

TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES IN RIEBINI MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract. *Tourism is one of the driving forces of the global economy, and its role in the national economies increases every year. Tourism is one of the leading export industries in the world, which, despite challenges and turbulences, develops steadily. However, to attract the attention and flow of tourists to the rural areas, it is important to create attractive and sustainable tourism products that could turn into tourist destinations. The aim of the research is to explore and identify possibilities for tourism product development in Riebini municipality. The following tasks were set to achieve the aim: to explore the theoretical aspects of tourism product and cultural tourism product development; to identify possibilities for tourism product development in Riebini municipality. The methods applied in the research: logical and constructive, synthesis and analysis, empirical survey. The research study was carried out within the framework of RTA research grant No. 13.15/5 "Maintenance and renewal of the cultural and natural heritage in Riebini municipality". The authors have developed proposals for development of the tourism sites in Riebini municipality that could transform them into tourist destinations.*

Keywords: *cultural tourism, Riebini municipality, tourism product, tourism product development, tourism resources.*

JEL code: *R1, R3, Z3*

Introduction

In the Latvian Tourism Development Guidelines for 2014-2020, the objective of tourism development policy is set. It envisages sustainable development of tourism in Latvia, enhancing the competitiveness of tourism services in foreign markets; promotion of competitive tourism product development by supporting the creation of new, innovative tourism products with higher value added, including the development of infrastructure, the formation of regional tourism clusters, and the inclusion of Latvian tourism products in the overall tourism offer of the Baltic Sea region; as well as improvement of the quality of tourism products (Latvijas tūrisma attīstības pamatnostādnes, 2014).

Tourists are faced with a wide range of tourism products at the destinations they visit. One of the key challenges for the tourism provider is to understand what makes a trip memorable and establishes a successful

experience? How to create a niche tourism product? Tourism professionals emphasize the necessity of creating innovative and comprehensive tourism products providing an unforgettable experience for different customers.

The aim of this research is to explore and identify possibilities for tourism products development in Riebini municipality.

The following tasks were set to achieve the aim:

- to explore the theoretical aspects of tourism product and cultural tourism product development;
- to identify possibilities for tourism product development in Riebini municipality.

The methods applied in the research: logical and constructive, synthesis and analysis, empirical survey.

Object of the research: possibilities for tourism product development.

Subject of the research: tourism products in Riebini municipality.

Hypothesis: The tourism resources in Riebini municipality could be turned into sustainable tourism products.

Theoretical aspects of a tourism product

In the academic terminology, the tourism product is defined as a commodity, service which is provided for a fee or is free of charge; wealth, values, and conditions or a set of those created by a human activity, having a real consumption value and being produced, created or adjusted by tourism companies and enterprises of other industries to satisfy the interests of tourists and to meet their needs. The basic tourism product is a trip consisting of a set of different services. A tourist can purchase a trip (tourism product) at his/her place of residence and consume it at the place of service (Tūrisma un viesmīlības terminu skaidrojošā vārdnīca, 2008). However, the Tourism Law defines a tourism product using the concept of a tourism service – a purposeful activity to meet the interests and needs of tourists. (Tūrisma likums, 1998)

Abdelati and Bramwell (Abdelati et al., 2015) emphasize that primary tourism products are the main attractions that draw the tourists to certain destinations. Diversifying, reinforcing, and linking these products can be crucial for the competitiveness and sustainable development of the destinations. The research explores the primary tourism products drawing the visitors to the destinations rather than the products (such as catering services, transport) that rarely are crucial in attracting the tourists (Jansen-Verbake, 1986). The physical, environmental, and sociocultural features or attributes of final attractions as major tourism products have been studied by the authors such as Jafari (Jafari, 1982), Smith (Smith, 1994). They emphasize the significance of physical and environmental qualities,

including climatic conditions, the landscape, and ecology, as well as sociocultural characteristics, including history, politics, arts, economic activities, lifestyles, monuments, and buildings. The development of primary tourism products in destinations is a complex task consisting of several elements comprising both tangible and intangible components, including cultures and associations with cultural elements as noted by Morgan (Morgan, 2014), Murphy, Pritchard & Smith (Murphy et al., 2000), Xu (Xu, 2010). The development of the tourism product as a destination accentuates the preservation of natural and cultural heritage in accordance with the sustainable tourism principles, which have been set as a development strategy for the last 30 years (Nickerson et al., 2016).

Cultural and natural heritage is an important intellectual and spiritual treasure serving as evidence of the living past and traditions. Its identification and preservation are in line with the principles of sustainable development.

