EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE STRUCTURE AVAILABLE FOR TOURISTS IN SMALL TOWNS OF LATGALE REGION

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The role and significance of the tourism sphere in the spatial development has been analysed and examined in various authors’ works, however practical research of this field is significant for every area offering tourism services. In this article the structure of services available for tourists in small towns of Latgale region is analysed; its evaluation is provided.

Towns of Latgale region are small rural towns in the number of inhabitants and the attraction of tourists is an essential source of income for local enterprises and inhabitants. That is why it is important to summarise and find out which services are used by the guests of Latgale region without direct tourism goals and how vital they are in the whole region.

Key words: tourism, services available, small towns, city attractiveness.
JEL codes: L8, R1.

Introduction

Towns in the Baltic States, incl. Latvian towns, are relatively small and it causes the shortage of the critical mass for creation of the definite demand with all ensuing consequences. In the given situation the solution for favouring attractiveness of towns is to look for comparative advantages and specialisation. In the frame of the project “Lingvo-Cultural and Social-Economic Aspects of Territorial Identity in the Development of the Region of Latgale” the author conducts research of the criteria of town attractiveness, factors that influence it and possible evaluation methods. The previous analysis of scientific research makes it possible to draw a conclusion that there is no unified approach and system of criteria, which would be universal and applicable for all towns and areas. Moreover the previous research showed various approaches in evaluation of choice of criteria based on the identity of the areas and searching for advantages of competitive capacity, which is the main challenge for the administration of any town or area. In the present studies the opinion about the necessity in the subjective approach in evaluation of town attractiveness is dominating.

The aim of the research is to analyse the service structure that is available for tourists in small towns of Latgale region in order to provide its evaluation and to work out recommendations.

Methodology of investigation

In this research the author used general scientific research methods: information analysis and synthesis, logically constructive, monographic, questionnaires, data grouping and graphical display techniques.
The basis of the investigation is the pilot research done in the framework of the project “Lingvo-Cultural and Social-Economic Aspects of Territorial Identity in the Development of the Region of Latgale” (Nr. 2009/0227/ 1DP/ 1.1.1.2.0/09/APIA/VIAA/071), which was financially supported by the ESF. The project work group devised definite criteria for evaluation of town attractiveness. In the project it is foreseen to organise surveys for 3 target groups: inhabitants, entrepreneurs and tourists. In the given article the author is analysing the results of the pilot research, which were received in the tourists’ survey (55 respondents) in small towns of Latgale Region in the first half of 2010.

Results

When arguing about the significance of attractiveness for tourists it is necessary to note that the role and importance of the tourism sphere in the spatial development has been analysed and investigated in many authors’ works, which covers a wide geographical territory. As an example we can mention D. O. Awaritefe’s research “Destination image differences between prospective and actual tourists in Nigeria”, in which the evaluation of the tourist destination attractiveness is based on the present resources, incl. tourism type, research, as well as the research analyses the impact of some factors (infrastructure, transport means and costs, level of prices, quality of services, communication facilities, social and cultural aspects, etc.) on the choice of present and potential tourists (Awaritefe, 2004). We can mention a different research done by R. C. Runyan “Tourist dependent small towns: Understanding competitive advantage”, where 2 types of towns are investigated (tourism sphere dependent towns and towns that do not depend on tourism), how they use their resources (town image, positioning, mix-retail trade, “magnetshops”) in realisation of the competitive capacity advantages. This research unlike other investigations emphasises the interaction between the tourism sphere and the general town economic development (Runyan, 2006). The existing scientific and practical research position the tourism sphere as an essential type of economic activity, which has a positive influence on the town development.

J. Jansson and D. Power in their publication “The Image of the City – Urban Branding as Constructed Capabilities in Nordic City Regions” reflect their investigation into city brands. These authors believe that it is necessary to choose the competition market or level when managing the town brand:

- global cities should compete in the international enterprise management or international fashion, movie, biotechnology or computer science centre establishment;
- towns of regional importance can compete in creation of local or national companies, state departments and institutions, organisation of national events;
- the goal of small provincial towns is to attract tourists and favour the inhabitants’ staying (Jansson, 2006).

