

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CONDITIONS IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF LITHUANIA

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Abstract. *The authors of the paper discuss the tourism development conditions in the municipalities of Lithuania. The scientific problem - tourism development trends have not been studied at the local, municipality level in Lithuania and tourism in districts developed without a clear and long-term development strategy and consistent implementation of the programme. The aim of the research is to explore tourism development conditions in the municipalities of Lithuania. Objectives of the research are to characterize the factors influencing the development of tourism; to perform an analysis of the main factors of tourism development in Lithuania; to define the major factors of tourism management in the municipalities of Lithuania. Tourism development issues were discussed; the results of the research (an analysis of scientific literature and questionnaire survey, an analysis of strategic documents) were performed. The factors, which influence tourism the most are the human and financial resources, tourism infrastructure, the variety of tourism services, the virtual environment, the image of a tourism destination/ awareness, management of the tourism destination, the quality of tourism services and events. Tourism development in the municipalities of Lithuania is influenced by such factors, as the development of the tourism planning and management system, an adequate competence of human resources, cooperation between the public and private sectors, planning and organization, the legal framework for tourism, tourism projects development and implementation, a tourism development strategy and research in the tourism development area.*

Keywords: *conditions, factors, municipality, tourism, tourism development.*

Introduction

Due to the influence of economic, social and political globalization processes tourism has become one of the leading industries in many countries. According to the data of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), tourism, which has a direct and indirect impact on the economy, on a global scale creates 9 % GDP, 1 in 11 jobs, 6 % of the world's exports and it is forecasted that the number of international tourists could increase up to 1.8 billion by 2030. Over the last decade, tourism has become an important economic sector in Lithuania - since 2009 each year inbound tourism revenue steadily has increased. According to the

2016 data, Lithuanian tourism statistics, the expenditure of foreign tourists and day visitors amounted to EUR 1.25 milliard.

Many scientists have analysed tendencies of tourism development: Dwyer & Kim (2001), Gunn (2002), Dmitrijeva & Šeniavskij (2009) analysed tourism destination competitiveness factors, Dredge & Jenkins (2007), Sharpley & Telfer (2002), Hall (2007) - tourism planning and development, Go & Govers (2000) - integrated quality management for tourism destination and others. In Lithuania these issues were analysed by Korneičiuk & Pipirienė (trends and development of modern tourism, 2015), Žičkutė (development of eco-tourism in Lithuania, 2014), Romikaitytė & Kisieliauskas (the factors, affecting Lithuanian tourism sector development, 2012), Andrulienė, Armaitienė, Povilanskas, Janulienė, & Dulskis (assessment of Lithuanian tourism potential, 2011), Žilinskas & Petravičienė (conceptualization and trends of tourism development in the Lithuania, 2007), Ligeikienė (tourism development and management, 2003), Žilinskas & Skrodenienė (management of tourism development in the regions 2003) and others. Trends in tourism development at municipality level are researched by Paulauskienė (prospects for tourism management development in Lithuania, 2013), Dapkus & Gaižauskienė (tourism development at municipality level, 2009). However, tourism development conditions at municipality level have not been researched, only sporadic research studies have been performed. For these reasons, tourism in many municipalities has developed without a clear and long-term development strategy and consistent implementation of the programme.

The object of the research is tourism development conditions in the municipalities of Lithuania.

The aim of the research is to explore tourism development conditions in the municipalities of Lithuania.

Objectives of the research are:

1. To characterize the factors influencing the development of tourism.
2. To perform an analysis of the main factors of tourism development in Lithuania.
3. To define the major factors of tourism management in the municipalities of Lithuania.

Research methods. The authors of the paper applied the analysis of scientific literature, quantitative research – a survey, document analysis and questionnaire data generalization. The research instrument (questionnaire) developed by grouping questions into blocks, related to the research topic for the qualitative and quantitative researches. Taking into account the specifics of research, this method is considered to be an important data collection method. Data Sources: the Lithuanian Tourism Law, the National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020. Tourism development issues were discussed and the research results were presented.

The survey sample. The survey sample of the research was calculated according to the formula of Schwarze. The survey involved 25 tourism specialists, responsible for tourism development in tourism information centres and tourism and business information centers in the municipalities of Lithuania (according to the formula a sufficient size to ensure the representativeness of the research sample is 22 respondents).

