
EVALUATION OF THE REGIONAL TOURISM ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract

The paper covers theoretical analysis of the tourism development in rural regions as well as the public administration role in tourism sector management in order to evaluate, plan and maintain tourism resources in the region. In the paper, there is presented a discussion on some proposed methodologies for the tourism structure and resources evaluation, in order to compare attraction potential of territories for the tourism development (competitiveness between regions). The tourism planning and management process should be proceeded at various levels of public administration institutions in order to avoid negative influence from different branches of the economy, preserve nature, historical and cultural heritage, ingeniously and cost-effectively use EU Structural funds and national budget resources for the tourism infrastructure development in order to prevent unwanted competition between local and regional public administrations, stimulating them to act jointly in order to achieve synergy attracting tourists to visit neighbouring regions. How to achieve mentioned goals the questioning of the tourism development experts has been performed, and some results of it are presented in the paper. Conclusions on the performed research and proposed methodologies as well as some suggestions for the better tourism development management at the regional level have been presented.

Key words: Rural regions, regional development, tourism infrastructure and products, regional tourism attractiveness and competitiveness, public management.

Introduction

Tourism is relatively new, rapidly growing economy sector, extremely important for many less developed counties, including new member States of European Union. Therefore, governments of these countries in their programs and the State long-term development strategies indicate tourism sector development as one of the most important priority, as this can be very beneficial for the country and its regions - promote employment, investment growth, infrastructure development and so on. Tourism as a stand-alone system incorporates many sectors of the economy. This shows the complexity of the tourism system. In order to attract tourists to a region, a systematic approach to tourism as a phenomenon and in tourism management, as the process is required. A regional specific of sustainable tourism development is based on the available tourist resources and conditions (environment and management). Tourism potential depends on the specific features of local, regional and state tourism development opportunities. Therefore, it is very essential to have good quantitative and qualitative assessment of the characteristics of a tourist area, in order to compare them with other competing regions' and implement innovative projects with a goal to increase attractiveness and reduce negative influence from seasoning. The long-term growth of tourism must be regulated and controlled in relation to the processes of globalization and competition in different market segments, and it is based on a partnership between the public and private sectors. The main problems associated with the development of tourism, particularly in the socio-economic indicators are lagging behind in rural regions, in

many cases caused by public institutions and private sector interests' incompatibility. The public sector, including municipalities, is responsible for the tourism planning process, assuring sustainability of regional development. Therefore, more attention has to be paid for the investigation of the potential of the tourism resources in the region, evaluate influence from other economy branches and encounter local societies and tourists' interests. Big attention should be focused for the preservation of nature and local cultural-historical heritage. These goals are very costly and require smart management in order to make region competitive for the tourists today, and sustain it not less attractive for the next generations. Nevertheless, at the same time tourism sector should generate sufficient profit for the private sector, which is responsible for the services and products for tourists. Presently many authors (Cooper et al., 1998; Bieger, 2002; Armaitiene, 2009; Vaitekunas and Povilauskas, 2011) already have described tourism sector development by examining local tourism products and defining territorial characteristics. Lithuanian and foreign authors (Mill and Morrison, 1985; Melnikas, 2002; Martin, 2003; Brykova, 2006; Navickas and Malakauskaite, 2007, 2009, 2010; Beniusiene and Svirskiene, 2008) have analysed the tourists' attraction determinants. Rational tourism planning and management system improvement at the local, regional and national levels has also been investigated by different researchers (Dapkus and Gaizauskiene, 2009; Bagdzeviciene et al., 2002), who have stressed the importance of strategic planning for the tourism sector competitive growth. Dapkus (2009) has described regional development policy, its implementation models and institutions'

role, Wafaa and Myrian (2012) have investigated sustainability of the tourism development.

