

TOURIST PROFILE IN ZEMGALE

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Abstract. Nowadays competition in tourism increases both in the supply of tourism services and with regard to the ways tourists are attracted. In order that Zemgale region can compete with the other regions of Latvia, growth in the tourism industry has to be promoted by engaging local authorities and the local public. According to statistical data available to Zemgale planning region specialists, mostly domestic tourists travel in Zemgale region. The research aim is to assess the profile of a tourist in Zemgale and opportunities for the attraction of potential tourists. The research analysed the most popular tourism objects in Zemgale and the opinions of tourism specialists on the existing situation and prospects for the tourism industry in the region. A tourist in Zemgale is mainly a one-day traveller. Nature tourism objects are mainly visited by families with children or schoolchildren groups. The main prospects for Zemgale region in tourism are associated with the development of new, innovative tourism products or services.

Key words: tourism, Zemgale, services.

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Introduction

Nowadays the tourism industry develops very fast. Competition increases both in the supply of tourism services and with regard to the ways tourists are attracted. Tourism is defined as a stable economic activity. Tourism can be an important factor in the development of European regions. The infrastructure established for the purpose of tourism contributes to local development, while the created and maintained jobs can help to avoid the decline of industry and rural areas (Tourism statistics, 2015). The tourism industry is not independent. An improvement or a deterioration in this industry considerably affects other industries. For this reason, it is important to engage all stakeholders – ministries, local authorities, administrative institutions, entrepreneurs etc. – in tackling tourism industry problems (Latvijas Turisma pamatnostādnes..., 2014). In a general sense, tourism could be considered a demand-driven industry, yet the demand could not be met without supply. The tourism industry differs from other industries in being strongly associated with many other industries and the products supplied by them. That is why tourism cannot be identified as an autonomous, separate industry, and it is impossible to accurately compute its contribution to the economy (Forands, 2011). The theoretical foundation of tourism broadened when the role and influence of the tourism industry began being comprehended in the world and the EU (Kaufmane, 2011). Wishes of individuals after their travel increase, therefore the supply of tourism products tends to rise.

In his works, Freijers has analysed and stressed the influence and interaction of tourism with regard to the most important indicators of the national economy:

- tourism and economic growth (i.e. a value-added effect, an effect on GDP);
- tourism and employment (i.e. the number of jobs and earnings);
- tourism and price levels (i.e. the price level at the residence place of travellers and in foreign countries);
- tourism and international trade (i.e. an effect on the balance of payments);
- tourism and distribution (i.e. at the individual, regional and national levels);
- tourism and concentration (i.e. the competitiveness level in selected industries and market segments);
- tourism and ecology (i.e. natural and social sustainability (Frayer, 2011)).

Tourism contributes to other industries, attracts consumers and raises the overall standard of living. All the mentioned indicators interact and make an effect on the national economy on parish, municipal, regional and national scales. In order that Zemgale region can compete with the other regions of Latvia, growth in the tourism industry has to be promoted by engaging local authorities and the local public. The research object is tourism in Zemgale region, while the research subject is opportunities for the attraction of potential tourists.

The research aim is to assess the profile of a tourist in Zemgale and opportunities for the attraction of potential tourists. The specific research tasks are as follows:

1. To develop the profile of a tourist in Zemgale;
2. To assess opportunities for the attraction of potential tourists to Zemgale planning region.

The research employed the following research methods: data acquisition – document analysis and a sociological method – expert interviews; data processing: analysis, synthesis and graphic; as well as general research methods.