An individual has always aspired to live and work in a comfortable, rational, and aesthetically high-quality environment that inspires, complements, and creates a mood. Every period leaves its footprints – its monuments – in the space, enriching it. The cultural heritage should not become a dogma, though it should not be given up due to the quality of the human life. The cultural heritage is a collection of all individual and humankind achievements – a huge, yet often underestimated force and energy that can be effectively used to develop the site.

The space, where we live, is not static; it is constantly evolving. Only the original has the highest value in the cultural and historical environment. Losing the original, the society loses a part of the heritage that cannot be recovered. The historical items of culture are covered by the layers of the previous periods – such as qualitative transformations, loss of certain elements, damages, and natural deterioration. Those, too, are the testimonies of the time and, hence, have a cultural value.

The cultural landscape is comprised of three basic elements – nature, culture, and people.

Nature encompasses everything that has emerged due to the natural processes – terrain, lakes, areas where the natural processes dominate.

Culture embraces the items made by a person over the time – traditions, history, buildings.

A person is a user of the place – a local resident, or a guest of a municipality or city (Tempļakalna parka attīstības stratēģija, 2016).

Cultural tourism products in Riebini municipality

The Riebini local self-government has assigned the status of protected cultural and historical objects for 32 sites (see: Table 1).

Table 1 The important cultural objects of Riebini municipality as defined by the decision of the local self-government
(Source: *Riebiņu novada saistošie noteikumi, 2007*)

Galeni pagasts	Riebini pagasts	Silukalns pagasts
The Roman catholic church of Vidsmuiza, Galeni Manor park, Galeni manor complex, Memorial house of Roberts Mūks in Galeni, Household building of J.Zeimuļs in Mičuļevka, Radži well in Sondori, Indāni walley Lomi Old Ortodox church, Makarova Old Ortodox church, Common grave of the WW II soldiers in Galeni, Monument "White cross" devoted for the victims of "The Red Terror" in Galeni, Memorial stone devoted for S. Belkovskis in Malta's Trūpi	Riebini Manor park, Riebini Roman catholic church, Pienini Roman catholic church, Riebini Manor complex, Stepanpole wayside cross, Pienini wooden church, Riebini orthodox church, Skangeli Old Orthodox church, Memorial stone devoted for J.Ivanovs in Babri	Obelisk dedicated to the soldiers of the WW II
Stabulnieki pagasts	Silajani pagasts	Rusona pagasts
Vilcini Old Ortodox church, Polkorona Manor building, Houshold buildings of Polkorona Manor	Kostigi Old Ortodox church, Common grave of the WW II soldiers	Memorial site of the vicitms of the Soviet terror in Caunes, Houshold building of Kastire Manor, Landlords' house of Gailīši Manor, Rušona Manor, Memorial house of J.Baško, Memorial house of J.Streičs in Caici, Aglona railway station, Memorial site devoted to the deported persons in Aglona railway station, The wayside cross "White Cross" in Aglona railway station

Culturally and historically, the territory of Riebini municipality is situated in Latgale region. Riebini municipality includes the following rural territories (hereinafter – *pagasts*) – Riebini, Stabulnieki, Silukalns, Silajani, Galeni, and Rusona (Riebiņu novada Tūrisma..., 2014). Twenty-five cultural monuments are located in Riebini municipality. Twenty of them are the objects of national importance, and 5 – the objects of local importance (Valsts kultūras pieminekļu..., 2012).

Cultural monuments along with the lakes, landscapes, and natural sites are important tourism and recreational resources that should be deployed for the municipality’s development. The most promising cultural tourism products are identified in the Tourism Development Strategy of Riebini Municipality for 2015-2022 (Riebiņu novada Tūrisma..., 2014).

Table 2 The most promising cultural and cultural tourism products in Riebini municipality (*Source: Riebiņu novada Tūrisma..., 2014*)

Resources	Deployment of suggestions for development of tourism products	Major resources with development potential
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Architecture	To include in the tourism offer as one of the main objects of attraction, to ensure the provision of high-quality information (facts, interesting and attractively presented information).	A significant cultural landscape is created by the monuments of architecture such as Riebini Manor, Galeni Manor, Rusona Manor, Rusona Roman Catholic church, and others reflecting the lifestyle of the German landlords in the 18 th and 19 th centuries. Pastari windmill serves as the symbol of the municipality.
Museums	To promote the creation of a modern, interesting, and attractive tourism offer in museums for both local and foreign visitors, to cooperate with other museums and exhibition halls on possibilities for the exchange of exhibitions and collections	The memorial house of Roberts Mūks, a world-renowned philosopher and historian, in Galeni, including his work cabinet, manuscripts, printed materials, library, personal belongings, part of his collection of Buddha statues, pipes, furniture, paintings, and other belongings.

