

## Tourism as creative force for spatial planning in Latvia

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The aim of this paper is to outline some existing conditions and problems of organizing the tourism and recreation as creative economic sector in Latvia, to define the strategic goals and tactics of tourism spatial development.

### Background

The contemporary situation of transition in post communist Latvia promises a very high possibility of realizing the strategy "Latvia - Bridge between the East and the West" with appropriate priorities for tourism, trade and communication.

The elements of this strategy on the national level are:

1/ Reduction of the industrial sector, which requires imported labor power and raw materials.

During the 50 years of Soviet occupation the level of industry in Latvia had increased more than 50 times. Such an economic growth without local sources of raw materials and sufficient labor was an expression of the strategy of total dominance by the Soviet Union, aimed at the strengthening of its occupation of the Baltic States.

2/ Comprehensive enhancement of tourism and recreation industry, stressing national characteristics.

The long (500 km) seashore with sandy beaches, many lakes and rivers, large tracts of forest covering nearly half of Latvia's territory and many historic city centers are rich resources for tourism and recreation development, in use since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The number of tourists in 1938 was 84 thousand, mainly from Lithuania, Estonia, Germany and Poland. In 1988 the volume of tourist flow reached 1 million people, mainly from the Soviet Union. In 1995 only 341 thousand tourists came, because the flow from Russia and other former Soviet republics dropped sharply after the restoration of the independence of Latvia. During the period 1995-2000 the volume of tourists reached 2 mln people and at 2004 – 3 mln people.

3/ Stimulation of environmental development and protection of rural landscapes and forests, rehabilitation of natural and built environment, development of sustainable cities and towns.

The purpose of this step is to counteract Soviet policies of industrialization and centralization, turning to the liquidation of the kolkhozes and the regeneration of the traditional farmsteads.

The next step should be the stimulation of rural tourism, upgrading and equipping the small towns, reconstruction of objects of interest to tourists [1].

4/ Humanization of the built environment, with improvement of social and spiritual quality of life.

This element would encompass the concept of mixed land-use, reconstruction of existing dwelling houses, increasing density, creation of new jobs and transforming 'bedroom

districts' into complete self-contained urban units (urban villages) with minimal need for commuting and mobility [2].

## Principles

The following basic principles of the tourism activities, which should determine an attitude toward the environment and structure relations inside the system, are suggested:

### 1/ Sustainability

Only those forms of tourism and recreation should be developed, that respect a diversity of nature, enhance the cultural and social environment, avert overloading and pollution of natural resources and the physical environment [3].

### 2/ Intensification

All forms of tourism and recreation processes need effective maintenance of resources, based on the attractive recreational scenarios.

### 3/ Hospitality

The physical and psychological level of comfort during the entire recreational experience maintained and improved, supplying the tourists with necessary information, service and personal security.

### 4/ Mobility

Successful tourism and recreation to a large extent based on the experience of seeing different human environments and observing diverse activities. The sharper this change, the more attractive and effective the recreational process may be.

## Methodology

The main goal of the tourism system is the organisation of effective tourism process for the profit of tourism potential, not decreasing the urban quality and preserving that potential for the future generations. The indicators for evaluation the tourism potential are elaborated as follows: attractiveness, time of acquiring, capacity.

The quantitative assessment of these indicators is the result of expert evaluation and attitude of the tourists to following groups of the tourism resources:

- 1/ Historical heritage of the culture, art and architecture;
- 2/ Museums, art galleries and exhibitions;
- 3/ Urban districts, places, public spaces, city as whole.
- 4/ Attractive natural landscapes and objects.

The effectiveness of the tourism system is linked with quality of tourism process and infrastructure.

The result of interaction of the evaluation indicators is **one** comprehensive index - **recreon**. Recreon (rn) is unit of measure, the product of attractiveness (a) of the object and time of the object to be acquired (t), resulted as 1.

$$rn = a \cdot t = 1$$

where  $a = 0 < a \leq 1$  and t is measured in hours.

The quality of tourism process and infrastructure are characterized with coefficients for lowering or raising the potential of the tourism resources.

Effectiveness is the evaluation of the tourism resources exploitation. That can be used for whole system (i.e. city), as for separate subsystems, scenarios and objects. Effectiveness show the part of tourism potential transformed to market goods.

Expenses calculated for developing and exploitation the tourism potential determine the market price of recreon and help to compare different cities and objects.

Serious task of the tourism organization is the scenarios modeling. The scenario of tourism is process, contained information about tourism resources available, accessibility of them,

hotels and restaurants, transport supply etc. The time of realisation of the scenario may be from 1 day to 10-20 and more.

The set of scenarios forms the tourism system on different levels. The interaction of scenarios impacts the effectiveness of system. The scenarios may provide the excursions to culture, art and architecture objects, and supplement them with trip in suburb area and recreation in holiday houses and resorts.

All these cases give a possibility to evaluate the tourism potential and planning the optimum version of tourism resources maintenance. It is possible to elaborate the scenarios for some more historic cities and nature objects.