However, there is a lack of methodological instruments to evaluate tourism products and their management at local and regional level, in order to prepare reasonable tourism development programs and implement necessary projects, seeking sustainability and synergy in tourism sector development, especially in rural regions. Without such instruments tourism sector development has a chaotic character and brings unwanted competition between the regions, instead of their cooperation for the tourists' attraction with jointly implemented projects (with much less financial expenditures). In particular, there is a lack of comprehensive, scientifically based research that would help to address sufficient support and reduce the unevenness in the development of the tourism sector in the rural regions. In this context, the importance of good public governance is crucial. New tasks for various institutions, including municipalities, should be addressed in order to upgrade strategic planning and attract private investment and the EU Structural Funds support. But after the periods of 2004-2006 and 2007-2013 when there was the EU Structural Funds substantial support for the tourism sector development, there arises a question why some areas, having and/or newly obtained a sufficient critical mass of resources suitable for the development of tourism, are still unable to attract more tourists' flows. This raises the scientific and practical interest to determine what factors influence the flow of tourists and significance of the tourist areas to have a competitive advantage.

The object of the research is development of the tourism sector. The research overall goal is to propose methodological instruments for the tourism products evaluation, carry out research at the rural regions' and provide suggestions for the public administration institutions in order to support strategic planning and ensure sustainable development of tourism sector. Tasks are as follows: 1. Analyse the peculiarities of the tourism sector through regional tourism competitiveness (attractiveness) prism. 2. Perform tourism policy formulation and implementation analysis. 3. Perform rural regions' tourist resources and tourism industry analysis. 4. Investigate the opinion of the tourism sector specialists'. 5. Provide recommendations for strengthening the attractiveness of the region for the local and international tourists.

Materials and Methods

Monographic method has been used for this research. Available scientific literature (journals, monographs, etc.) have been studied with the aim to define best practices for the tourism sector evaluation and good governance implementation at local and regional levels in order to increase the

tourism sector competitiveness. The tourism sector's internet sites conceptions are analysed; the tourism structure, the characteristics of tourist infrastructure and products, the factors which determine the attraction (competitiveness) of tourist areas and its public management are investigated from secondary information resources, legal documents and statistical data; the principles of Lithuania's tourism policy formation and management are examined from strategic planning, regulating documents and financial support programs. The expert survey was performed in order to determine main problems and long-term goals of the tourism sector development in the rural regions. Based on the results of this research recommendations were proposed, addressing them to public management institutions.

Results and Discussion

Scientists do not have consensus, what the smallest object or a territorial unit, which has the ability to become a tourist location is. Cooper et al. (1998) considers that the territorial object, as for example, National Park, may be a tourist location. In the meantime, Beunders (2008) indicates that the National Park is a landmark, or a place for visiting, but not in a tourist area. Cooper et al. (1998) provide the tourist area or territory examples: the shore areas, cities, business and meeting areas & villages, heritage and historical & cultural sites, locally created territories with theme parks, resorts, SPA centres, sports and gambling facilities. It is obvious that the identification of the territory depends on the international, national, regional or local scale. Therefore, depending on the destination and travel purposes, there can be different amounts of tourist object & products in order to treat the territory as a tourist location. Bieger (2002) considers that tourist destination depends on the distance of travel – the greater the distance, the higher requirements for the touristic attractiveness objects should be in the package. Hence, the analysis of different levels (national, regional or local level) locations, can be referred to the combination of tourism products and infrastructure at different location levels, which can be treated controversially – increasing attractiveness (creating synergy between the tourism attractive products in neighbouring territories), or creating unwanted competition between these neighbouring territories.

Performed analysis of different authors' publications about tourist destination territories, it is possible to present several most common definitions (table 1). Results of this analysis enables us to agree on the common territory for the further investigation of tourism products and infrastructure as well as focus on the public management institutions with their territorial (spatial) and strategic planning and program