Research results and discussion

After joining the EU, Latvia experienced a period of fast tourism growth, which was followed by a sharp economic downturn that negatively affected the development of tourism. Since 2011, tourism in Latvia has returned to the path of growth. In order for Latvia to be able to compete with the tourism products offered by other countries, it is necessary to identify competitiveness advantages for Latvia. This is required to make tourism growth sustainable (Latvija turisma attīstības..., 2014). One of the largest problems in tourism in Latvia is explicit seasonality, as the consumption of tourism services considerably increase during the warm period of the year. It is important to have something unique and special in the offers of tourism products, which are also of adequate quality. Designing something new in the region that is not available elsewhere and that is demanded during the passive tourism season would be a significant contribution to the tourism industry. The following kinds of tourism are defined as strategic in Latvia:

- 1) business and event tourism;
- 2) health tourism;
- 3) nature tourism;
- 4) cultural tourism and creative industries (Latvija turisma attīstības..., 2014).

Nature and cultural tourism are mainly specific to Zemgale region, as well as creative industries. Tourism is defined as a priority in the development programmes of 35 out of 71 municipalities, with cultural tourism being referred to the most frequently. The total number of visitors, including foreigners, served in Zemgale region was the lowest among all the regions. The low figure could be explained by the fact that Zemgale is located very close to Riga and Pieriga; for this reason, foreign tourists prefer staying overnight there, and Zemgale is only a place of objects to be sightseen.

To describe the existing situation in the tourism industry in Zemgale region, the authors used the Sustainable Development Strategy of Zemgale Planning Region 2015-2030, the Development Programme of Zemgale Planning Region 2015-2030, the website of Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR), the website of the Zemgale Tourism Association as well as the data on Zemgale region available on the website of the Central Statistical Bureau.

The ZPR Sustainable Development Strategy was produced in 2015; it describes the existing situation in tourism in Zemgale region. Nature values in Zemgale, unhurried leisure on Zemgale waters, Zemgale – a rich cultural and historical region with palaces and manor houses –, produced

in Zemgale – these are only a few values referred to by Zemgale tourism coordination team members.

The Zemgale Tourism Association suggests 10 most important objects to be sightseen in Zemgale region by both domestic and foreign tourists. They are as follows: 1. Rundale palace (Rundale municipality); 2. The Tervete Nature Park (Tervete municipality); 3. Bauska palace (Bauska); 4. The tower of Jelgava Holy Trinity Church (Jelgava); 5. Jelgava palace and the tombs of the Dukes of Courland (Jelgava); 6. Koknese castle ruins (Koknese municipality); 7. A boat and a sledge of Mez mala Vikings (Plavinas municipality); 8. Krustpils castle (Jekabpils); 9. A garden and a memorial museum of A.Upits (Dobele); 10. The Christmas Battle Museum (Jelgava municipality) (Zemgales planosanas regiona..., 2014).

Most of the mentioned sites for sightseeing are cultural and historical tourism objects in particular. Six of them were among the most visited objects in the region in 2013-2016. The data on visitors were provided by the local authorities of Zemgale. Visitors from the neighbouring countries – Lithuania, Estonia and Russia – dominated in the territories located close to Riga. In contrast, the western part of Zemgale was preferred by tourists from Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Poland and France, while fewer tourists arrived from Finland, Belarus, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, the USA and India. The eastern part of Zemgale was popular for tourists from Germany, Russia, Estonia, Australia, Great Britain, Poland, Lithuania, Austria, as well as the USA, Finland, Sweden and France (Zemgales planosanas regiona..., 2014).

A large number of domestic and foreign tourists is usually observed during events in Zemgale region. Among the largest events that attracted most visitors were the International Ice Sculpture Festival (47000 visitors in 2010; 41000 in 2013; 85000 in 2017), the International Sand Sculpture Festival (26000 visitors in 2011; 25400 in 2013) as well as the Jelgava City Festival and the General Dairy, Bread and Honey Festival that attracted at least 22000 visitors each. In recent years, important sports and international activities have been held at the Zemgale Olympic Centre. The annual classical music concert in a flowering lilac garden in spring in Dobele, the Catfish Waking Festival in Koknese, the Semigallians Festival and Walpurgis Night in Tervete etc. have to be mentioned as well (Zemgales planosanas regiona..., 2014).