Table 2 continued

1	2	3
Intangible cultural heritage (craft skills, rites, folk medicine, etc.)	To involve tourists, let them participate, promote co-operation in product development and selling of homemade products.	Revitalizing and promoting traditions of cheese making, beekeepers, bread baking, beer brewing, handicrafts, woodworking, ceramics, and others at least regionally. It is necessary to raise the awareness of the local people that these traditions have to be revived and passed on to the future generations.
Gardens, parks	To include in the tourism product offer.	Riebini Manor and park, Galeni Manor and park, Gelenova park are the sites both for cultural and sporting events, and the attractions for individual tourists.
Castle mounds, worship (sacrifice)	To include in the tourism offer as the attractions intertwined with legends and myths.	Ancient Latvian castle mounds and worship sites – Šņepsti castle mound, the stone of sacrifice Upurakmens, the sacrifice site Spuldziņu Melnaiskalns, and others.
Notable persons of Latvian culture, and other prominent persons	To use them for promoting the image and recognition of Riebini municipality in wider tourism target markets.	The homeland of R. Mūks, traditions of applied arts (Silajāņi pottery school), the heritage of J.Pigoznis, J.Ivanovs, J.Streičs, and others.
Religious (sacred) tourism	To incorporate in the tourism offer in accordance with the requirements of the target market, to create routes including these objects.	Churches of all the most common denominations in Latvia are situated in Riebini municipality.

Cultural tourism product development possibilities in Riebini municipality

In 2017, within the framework of RTA research grant No. 13.15/5 “Maintenance and renewal of the cultural and natural heritage in Riebini municipality”, in cooperation with Riebini municipality, the authors have developed a strategy of cultural tourism objects in Riebini municipality. The strategy of cultural tourism objects is part of the tourism strategy of Riebini municipality and part of the overall hierarchy of municipal policy documents.

Currently, the rich natural resources and their diversity determine the existing tourism offer in Riebini municipality. For example, the water resources of Rušona pagasts attract both active tourists and the pilgrims visiting the most popular tourist attraction in Latgale – the Aglona Roman Catholic Basilica. On August 15, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven, the number of visitors of the Basilica reaches up to 450 000 persons (Aglonas novada oficiālais...). The Puppet Museum, the King's Hill of Christ, the Lake Velnezers also are among the most interesting tourist attractions in Latgale (Kristus Karaļa kalns..., 2015).

Klepers in his dissertation "Tourism spatial structures in Latvia, their formation, manifestations, and meanings in the promotion of tourism a destination in the market" (Klepers, 2012) has developed a synthetic zoning approach for identification of the tourism spatial structure. The author suggests using this approach to identify the factors determining the development of tourism in the region, adding to them one more criterion – significance of place perception, that is, places that already have a certain set of ideas in the perception of visitors. Consequently, they can be conditionally divided: fourth-level destinations – a region (e.g. Baltic Sea region), third-level destinations – a country (e.g. Latvia), second-level destinations – a local region (e.g., Latgale), and an initial spatial unit – local destination – a tourist attraction (e.g., tourist attractions of Riebini municipality) (Compiled using Klepers)

The value of Riebini municipality is mainly determined by its natural and cultural resources and objects. Experts' observations suggest that the municipality's possible development scenario involves the provision of recreational, cognitive, and active leisure activities in the rural environment.

The possible development directions of the cultural objects of Riebini municipality are designed with the aim to ensure the socio-economic development of the municipality, deploying the significant natural and cultural resources at its disposal. However, it should be acknowledged that the sustainability of the natural and cultural resources is possible only if there are the necessary funds for their renewal and maintenance, considering the protection, maintenance, and development of the authentic environment and its elements. By investing the necessary financial resources, a unique cultural heritage can be preserved for a long run.

Table 3 Development directions and sustainability of the cultural objects in Riebini municipality (*Source: compiled by the authors*)