All scenarios need the acceptance and support of sustainability principles. Anyone scenario is to evaluate with sustainability indicators and to correct the contradictions with them.

Important aspect of the tourism system modeling is the attitude to residents' interest and support and/or improves their quality of life. On the one hand the tourism disturbs the customary urban life rhythm, on the other hand - on promotes new working places and increases the volume of revenue. The task of tourism system is to minimize the negative and increase the positive outcome, due analysis the experience and modeling appropriate tourism scenarios.

This methodology is used for evaluation the tourism

For the evaluation of tourism and recreation programs the following quantitative method is proposed:

The main criteria of the tourism object assessment are:

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1) Attractiveness of the object ( a )         | - $0 < a < 1$                  |
| 2) Duration of the object's acquirement ( t ) | - hours                        |
| 3) Capacity of the object ( q )               | - number of people             |
| 4) Specific recreative potential ( r )        | - $r = a - t$                  |
| 5) Total recreative potential ( R )           | - $R = a - t - q = r - q$      |
| The unit of measure of recreative potential   | - recreon ( $r = a - t = 1$ ). |

The main classes of tourism objects are:

- attractive landscapes and objects of nature;
- elements of historical and architectural heritage;
- museums, exhibition places and art galleries;
- cities and towns and their special districts.

For each of the classes an independent expert team is to be formed. The core expert team would make the comparative evaluations among various classes of the objects.

The result of the evaluation will be the assessment of recreative potential of tourism resources for any given place. This will provide the base for the construction of different development models of tourism system.

The result of analysis, classification and evaluation of tourism resources of Latvia is presented on the fig. 1. The diameter of circles shows the quantity of recreative potential expressed in **recreons**. The height of shadows shows capacity of tourism objects expressed in simultaneous number of tourists. Only the shadow of the capital city Riga is reduced, while the capacity is too big - 6200 tourists - for expressing in the same scale as other objects. The spatial distributions of the recreative potential give the basic information for planning of development the tourism system in Latvia.



The analysis, classification and evaluation of tourism resources of Latvia are accomplished. The spatial distribution of the recreative potential gives the basic information for spatial planning of development the tourism system in Latvia.

### Mathematical model<sup>1</sup>

The model of optimizing the strategy of development the tourism system:

$$P = T_1 \sum_{n \in N} p_n x_n + T_2 \sum_{n \in N} p_n x_n \rightarrow \max \quad (1)$$

where: **P** - total recreational effect - the weighed out carrying capacity by quality of tourism system;

**T** - length of the season (1 - summer, 2 - winter) - days;

**p** - Coefficient of the tourism quality;

**x** - Intensity of the tourist flow - tourists/day; (carrying capacity);

**n** - number of tourism scenario;

**N** - Tourism system.

The goal function is limited by labor availability in several seasons, capacity of recreational resources, tourism market requirement, and transport accessibility.

These principles and methods are used on the regional and local planning levels within Crimea and Latvia [4].

### Concept

The new program of tourism development in Latvia is now being defined, using the above mentioned principles.

The main goal is the development of a profitable and sustainable tourism system, having a priority within the national economic of Latvia.

The legislative and investment policies, linked to tourism, have to be substantially improved.

The image of Latvia has to be enhanced round the world as a welcoming, attractive and secure country, suitable for tourism and recreation.

The Latvian tourism product is composed of:

- unspoiled natural environment;
- interesting history, rich in culture and traditions;
- advantageous geographic location;
- an established center for congress and business tourism in the city of Riga;
- the Baltic seashore;

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<sup>1</sup> Elaborated together with Dr.math. O.Shcherbina

- natural health facilities;
- rich hunting and fishing resources.

The main goal is the development of a profitable and sustainable tourism system in following directions:

1/ up-grading of the small boarding-houses and hotels on the sea-shore and in small towns, as well as promotion of rural-tourism; 2/ creating the Regional Tourism and Recreation Centre (RTRC) in City of Riga and four regions of Latvia (Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale, Kurzeme).

The location of the Riga RTRC is proposed as part of urban village at the lake Jugla as result of revitalization the Brownfield area. RTRC will ensure the partly employment for residents of urban village.

Location of RTRC in small towns and rural areas will create new jobs without significant financial and time resources for professional training. .

### **Regional Tourism and Recreation Centre (RTRC)**

The project has been planned to facilitate four tourism and entertainment centres in rural Latvian towns and villages. They are created to represent a kind of “key” to each region – Vidzeme, Zemgale, Kurzeme, Latgale and Riga. Using this “key” travellers will “unlock” Latvia by getting to know its nature, traditions, cultural and historical objects in a new, attractive and modern way. It will help tourists enjoy a pleasant and unspoiled holiday at the same time.