To conduct a quantitative study, the research used the Zemgale tourist coordination team, which was comprised of not only representatives of the administration of Zemgale planning region and of the local government of the municipality, mostly tourism information centre (TIC) specialists, but also of representatives of the nongovernmental and business sectors. The representatives were sent e-mails with questions. Sixteen expert interviews were carried out – with tourism specialists, consultants, managers, a public relations specialist and a tourism organiser.

Figure 1 presents the opportunities for tourism development that were identified based on the expert answers. A number in the parentheses after every opportunity indicates the number of specialists who referred to it as necessary for tourism development in future.

The development of new, innovative tourism products that would attract more domestic and foreign tourists was among the most frequently indicated factors (i.e. five times). The Jelgava city specialists referred to the establishment of the "Caramel Workshop" as a successful example – it was visited by more than 30000 individuals in the first year. The reconstruction of infrastructure, roads in particular, is required in the municipalities having a high proportion of gravel roads and poor-quality asphalt roads. The development of tourism is hindered by non-asphalted roads, the

poor-quality infrastructure and the poor condition of paved roads. The need to improve the condition of roads was noted by a third of the experts.

Special attention has to be paid to the establishment of new accommodation facilities, as four municipalities were short of them. The expensive maintenance of such facilities outside the active season when the tourist flow is the lowest was mentioned as one of problems. Making information about tourism opportunities in a municipality available to foreign tourists was of the same importance. The municipality website is one of the first options for visitors to seek information; the website has to be understandable and easy to perceive. Four of the municipalities believed that the development of a website or a booklet in many languages was an opportunity for tourism development. Koknese municipality, for example, had already been working on a new website for tourism (www.visitkoknese.lv), which would potentially attract more foreign tourists. The specialist of Plavinas municipality suggested producing materials on tourism in Lithuanian, Polish, Estonian and other languages. The other municipalities stressed the development of diverse tourist routes.

The municipalities of Dobele and Aizkraukle suggested developing active tourism as one of the opportunities. Active tourism in the municipality provides more opportunities to attract diverse target tourist audiences. There were municipalities that revealed that the lack of their local governments' interest in tourism was the reason for low tourism activity in the municipalities. Tourism was not a priority for some local governments, as their municipalities had a few tourism objects or they primarily or even secondary tackled other problems.



Source: authors' construction based on ZPR tourism specialist answers, 2017

Fig. 1. Opportunities for tourism development in Zemgale region

The creation of a reliable and unified counting system would be one of the tasks to be performed not only in the municipalities that stressed it as a priority but also in the other municipalities.