Table 1

Definitions of a tourist destination territory

Author, year	The definition of tourist destination territories (site, area, region)
Cooper et al., 1998, p. 102-103	Tourist area is a site with the infrastructure and services, designed to meet the needs of tourists.
Buhalis, 2000, p. 97-116	Tourist site, which can be characterized by six A: attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities, ancillary services.
NEST, 2010	Tourist site is a product that identifies itself with the tourist, where they organize their holidays. Destinations of the target depend on the definition of the tourism market.
Bieger, 2002, p. 56	Tourist site - geographical area (location, region, country, continent), where visitor(s) (or visitor segment) choose to travel. It combines all the necessary services - accommodation, meals, entertainment and activities. This competitive element of inbound tourism, which has to act as a strategic business unit.
Carter and Fabricius, 2007	Tourist site is the physical place where tourists spend at least one night. There are tourist attractions, products and services that are necessary to provide for the tourists, who are staying in the area for at least one day. Tourist area has the physical and administrative boundaries, given by the public management institutions', as well as its image and perception. There are many related items, which can create a network or a network itself built-up by several tourist areas in order to attract more tourists.
Vaitekunas and Povilauskas, 2011, p. 21	Any area to which a tourist arrives can be considered as a tourist site, if this place for him/her is important only for a tourism purposes and is located out of natural and usual environment. The natural and usual environment - the geographic territory in which the person lives, works and travels for daily affairs.

implementation. In addition to the tourist destination territories definitions, there could be noticed that all tourist areas are created by natural nature, historical-cultural and artificially designed tourist attraction products and services concentration in a particular territory, acknowledged by tourists themselves or defined by governmental authorities independently or with the agreement from local society and tourism business companies.

Tourist areas are not static, they are changing, because tourists and service providers in the market may appear and disappear. In addition, tourism in all cases is affecting these areas in a positive and a negative way. Tourism planning and management are necessary in order to maintain the integrity of tourist destination areas' unique properties, to preserve them and maintain necessary infrastructure and tourism products.

Tourism development planning documents, applications, preparation of feasibility studies and the implementation of the methodological recommendations for the monitoring of them states that, in order to identify tourism development opportunities for the particular territory, it is necessary to investigate the potential of such a territory by evaluation of the infrastructure and tourism products & services:

- Tourism objects and the environment (which can be as a tourists interest objects and/or recreational resources);
- Transportation means and accommodation objects;
- Objects of the services (information, catering, trade (gift), artisan workshops, art, hiring, banks

and currency exchange points, health care and public service institutions, vehicle service objects);

- Land, air and water vehicles renting points and stations;
- The institutional arrangement (tourism legislation and norms, public and private tourism structures, systems and incentives to attract investment in tourist facilities, training programs and the structure of education and training, public education and the promotion of tourism and eco-training programmes, marketing (promotion) activities and measures);
- General infrastructure (road network, power supply, communal infrastructure, etc.).

A similar structure can be used to perform evaluation of the attractiveness of the tourism potential of the territories or assessments. In addition to the previously mentioned characteristics for the tourism area, attractiveness evaluation can be some of those indicators:

- Tourism resources (natural, historical-cultural, social/human, artificial) and infrastructure (tourist industry components);
- Accommodation, catering, transport, entertainment, information, management, tour quantity and quality, educating programs;
- The route and flow of tourists;
- Status (for example, a UNESCO World Heritage site, National resort place and etc.);
- Tourism stakeholders, tourism specialists and managing staff in the area;
- Accessibility and situation of tourism network in the area;

- The tourism business attractiveness for the investors and perspective for the tourism development in the area;
- The national tourism development policy and geopolitical situation of the region.

Thus, tourism development potential can be characterized by complex of tourism products' and services' parameters and tourist area potential, characterized by tourism management, resources, status and image parameters.

Tourism is gaining greater and greater importance to regional development promotion. Special attention has recently been devoted to this branch of economy as in the majority of cases tourism is beneficial to states' since it promotes employment, investment growth and infrastructure development. For the regions (especially rural) and individual districts tourism development is one of the key economic areas that may help them deal with the issues of ensuring more rapid development of their economies and social welfare and, due to their specificity, make a significant impact on the development of a number of other economic activity sectors and significantly contribute to the creation of the gross domestic product due to the effect of synergy. This is especially relevant seeking to reduce dependence on the primary agricultural activities, industries using natural resources and imported raw materials.