An important part of the project is transportation. It is planned to provide alternative and permanent transfer of tourists to/from airports and ports and the centre of Riga. All the regional tourism and recreation centres will have transportation routes to nearby natural, cultural, historical objects and the closest cities on a regular basis. For example, if a traveller chooses the recreation centre in Zemgale, he can spend a day or more there by using the centre’s services providing the opportunity to visit a specific or several tourist attractions in the region (castles of Mezotne and Rundale, Skaistkalne sinkholes, Tervete’s nature trails, as well as the beaches of Riga, Livu water amusement park, etc.).

Outdoor facilities will include sports equipment rental and playgrounds, skating rink, skiing tracks, a hill for summer and winter activities, water attractions, sunbathing and recreation facilities. In order to make an object less weather-dependent, part of the attractions will be placed under a roof. Special picnic and fireplace sites, as well as boat quays will be built.

All regional tourism and relaxation centers will contain following objects:

- 2 or 3 stored economical class hotel probably with some suit of rooms, containing some 50 to 60 bedrooms (approximately 26 accommodations). Every room should have its own toilet facilities and shower. The most accommodations will be provided with extra bed (for kids or adults).
- Hotel reception will serve as a little souvenir shop and tourism information center as well. Thus everyone interested will be provided with a chance to choose an ambit excursion depending on ones desires, competence and resources.
- Holidaymakers and tourists will also have the chance to stay at camping houses (5-10 people capacity) and use caravan sites and tent places.
- Latvian traditional inn will be arranged at a separate building. Basement will be large enough for balls or disco parties. Two over ground floors must be able to host 150 people plus 50 people on 1<sup>st</sup> floor (2<sup>nd</sup> stage) veranda. There will be a small stage for live music or karaoke on the ground floor. Several tables will be located beside inn. Several festivals and events will take place at outdoor stage which is located not far from outside tables.
- One more building is allocated for separate events and conferences for approximately 100 participants. Rooms here can be modified to suit number of seminar, conference, jubilee or banquet participants. There will be bathhouses and water relaxation objects

exclusively for participants in one part of the building. Clients will be able to order drinks from bar inside this house and courses from inn-house.

- There will be several separate Latvian traditional bath houses for groups of 10 to 15 people. Ground floor – bath, shower, toilet and a little hall; 1<sup>st</sup> floor – beds.
- One building is allocated for water paradise and sports complex, which will be as two separate objects inside one building. Water paradise has 25 meter swimming pool, stream river, water massage and cascades, shallow water bodies for kids, bubble bath and several bathhouses (vapor bath, sauna, Caldarium and Turkish bath), showers. Sports complex will have: modifiable gym-hall (basketball, football, volleyball, etc.), gym for aerobics, fitness equipment, and squash.
- Modern entertainment technology house is planned to be a unique and different from other kinds of offers for spending leisure hours in Latvia.

### ***Economic aspects***

The project's implementation is planned for the whole country – paying special attention to rural regions and setting up a strong company in economically weaker municipalities. This is why economic efficiency is very important. Construction of tourism and recreation centres in small towns and rural areas will create many new jobs, which will directly influence the welfare of the local people. The chosen area of tourism in many cases does not require significant financial and time resources for professional training of personnel or requalification.

Indirectly – attracting tourists to the regions will result in a good part of the money spent there to stay in the respective municipalities, which will increase the buying power and quality of life for the local people.

### **Conclusions**

- 1/ Latvia has sufficient quantity and quality of tourism resources to increase the tourist flow.
- 2/ The main development direction in the near future should be the upgrading of the small boarding-houses and hotels on the sea-shore and in small towns, as well as the promotion of rural-tourism.
- 3/ The doubling of hotel capacity may be a necessity, but it is also a challenge due to the considerable amount of investment, that would be required.
- 4/ As the first step toward a productive development of Latvia's tourism system should be meeting the requirements from East (former Soviet republics), and little by little increasing the quality of the tourism product to reach eventually European standards.
- 5/ The structuring of a regional tourism activity centered on the Baltic Sea and planning a Baltic tourism system linked with American and Canadian tourism activities, are urgent tasks for us to-day.
- 6/ The methods and principles presented in this paper could be the basis for planning tourism and recreation development in Latvia.
- 7/ Latvian tourism product forms out of its natural resources and can find a niche in world's tourism market by offering ecotourism and unaffected nature in combination with types of active recreation.
- 8/ The strategic goal of the Latvian tourism product development must be increased of competitiveness in order to grow tourist satisfaction with their stay in Latvia.
- 9/ Marketing of the Latvian tourism product on the global market can't be separated from the overall Baltic tourism development strategy. It is necessary to show the Baltic's as an integrated tourism market and Latvia as an individual destination.
- 10/ In order to attract tourists and extend their stay in Latvia, it is necessary to develop the appropriate infrastructures, including but not limited to paid-for services (accommodation, recreation, equipment rentals, etc.), as well as free services (parking, recreation sites, etc.).

11/ Taking into consideration the pricing gaps and the advantages of the Latvian tourism product, it would be necessary to orientate investments toward rural tourism to promote growth for accommodation places in the countryside.

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