Scientific discussion on the topic of tourism development in the municipalities

The WTO defines tourism as a type of travel, tour, when a person leaves his job and place of residence for more than one day and less than 12 months, and the aim of the trip is not recruitment or paid activities. For all countries welcoming tourists one of the most important condition is to preserve and develop their national identity. Tourism development is understood as physical changes caused by the increasing tourist interest in the area and the expression of this interest through the increasing incoming flows. According to Ligeikienė (2003), tourism development can be seen as an assumption for the improvement of life quality of tourists and the local community. Tourism development goals in the overall economic structure have impact on and relate to strategies of other industries of the economy, their actions and measures, and the public sector, such as environmental protection, transport, agriculture, regions, development of small and medium businesses. Tourism and regional development are linked to each other in the national and even global context (WTO, 1980). Sharpley & Telfer (2002) states, that tourism has a direct impact on national, regional and local economies, whereas tourism development has potentially beneficial economic effects, which in turn positively affects the destination's economic development. Hall (2007) has supplemented tourism development with a new tradition of sustainable development, formed in the last decades.

In many countries, the most popular tourist attractions related to natural resources (the sea, beaches, climate, mountains, and so on). This shows that the development of tourism (as well as economic benefits) is based on the natural resources that are free, because they do not need to be built or created (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). In order to determine the development of a tourism destination, tourism resources of the destination have to be estimated.

In recent decades, the general trend of public development has determined the rapid development of tourism - tourism has become one of the most popular leisure activities. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2010), rapid tourism growth was mostly influenced by the globalization process, reinforced by socio-economic factors: rising personal income and inheritance, prolonged life expectancy, faster and cheaper air

transport services, improvements in accessibility of various tourism destinations, intensive use of information technologies, the increasing living standard in new developing markets of inbound tourism.

Table 1 summarizes various factors, which influence the development of a tourism destination.

Table 1 Factors, which influence the development of a tourism destination
(source: compiled by the authors of the article)

Author	Factors
Foreign authors	
Dmitrijeva & Šeniavskij (2009)	Political stability, the natural environment, safety, health and hygiene, transport infrastructure, information-communication technologies, price policy, personnel management, tourism infrastructure management of tourism destination, natural and cultural resources
Mikos von Rohrscheidt (2008)	Country economic situation, political situation, security and preparation emergency situation and crisis, country's geographical position, convenience of transportation, the image of the country in the world, market conditions, climate, social norms, scientific and technical progress, increasing life expectancy, lifestyle changes, prolonged leisure time and so on.
Dwyer & Kim (2003)	Natural resources, artificial resources, special events, supporting factors, tourism destinations management, demand factors, factors of market performance
Wöber (2002)	Cultural and natural resources, tourism, infrastructure, personnel competence, variety of the tourism market, the geographic environment, the virtual environment
Sharpley & Telfer (2002)	Creation of jobs places, economic diversification, support for the development of public services, recreational services for tourists and so on.
Go & Govers (2000)	Access to a tourism destination, availability of a tourism destination, quality of service, government support for tourism, price policy, the image of the tourism destination, climate and the environment and attractiveness
Lithuanian authors	
Žuromskaitė (2016)	Lifestyle and motivational factors, demographic, political, economic, environmental, social, technological factors
Indriūnas (2015)	Leisure (recreation) objects, infrastructure of services, infrastructure of passenger transport, engineering infrastructure of the tourism destination, organization of travel, tourism information and advertising

Paulauskienė (2014)	<i>Incentive factors at the municipal level:</i> assignment of EU support, development of tourism infrastructure, priority at national level, marketing of tourism at the municipal level
	<i>Incentive factors at the national level of tourism management:</i> a positive image and awareness of the country, development of tourism infrastructure, formulation of the vision, improvement of qualification
Pliustienė (2012)	Functions and decisions taken by public sector institutions
Baležentis & Žuromskaitė (2012)	Economic, political, demographical, technological factors, security/insecurity, fashion.
Andrulienė et al. (2011)	Tourism resources and infrastructure, components of the tourism industry, the flow of tourists, the image of the tourism destination, activities of tourism related agents, the position of the tourism destination in the tourism network.
Vaitiekūnas & Povilanskas (2011)	Having free time and money, curiosity and the gladness of cognition, globalization and the convergence of world cultures, attractiveness of recreational resources, increasing opportunities for international transport and advertising.
Ligeikienė (2003)	Conditions of globalization, integration, information technology and economic progress and changes in consumer behaviour
Bagdzevičienė et al. (2002)	Social accessibility, the demographic factor, natural resources, geographic accessibility, human resources, financial resources, legal acts, technology, infrastructure, international events, eco-accessibility.