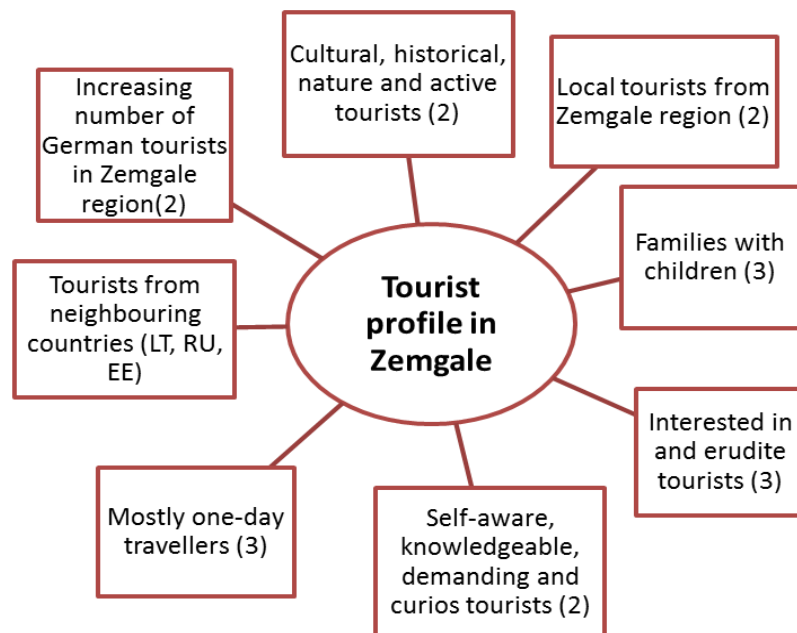
Zemgale planning region municipalities have to establish cooperation teams for different tourism objects. This would give an opportunity to get familiarised with the ideas of other professionals, experience stories and suggestions. For example, after tourist counters have been installed, conclusions have to be drawn with regard to what contribution is made by tourism in any municipality. Tourism clusters have to be created so that the region is competitive with cities in terms of tourism offers. The Guidelines for Tourism Development define a tourism cluster as a concentrated group of tourism service providers, support organisations and research and development institutions that provides effective coordination and cooperation in a certain geographic place, thus developing complex tourism offers. The creation of such clusters would increase the competitiveness of the region with cities and the other regions. Cooperation with a number of organisations would raise the quality of tourism services, as it is going to be controlled by several institutions. It is important to be aware that the charm of many objects for sightseeing lies in the offer of a number of entertainment places and attractions in the nearest vicinity. Climatic conditions should not influence the demand for tourism at all sites for sightseeing. Many interviewed Zemgale planning region tourism specialists referred to the reconstruction of roads as one of the most essential opportunities for tourism development. This factor is very important for creating tourism clusters in the regions.

It is important to ensure that destinations are easy to reach by private vehicles and public transport. The Guidelines for Tourism Development stress the fact that the resources invested in a tourism product or service will in no way be repaid if the tourism destinations are not easy to reach.

As tourism develops in the region, it is necessary to work on information availability, new technologies, innovation, coordinated information aggregation and other factors that contribute to the growth of the tourism industry.

The answers given by the specialists on what kind of tourists most frequently visit tourism objects in their municipalities were used to identify the characteristics of a tourist in Zemgale. Figure 2 shows the general profile of a tourist in Zemgale. It has to be added that the information acquired was based on the individual perspective of the specialists and their experience gained when daily meeting visitors at tourism information centres and at sites for sightseeing.

A tourist in Zemgale is mainly a one-day traveller who, after the sightseeing, stays overnight in Riga or goes to Kurzeme region for sightseeing and stays overnight there. Mostly residents of the nearest municipalities or regions who wish to spend their leisure time outside their places of residence travel in Zemgale region. According to the data provided by the specialists, the proportion of foreign tourists from the neighbouring countries – Lithuania, Russia and Estonia – was the highest. Based on the positive feedback from tourists, the research found that cultural-historical, nature and active tourism were three the most popular kinds of tourism in Zemgale planning region. It is very difficult to accurately describe a tourist in Zemgale because not all TICs perform unified and systematic data collection and analysis. There are municipalities where the data collection is done manually, keeping counting records in a book, which is an inefficient and inaccurate way of doing it.



Source: authors' construction based on ZPR tourism specialist answers, 2017

Fig. 2. **Tourist profile in Zemgale**

As regards the opportunities for the attraction of potential tourists, modern tourists have to be attracted by means of new, innovative tourism products that contrast with the other tourism products. It is important to produce easy-to-understand sources of information – booklets, maps and tourism websites. As social networks progress fast, one has to carefully work on tourism product advertising, as the official website of the tourism object or the tourism website of the municipality are the first information source any traveller seeks when planning travel to a new destination. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are among the modern most popular social networks that are used to popularise the products offered. Already now many municipalities use Facebook features, creating a social account where to advertise the latest events and offers and communicate with the audience that use social networks.

The second most important factor in attracting potential tourists relates to raising the level of hospitality and quality in serving current tourists. It is important that the tourists who have visited sites for sightseeing in Zemgale are those who express their opinions about their experiences and give feedback. Responsive, knowledgeable and polite specialists in tourism, a well-structured environment and interesting activities are what encourage tourists to come again.