Towns of Latgale region are small rural towns in the number of inhabitants, therefore tourist attraction there is an essential source of income for local enterprises and inhabitants. Consequently, it is important to summarise and find out
which services are used by guests of Latgale region without direct tourist goals. Furthermore, some of these services are general infrastructure objects, availability and quality of which depends on the state and regional development policies. One of the aims of the survey was to obtain quantitative data on the use of available services. Tourists were asked to provide information on the use (or not) of the following services while staying in small towns of Latgale:

- information about the city (maps, brochures, telephones etc.);
- medical services;
- nutrition institutions;
- ramps for people with disabilities;
- shopping possibilities (supermarket);
- public transportation;
- road / pavement quality;
- hotel / accommodation offer;
- mobile (cellular) communication;
- Internet access;
- cultural events;
- entertainment venues (bars, clubs, discos);
- signs, maps;
- tourist information centre.

As a result, some additional information, which is not going to be analysed in a detailed way in this article, was obtained and generalized. The results are summarized in figure 1, where the percentage of people, using the particular services, from the total number of respondents can be observed.

Figure 1 Services used by tourists in small towns of Latgale region (percental)
More than a half of all respondents used services which directly depend on the tourism sphere, i.e., information about the city (maps, brochures, telephones etc.) – 69%, nutrition institutions – 60%, shopping opportunities – 58%. Similarly, 64% – 73% used offers of the general infrastructure – mobile communication, roads and pavements. Relatively less respondents – 24% used such services as public transport and the Internet access points. Few respondents used hotel accommodation. It can be easily explained by two aspects. Firstly, only 20 of 55 respondents, regarding the gathered information, stayed in these towns for more than one day and, secondly, the respondents were Latgale small town visitors not rural tourists. Respectively, entertainment venues (bars, clubs, and discos) were visited by 35% of respondents and cultural events by 47%. The amplitude of the age of respondents is from 17 to 65 years old, accordingly this explains different interests and tourism goals.

Conclusion

As a result the following conclusions can be drawn:

- towns in Latgale region, according to the number of inhabitants, are small towns, therefore tourist attraction there is an essential source of income for local enterprises and inhabitants. Consequently, it is important to regularly summarise and find out which services are used by guests of Latgale region without direct tourist goals;
- there are general infrastructure objects in the area that are situated in tourist available infrastructure environment, the existence and quality of which highly depend on national and regional development policies;
- tourists in Latgale region stay in towns for a relatively short period of time (the majority of tourists – 1 day), that is why it is of great importance to create new tourism products that would encourage tourists to stay longer in this region, thereby enhancing the region's overall development;
- regional tourism policy makers should pay more attention to such a tourism product as shopping possibilities and this requires additional market research and searching for niches (for instance, ecologically clean food trade).

Literature

Tyrimo tikslas – turizmo paslaugų, kuriomis naudojasi Latgalės regiono mažųjų miestų gyventojai, struktūros analizė. Analizės rezultatai grindžiami autorės atliktais eksperimentiniais tyrimais, vykdant Europos Sąjungos fondo finansuojamą projektą „Teritorinio identiteto lingvokultūriniai ir socialiniai-ekonominiai aspektai Latgalės regiono plėtros aspektu“. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad turistų pritraukimas yra svarbus Latgalės regiono įmonių ir gyventojų šaltinis. Siūloma nuolat vertinti turizmo paslaugų naudojimo netiesioginius tikslus, kas įgalina vystyti bendrą regiono plėtrą turizmo kontekste.

Raktiniai žodžiai: turizmas, teikiamos paslaugos, mažieji miestai, miesto patrauklumas JEL kodai: L8, R1.