As we can see, experts recommend to assign tourism resources, tourism infrastructure, the variety of tourism services, tourism management, the virtual environment, the quality of tourism services, the image of a tourism destination, and events to the development factors of the tourism destination.

In practice, the development of tourism is realized through plans and selected indicators. Gunn (2002) was one of the first scholars to describe tourism planning as a tourism destination development tool. According to Gunn (2002), the aim of planning relates to increase in income and employment, conservation of resources and conditions for traveler satisfaction. It is noted that in insufficiently or under-developed tourism destinations, plans can become a serious support for further development of tourism, while in the developed countries (regions) they are often used as a tool to 'revive the tourism sector and to maintain its viability in the future' (WTO).

The strategic goal of tourism development in Lithuania is to increase the competitiveness of the Lithuanian tourism sector, because tourism is an economic activity, whose main function is to generate economic growth. At the same time, the socio-cultural impact of tourism is no less important, which affects the infrastructure, increases services and entertainment offers, revives cultural life in the regions, increases opportunities for self-expression of the local population and strengthens cultural identity and individuality.

Planning and management of the Lithuanian tourism sector since 1998 has been based on the regulatory statutory acts and other documents (Tourism Law of the Republic of Lithuania and related secondary legislation), the Territory Planning Law of the Republic of Lithuania, rules for drafting tourism and recreation schemes and plans (projects). Tourism planning is one of the functions and tools of tourism sector management and policy. In order to increase the competitiveness of tourism, Lithuanian tourism development programmes for 2014-2020 provide for planning development goals and objectives. New goals and objectives are set the tourism development programmes in order to implement the national tourism development goals and objectives, which include competitive tourism products and services, development of tourism infrastructure and services, creation and promotion a favourable tourism business environment, implementation of effective marketing and communication devices, increasing the competitiveness and visibility of Lithuanian tourism in Lithuania and international markets, to promote tourism services exports to foreign countries under the principles of sustainable tourism. The goal is to make tourism, as one of the industries of the economy, by properly using the country's tourism resources and offering a marketable, high quality and competitive tourism products in foreign and domestic tourism markets, help increase the income of the population and to contribute to the development of new business niches in order to attract private investment, improve the country's gross domestic product as well as to address regional economic and social development issues, and together - to protect the landscape (natural and cultural) values, the rational use of natural and cultural resources.

As foreseen in the LR Tourism Law, the tourism policy in Lithuania is carried out at the national, regional and local levels as a means to achieve the country's strategic development goals. The research object of the present paper is the development of tourism conditions at the municipal level, and Table 2 presents municipality competences in tourism policy-making and management.

At the municipality level tourism development issues are evaluated in the strategic development plans, but the initiation of management of tourism activities at this level is not mandatory. According to Bryson (2004), the need for a strategic plan in municipalities is based on several factors which are more suitable for a sustainable than a competitive development strategy: to help the organization to organize and execute the changes, to improve decision-making, to increase the efficiency of the entire organization. According to V. Gražulis (2008), a properly chosen strategy helps take the desired location in a competitive market, and the managers to foster values, norms, roles and groups as a whole, while achieving strategic objectives. Success of strategic planning is highly dependent on how the strategic planning models, principles, procedures are associated with the actual performance conditions. According to T. Sudnickas (2011), successful

competition is not possible without a permanent response to the changes taking place and the efficient use of available resources, and is hard to imagine without the strategic management of the organization. Unfortunately, municipality strategic plans are usually seen as a precondition for assistance from the EU Structural Funds, and not as clear priorities and setting directions for balanced and productive activities.

Table 2 **Forming tourism policy and tourism management at the municipal level in Lithuania** (source: compiled by the authors of the article according LR Tourism law, 2015)

Competences of municipality
<p><i>Promotion of tourism business and establishment of tourism information centres:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To promote the tourism business as a job creation and employment measure; 2. To establish municipality tourist information centres. <p><i>Preparation and implementation of the strategic documents and development projects:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. According to the provision of the Lithuanian tourism development programme, to prepare, approve and implement the municipal tourism development programmes (strategies) or municipal tourism and recreation schemes and projects; 4. To develop and implement projects of public tourism and recreation infrastructure. <p><i>Planning and implementation of recreational activities:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To plan and implement the measures, necessary for the protection of recreational areas, recreation and tourism activities in these areas, to develop and manage accounting for recreational areas, to approve regulations for the usage of recreational territories; 6. To plan and organize camps for children and youth activities, to determine the requirements for these camps and monitor their implementation; 7. In order to ensure tourists calm rest, the Lithuanian Government shall have the right to restrict the construction, repair, reconstruction, installation works in resort territories of the municipal council during the tourism season; 8. To perform market research and marketing of tourism resources and services in the municipality area; 9. According to the law, to make contracts with the tourism service providers - legal and natural persons - for the recreational use of resources (lease) for tourism and recreation, to control the execution of contracts.