The vision of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on the tourism sector covers the following key areas:

- Induce governments to accept tourism and travel as a strategic priority for economic development and employment;
- Referral to open competitive markets by supporting the implementation of the GATS (general agreement on trade in services);
- Remove barriers to tourism growth, which implies the expansion and improvement of tourism related infrastructure – such as increased airport capacity, construction and modernization of airports, roads and tourist facilities (Nasser and Donsimoni, 2012).

Tourist competitiveness of Lithuania and its individual regions depends on the local tourist potential and efficient management. With a view to attracting tourists to a certain region, a systematic approach to tourism and its management is needed. One of the main stages of efficient management is a tourism planning process at the local level, which must be based not only on the analysis of the tourism sector, evaluation of the tourist potential but also on the established competitive position with regard to other tourist regions on the grounds of sustainable development concepts. A long-term tourism growth must be regulated and governed taking into account

globalisation processes and competition in various segments of the market and be based on the principle of partnership between the public and private sectors (Mowforth and Munt, 2003).

World Tourism Organization, which is subsidiary division of the United Nations (UN), is responsible for the UNEP (United Nations Environmental program), and it has produced a set of policy guidelines, including the Principles for Implementation of Sustainable Tourism, widely distributed to governments and local authorities and used as an input to some of the multi-lateral environmental agreements. The UNEP's principles on the implementation of sustainable tourism include:

- **Legislative Framework:** Support the implementation of sustainable tourism through an effective legislative framework that establishes standards for land use in tourism development, tourism facilities, management and investment in tourism;
- **Environmental Standards:** Protect the environment by setting clear ambient environmental quality standards, along with targets for reducing pollution from all sectors, including tourism, and by preventing development in areas where it would be inappropriate;
- **Regional Standards:** Ensure that tourism and the environment are mutually supportive at a regional level through the cooperation and coordination between States, to establish common approaches to incentives, environmental policies, and integrated tourism development planning (Nasser and Donsimoni, 2012).

The concept of sustainable tourism can be underpinned by a range of underlying principles, including the following:

- Sustainable tourism is not just about protecting the environment; it is also concerned with long-term economic viability and social justice.
- Initiatives designed to achieve sustainable tourism brings benefits to some people and costs to others. It is thus a highly political, rather than just a technocratic field.
- Sustainable tourism cannot be separated from the wider debate about sustainable development in general.

In order to maximize the exploitation of tourist resources available in the region and at the same time ensuring sustainable tourism development principles, strategic planning and public administration must be properly carried out. At local level tourism development issues are defined in regional and district strategic development plans. Some regions have developed separate locality attractiveness and image enhancement, local trademark formation and tourism development strategies, operational programmes,

