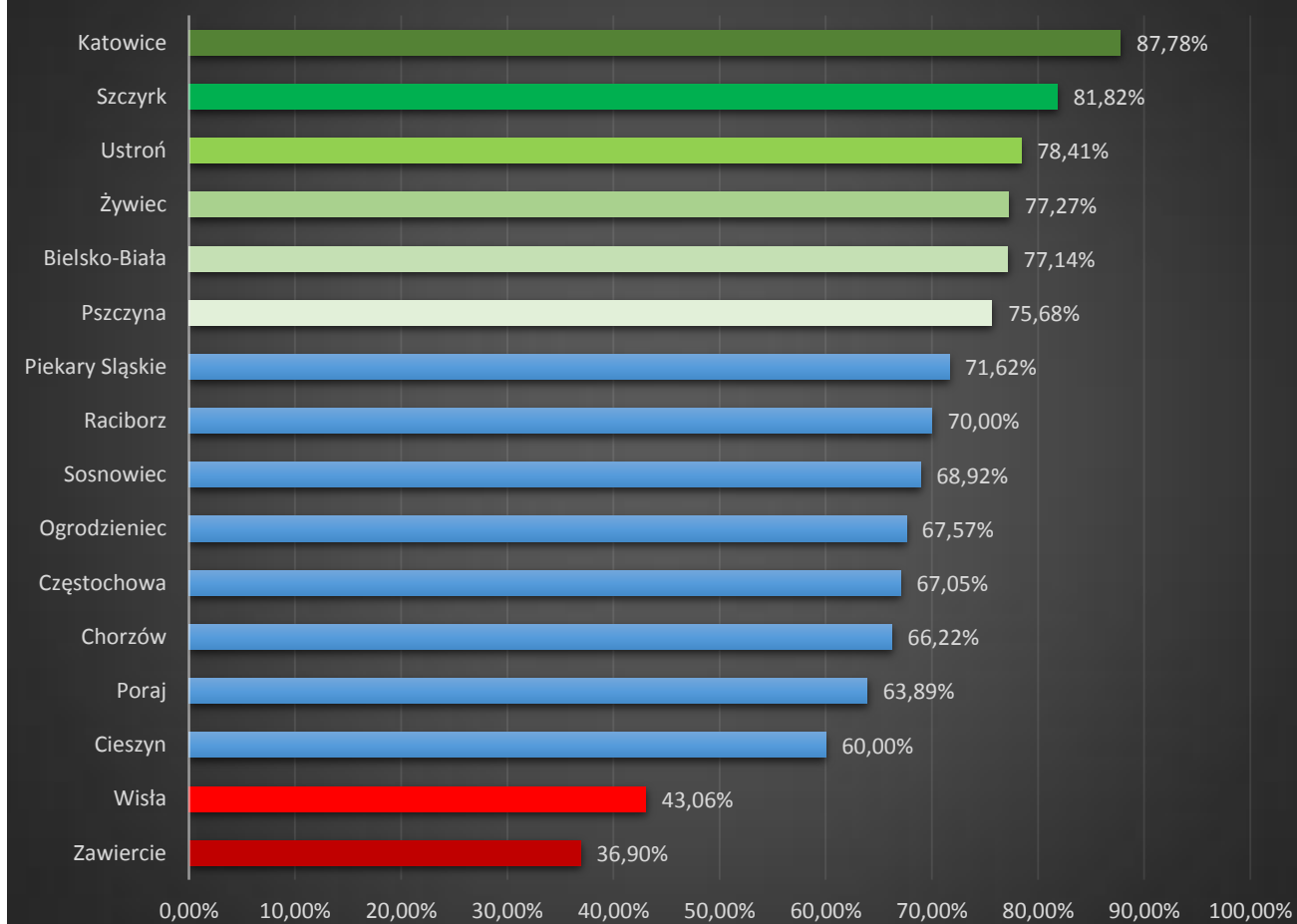
Good practices:

- **Żywiec** (TIC representative answered all the questions, explaining and showing the places she was talking about. Only some technical issues didn't let this TIC to get higher position, but the customer service and professional competence was one of the best from all the monitored TIC. Very important that only in Żywiec the TIC representative asked questions about what tourists want to do and like to do in the city; very good work with the emphasis on visitors needs).
- **Sosnowiec** (TIC representative provided all the needed information, checked in the Internet to confirm, showed on the map and explained).
- ***Ogrodzieniec** (received the highest score only because during the 2nd visit TIC wasn't found at all – so no any signs found, directing to TIC in the city).

Bad practises:

- **Zawiercie** (incomplete information provided – TIC representative gave brochures, but didn't explain anything and then just left the visitor, went to back office and didn't come back! So there was no opportunity even to ask some of the questions);
- **Wiśła** (according to TIC representative answer: Katowice is *"only for shopping"*, didn't know anything about Katowice; TIC representative repeated several times, that I can find the places, mentioned in a given leaflet, on my own);
- **Częstochowa** (quite controversial – during the 1st visit almost all the questions answered, places shown, but during the 2nd visit – no wish to help, only some brochures and map given, TIC representative didn't understand the questions or didn't want to help).
- **Katowice** (there is no toilet in TIC for visitors, TIC representative answered that there was no any toilet in the city).
- **Cieszyn** (TIC representative doesn't speak English, that was also mentioned in part 1 (phone call)).

Rating of TIC according to all monitoring results



CONCLUSION

16 Tourist Information Centres were monitored in Silesian Region according to the selected criteria.

During the monitoring the following common problems were disclosed:

- In most TIC the representatives are not initiative. The visitors had to ask the questions every time to get all the pieces of information.
- **65,63%** of TIC representatives showed the places, that they were talking about. So, many of them didn't understand that it's difficult for a foreigner to reach the place without showing them on the map.
- Only **56,25%** of the monitored TIC have an English version of the website , and mostly the information in a foreign language is not equal to a polish version.
- **57,14%** had signs in the city, directing to TIC (mostly, only near TIC).
- Many brochures and booklets were given only in polish language that is useless for a foreigner. No information in English about accommodation possibilities (inside the TIC – only **46,67%**, outside TIC – **12,50%** among all TIC).
- Just **56,67%** of TIC representatives think that Katowice is worth visiting and know, what exactly it's better to see there.
- **53,33%** provided the full information about cultural events in the city.
- **32,14%** of all TIC provided the information about cultural events in nearby cities, most TIC are focused only on their city (even TIC in Katowice!). TIC representatives didn't even try to search in the Internet to help with this question.
- Low level of English in some TIC – difficulties in communication.
- Only **18,75%** of TIC have map of *the region* outside the office, only **40,63%** have the map of *the city* outside the TIC.
- **37,50%** have an electronic information point/ bulletin board service in the TIC neighbourhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To improve the customer service level of TIC (initiative, professionalism, general customer service standards and interest to help the customer, etc.)
- To raise the level of English language knowledge as most commonly used foreign language.
- To provide more brochures and booklets in English language to all TIC, not in Polish.
- To provide information not only about cultural events in the city, but also in nearby cities.
- In case of lack of information/knowledge in some issues, TIC representatives should take the initiative - search in the internet, ask colleagues.
- To check and add information about accommodation possibilities, maps (in English) – outside the TIC. So, the visitor can get information, when TIC is closed.
- To revise the working time of TIC (as mostly they are closed on weekends).
- To put more signs in the city, directing to TIC, according to possible ways the visitors are coming.
- To improve the general knowledge of Katowice as the centre of Silesian region, the knowledge of its sights.