The situation in the tourism sector in the municipalities of Lithuania

According to the data of State Tourism Department (2017-10-30) Tourist Information Centers (TIC) or Tourism and Business Information Centers (TVIC) operate in 48 municipalities of Lithuania. During the survey, tourism specialists rated the image of the tourist destination with the highest score (4.84 points), in second place - the quality of tourism services (4.83 points), in third place - tourism management (4.68 points), in fourth place- resources (4.53 points), in fifth place - events (4.49 points), in sixth place – the virtual environment (4.45 points), in seventh place - tourism infrastructure and the variety of tourism services (4.42

points) (see Table 3). Improving the image of a tourism destination and promoting its tourism opportunities contributes to solving local social and economic issues and creating welfare.

Table 3 Ratings of important factors, affecting Lithuanian tourism development
(source: compiled by the authors of the article according to the survey data)

Factors	Rating, 5-point system
Image of tourism destination/ awareness	4,84
Quality of tourism services	4,83
Management of tourism destination	4,68
Tourism resources (cultural, natural, human, financial)	4,53
Events	4,49
Virtual environment	4,45
Tourism infrastructure	4,42
Variety of tourism services	4,42

Tourism specialists rated the image of a tourism destination, the quality of tourism services and the management of the tourism destination quite high (see Table 3). Evaluating the resources, the maximum score was given to human (4.86 points) and financial (4.84 points) resources, a slightly lower grade were given to natural (4.42 points) and cultural (4.01 points) resources. Human resources in the tourism sector are very important, because employees of this sector create the country's tourism and hospitality image and hospitality is an integral part of the competitiveness of the tourism sector. In order to strengthen this potential, it is important to continuously develop the professional competence of tourism sector employees, i.e. to constantly improve their skills, knowledge of foreign languages, to improve the image, and develop intercultural competence. The country's tourism resources are one of the most important competitive advantages to attract tourist flows and increase the economic benefits of tourism. The abundance and diversity of Lithuanian natural and cultural tourism resources allows to create and develop products of recreation, cultural and educational tourism, ethnic, rural tourism and eco-tourism, focusing on the segments of the respective market.

Natural and cultural resources are very important in the development of tourism. Evaluating the natural resources, the respondents noted the importance of the presence of the sea (4.67 points), lakes (4.4 points), forest (4.46 points), and the river (4.13 points). Evaluating cultural resources, the respondents noted the importance of national cuisine (4.85 points), castles (4.8 points), manors (4.68 points), museums (4.54 points), folk traditions (4.52 points), urban heritage (4.4

points), archaeological values (4.32 points), folk crafts (4.25 points) and artistic values (4.2 points).

According to the results of the research, the following types of tourism are being developed in Lithuania: in accordance with to the current demand, types of niche, business, conferences, sports and adventure tourism are developed; according to the strategic documents: health sanatorium tourism, ecotourism, recreation, leisure, cognitive cultural, rural tourism (see Figure 1). Natural and cultural resources of Lithuania create preconditions for the development of all the mentioned types of tourism, and the development of health tourism relates to the activities of resorts and resort areas.