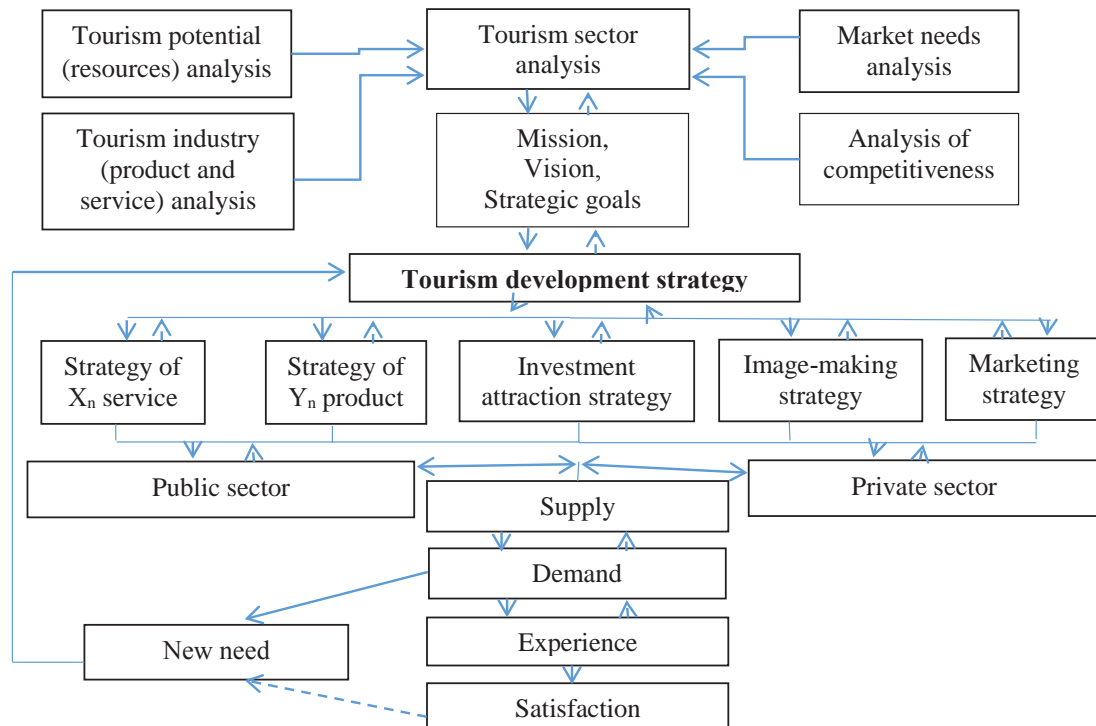


Figure 1. Recommended tourism strategic management model.

feasibility studies and other programming documents. Development of territorial planning documents, i.e. general and special plans, were worked out together with strategic planning, which focuses on the prospects of tourism development. However, in the majority of cases these are fragmentally works, covering single regions, which hardly match among themselves and are insufficiently synchronised with the functions and implemented by local authorities' projects. "Misunderstanding" among public administration institutions, farmers and private businesses, local populations and their communities is observed. Another problem is non-compliance of more serious research-based documents regulating tourism development in districts with the spirit of the programmes of neighbouring districts, the entire region, and the country. There are frequent cases when tourism is developed in districts without having a clear and long-term tourism development strategy and a consistent programme for its implementation based on the appropriate financial and human resources as well as the local tourism infrastructure and products. Tourism sector development planning is very sensitive to a private initiative and personal relationships; however, this does not always correlate with the public interest when short-term narrow political goals and/or personal business interests begin to compete with long term interests of regional society and tourists' needs. Consequently, the works that contribute to the rational tourism planning and management system improvement at the local, regional and national levels

(Dapkus and Gaižauskienė, 2009) are especially relevant.

After analyses of legislative documentation and scientific papers, new methodological approach for the tourism sector long term strategic planning could be presented (Figure 1).

In order to discuss functionality of the proposed model and evaluate the tourism potential (products, services, infrastructure and management) of rural areas, a survey by questioning experts working in the tourism sector was carried out. Some of this investigation results are presented in Figures 2 – 4.

From the experts' questioning it is very clear (Figure 2) what priorities according to their opinion should be included in the municipal strategic planning documents. The main focus should be placed on increasing facilities for active tourism, but less interesting is historical and cultural heritage sites' development (mounds' and churches' arrangement).

In many cases there are heated debates between policy makers and tourism sector developers about what forms of tourism to promote in the region. The proposed methodology enables decision makers to investigate quantitatively the tourism products in the region and later on to evaluate qualitatively their relevance and importance for the tourism sector sustainable development in the particular region. Based on these evaluations, a feasibility study of the possible tourism sector competitiveness could be done. In further strategic planning process it is important to take into account the neighbouring

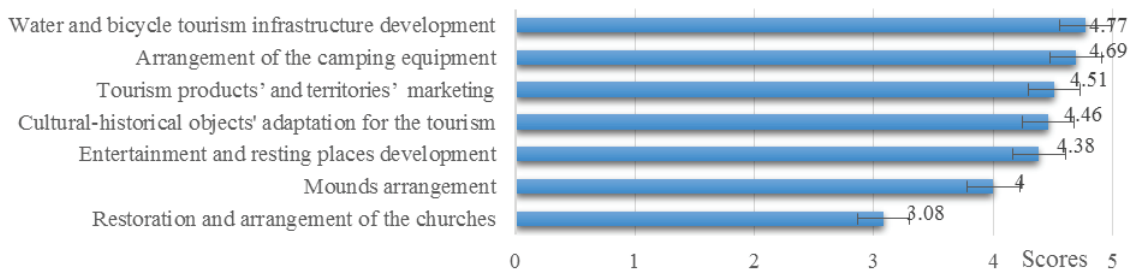


Figure 2. In the tourism sector, necessary work priorities to be carried out for 2014-2020 time period (in scores).