The following largest problems in counting tourists were mentioned by the tourism specialists:

- the counting is not done at all tourism objects;
- those who do it, do not do that in a unified system (data are difficult to compare);
- tourists themselves do not fill in questionnaires;
- counting of travellers is done by means of a book;
- tourists attend tourism objects individually (do not visit a TIC);
- counting of tourists is difficult to do at a large flow of the tourists (large events);
- tourism service providers do not send in data or only approximate data.

Not only tourism entrepreneurs themselves or the local authority but also the national government have to work on establishing a tourist counting system because it would be easier to aggregate the statistical data and compare them with those for the other regions. Entry to many

nature tourism sites in Zemgale are free of charge; therefore, it is difficult to do a count, as no tourism employee is assigned to do it or no tourist counters are installed.

The need for new, innovative tourism products in Zemgale region was mentioned by five of the interviewed specialists. There is a demand for something new and not seen elsewhere by tourists. It is important for Zemgale region to attract new, knowledgeable specialists in tourism who are able to begin and maintain cooperation between tourism entrepreneurs and national institutions, hold activities and promote the activity of current tourism service producers.

The shortage of hotels and accommodation facilities is the second largest problem in municipalities, as it is difficult to provide accommodation for a large flow of travellers. It has to be noted that the availability of accommodation is only one of the factors that affects the flow of tourists. Entertainment opportunities after doing sightseeing are essential as well. The supply of entertainment in cities is sufficient, whereas in towns and rural areas the situation is opposite. There is a demand for entertainment by travellers in the evening or at night. This is one of the reasons why tourists do not prefer staying overnight at rural accommodation facilities and, instead, go to Riga or other cities.

Figure 3 presents the results of expert interviews about what kind of tourists every municipality would prefer.



Source: authors' construction based on ZPR tourism specialist answers, 2017

Fig. 3. Desired tourist profile in Zemgale region

In their municipalities, the tourism specialists of Zemgale planning region would prefer mostly foreign tourists – either from Lithuania or the Scandinavian countries –, as well local travellers, including schoolchildren and families with children, from the neighbouring municipalities. The tourism information centre specialists would like to see more travellers interested in cultural and historical objects in the city who are curious, patriotic and having a sense of humour.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

The offers of tourism in Zemgale planning region represent cultural, nature and water tourism. Zemgale is rich in cultural-historical heritage – palaces, manor houses, castle ruins and monuments. Rundale palace and its museum has persistently been the most popular tourism object in the last five years.

According to the information provided by the Zemgale tourist coordination team, individual TICs and Zemgale region as whole had no unified tourist counting system. In some tourism information centres, the counting of travellers was done by means of a book. The counting system in Zemgale region was not unified and complete, as no national legal acts on tourism regulated it.

In the opinion of the experts, the most significant hindering factors for the tourism industry were the poor quality of roads and the shortage of accommodation facilities, financial resources and new, knowledgeable tourism specialists.

A tourist in Zemgale region is mainly a one-day traveller who, after the sightseeing, stays overnight in Riga or goes to Kurzeme region. Tourists to Zemgale come mainly from the neighbouring countries – Lithuania, Russia and Estonia – and prefer cultural-historical and nature tourism sites. Nature tourism sites are mainly visited by families with children or schoolchildren groups.

In Zemgale region, the key opportunity for tourism development is the creation of new, innovative, elsewhere unavailable tourism products or services of high quality that could attract a large target audience among domestic and foreign tourists.

The Zemgale Tourism Association in cooperation with Latvian Tourism Advisory Council representatives have to develop and introduce a uniform digitalised tourist counting system at tourism information centres and private enterprises providing tourism services.

Desired tourists in Zemgale region are those interested in cultural and historical heritage from Scandinavia or Lithuania, as well as schoolchildren from the neighbouring municipalities, families with children who are curious and patriotic, have a sense of humour and are interested in the site for sightseeing.

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