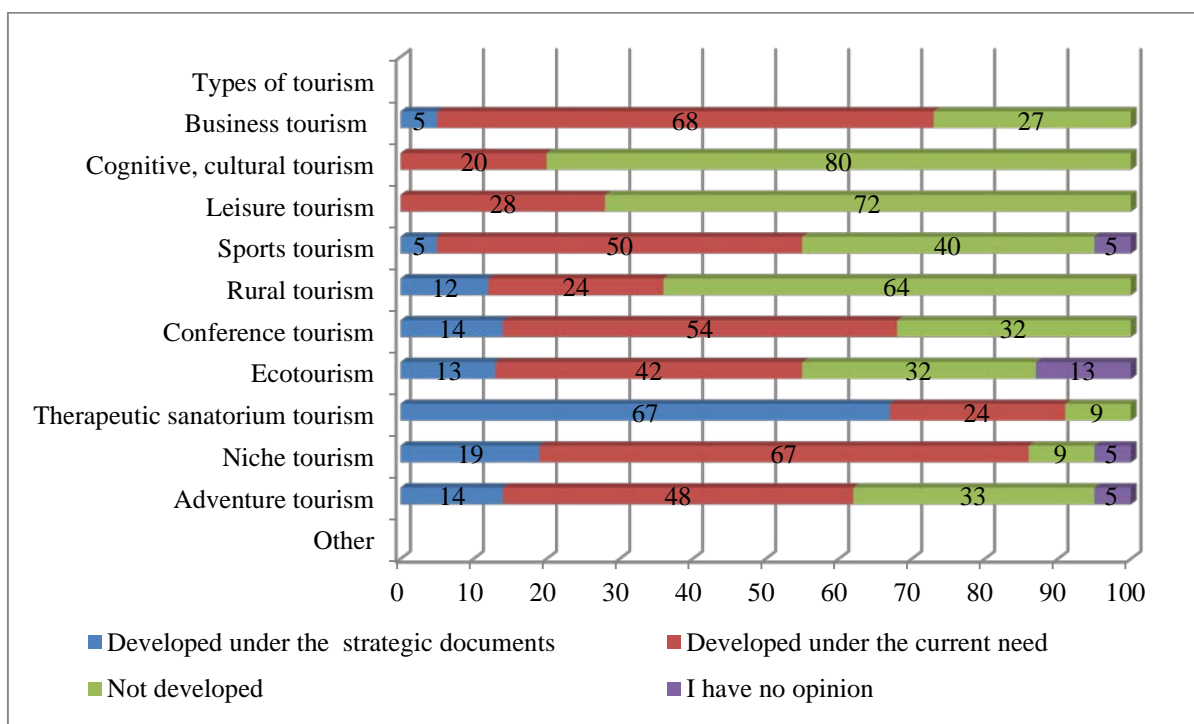


Figure 1. **Analysis of tourism development in Lithuania, %** (source: compiled by the authors of the article according to the survey data)

Various tourism services are being developed in Lithuania. Services are developed based on the current needs (water, catering, entertainment, conference organization, transportation services etc.) or according to strategic documents (tourist information, accommodation, travel organization services).

The tourism experts identified tourism information and accommodation services, social media (Facebook, Instagram etc.) and Internet sites, event organization, visiting heritage as tourism development strengths in Lithuania. The cultural resources to be noted: urban heritage, artistic, archeological values, folk traditions and crafts, museums. The strengths to be noted: tourism infrastructure

(asphalted roads), carriage by road transport, the image of the tourist destination, the management of the tourist destination, the quality of tourism services and human resources. The identified weaknesses included the absence of a variety of tourism services and tourist infrastructure - no bicycle path network, the lack of car parking lots and hiking trails, the poor quality of district roads, the inadequate infrastructure of water ways. The identified weaknesses for virtual services included the lack of mobile applications. There were such threats for tourism development in the region as unplanned change of state economic development priorities, population migration to other countries, the worsening demographic situation in the district and others. Tourism development in the region can benefit from the EU Funds, the growing demand for active recreation and health tourism products in the hospitality industry, quality improvement and implementation of international standards and other options in the domestic and foreign markets.

Conclusions

1. Factors, which influence tourism the most, are the human and financial resources, tourism infrastructure, the variety of tourism services, the virtual environment, the image of the tourism destination/ awareness, management of the tourism destination, the quality of tourism services and events.
2. Tourism experts identified tourism information and accommodation services, social media (Facebook, Instagram etc.) and Internet sites, event organization, visiting heritage as tourism development strengths in the Lithuania. The cultural resources to be noted: urban heritage, artistic, archeological values, folk traditions and crafts, museums. The strengths to be noted: tourism infrastructure (asphalted roads), carriage by road transport, the image of the tourist destination, the management of the tourist destination, the quality of tourism services and human resources. The identified weaknesses include the absence of a variety of tourism services and tourist infrastructure - no bicycle path network, the lack of car parking lots and hiking trails, the poor quality of district roads, the inadequate infrastructure of water ways. The identified weaknesses for virtual services included the lack of mobile applications.
3. Tourism development in the municipalities Lithuania is influenced by such factors, as the development of the tourism planning and management system, an adequate competence of human resources, cooperation between the public and private sectors, planning and organization, the legal framework for tourism, tourism projects development and implementation, a tourism development strategy and research in the tourism development area.

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