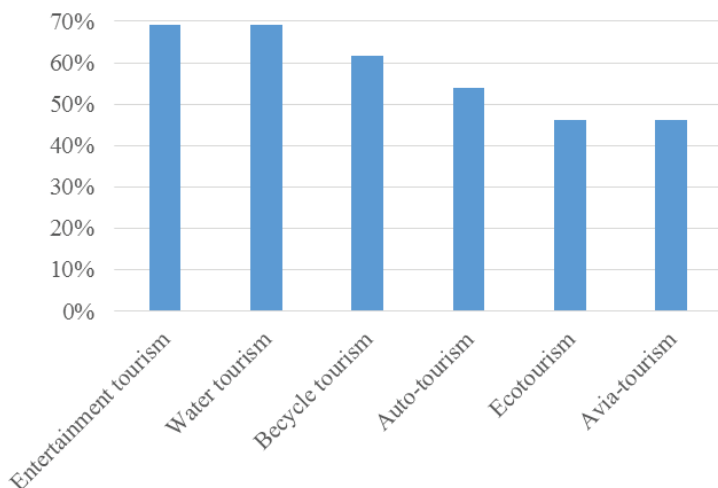


Figure 3. Viable forms of tourism development in rural regions.

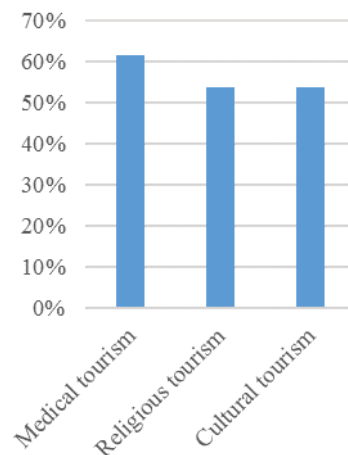


Figure 4. Non viable forms of tourism development in rural regions.

regions tourist attraction and achieve synergy in terms of joint tourism development projects. An example of proposed methodology implementation was used for the investigation of Taurage rural region tourism development perspectives. Some of obtained results are presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4. Perceptiveness of various tourism forms was expressed in percentage scale. In Figure 3, there are presented viable forms of tourism development in Taurage rural region particularly, and accordingly, non viable forms of tourism development in the same region are presented in Figure 4. All respondents have had a possibility to select unlimited amount of viables for their answers.

Continuing the strategic planning process in accordance with the methodology shown in Figure 1, it is appropriate to carry out further investigation even of the individual parts of the same region in order to define most promising tourism development directions. The same methodology could be used but in opposite manner – it is possible to determine the identity of tourism products and services, which should be provided in this territory of the region in order to achieve desired tourism development direction.

This ensures the versatility of the proposed method. Further refinement of this methodology already is planned - to incorporate Information and Telecommunication Technologies with GIS and visualization applications for further tourism sustainable development under the territorial and strategic planning for the better public management and regional competitiveness growth.

Conclusions

1. Tourism is a complex branch of the national economy having a complicated structure. It is important to recognise tourism as a product, a service and a phenomenon, to be well aware of the specificity of each component of the tourism structure as well as their interaction, problems and possibilities.
2. Tourism is a productive sector distinguished by a tendency of growth. Therefore, every public authority or district municipality administration seeking to derive economic benefit from the tourism sector should deliberate on a tourism development policy or strategy, take care of its

- natural, cultural and historical heritage and be capable of efficient management thereof.
3. With a view to achieve sustainable tourism development, effort of the public sector aimed at ensuring a clear tourism development policy as well as the involvement of the private sector offering competitive tourism products and services and mutual collaboration are needed.
 4. The methodology for the evaluation of the regional tourism attractiveness was proposed and examined. It is enough sufficient instrument, useful in the public management process for the territorial and strategic planning, ensuring sustainable tourism sector development and regional competitiveness.

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