Object	Location	How it could be used in tourism
1	2	3
Landlords house of Riebini Manor, Manor complex and park, Riebini Roman Catholic church	Riebini municipality, Riebini pagasts	<p>To clean and improve the pond, to arrange recreation zones for all social groups.</p> <p>To develop active tourism, for example, horse riding routes of various complexity.</p> <p>To develop artisan food workshops (dairy candies workshop, healthy food workshop focusing on local resources) in the buildings of the manor.</p> <p>To create (include) a complementary offer in cooperation with other manor estates in Latvia, for instance, in connection with the Kerbedz family, the Korf family, and the Platenberg family estates.</p> <p>To create an attraction "Latvia in miniature" (starting with the replicas of the churches, the manor estates of Latvia) in the park. Viewing sites over the park of miniatures.</p> <p>Photo service (retro photo) as a complementary service if the tourism offers "Latvia in miniature", artisan food workshops, and Trail of Senses are developed. Along with creating this tourism product, to develop a new offer for the new-weds that can be linked to the opportunities offered by the Pienini church – organization of the matrimonial ceremonies.</p> <p>In the Riebini Manor house (by attracting investments), to set up a spa centre.</p> <p>"To dress" the manor in the canvas with the manor's authentic reproduction on it.</p> <p>The Trail of Senses – a route based on the human senses (e.g., walking barefoot).</p> <p>Organized recreational zones with barbecue facilities.</p>
Rušona Roman Catholic church, its buildings, monastery, fence	Riebini municipality, Rusona pagasts, Vecrušona	<p>The accommodation in the monastery for the target audience of adventure tourism, the hotel's furnishings and comfort level tailored to the lifestyle of Dominican monks.</p> <p>In addition, to offer "silence retreats" (no communication with the purpose – to harmonise inner peace).</p> <p>Event tourism – "One day in the monk's shoes".</p> <p>Ancient science centre (e.g. Alchemist Laboratory). To develop a tourism product based on the experience economy. Thematic experience involving 5 senses to make the tourist's experience live and personalized with involvement and participation.</p> <p>Ancient book exhibitions.</p> <p>In cooperation with schools – <i>schools</i> of historians, archaeologists.</p>

Table 3 continued

1	2	3
Rušonas Manor	Riebini municipality, Rusona pagasts, Vecrušona	<p>In the manor, snails (in Latvian language – “wine snails”) are bred and homemade wine brewed – to include it in the tourist routes (with tasting).</p> <p>The manor has a hotel with a spa offer, which is currently scarcely provided in the region (Dembovska et al., 2017).</p> <p>If appropriate winter conditions, to organize winter events on the Lake Rusona including various activities aimed at different target groups – skating, skiing, sleigh rides, etc.</p> <p>A railcar built on the single-rail, which runs around the park and the lake (built as a carousel, roller coaster).</p> <p>Organized rest zones with barbecue facilities.</p>
Pastari windmill	Riebini municipality, Stabulnieki pagasts, Dravnieki	<p>Old crafts tradition demonstration centre (workshop) – arrangement of experimental laboratories, for example, a flour workshop, agro-tourism (in cooperation with local farmers – farm-visiting days).</p> <p>Domestic animals garden. Biological fields of agricultural plants (for example, medicinal plants, and cereals grown in the municipality) for visiting, the target audience – schoolchildren. A small area (no more than 1 ha). Seasonal tourism product.</p> <p>Organized rest zones with barbecue facilities.</p>
Vidsmuiza Roman Catholic church, Pieniņi Roman Catholic church		<p>The patron (guardian) of the church and related feasts.</p> <p>Organ music concerts.</p> <p>Creating thematic calendars of the sacred objects.</p> <p>To arrange events, happenings where the tourist visits one sacred object on a Sunday, scores points during the year, the most active travellers of the municipality receive the reward (for example, the prize could be a weekend in a significant sacred centre). This activity could be attributed to Latgale tourism products, and Riebini municipality could initiate it. It could be positioned as a travel quest based on the principle of “Travel around Latvia's Manors and Castles!”</p> <p>Ancient Music Festival.</p>
Galēni Manor park and Manor complex		<p>Active tourism development – an obstacle course located above the ground in the park trees. The target audience – children and adults, since there are the varying degrees of difficulty on the track.</p> <p>Rental of sports equipment.</p>
Kastīre Manor stables		<p>Kemperī parking (amenities needed, including showers, electricity, laundry and cooking facilities).</p>
Gailīši Manor, landlord house		<p>Because of the current use of the building, it is difficult to combine it with an attractive tourist product (the tourist is looking for positive emotions that are difficult to combine with the current use of the object).</p>

Conclusions and suggestions

Tourism could be integrated into non-agricultural entrepreneurship, as well as in agricultural enterprises, if it can solve a part of the marketing task – selling the goods. Visits, tastings, and tours at the production site can convince the potential buyers, strengthen loyalty, and encourage sharing the experience. Tourism becomes not only an additional source of income, but also an important component of marketing. Similarly, the crafts and traditional skills, coupled with quality and high design requirements, can be an adjacent tourism offer. Souvenirs, interior design items alongside with artisan food can be required at the tourist sites.

The strength of the Riebini municipality tourism destinations is the constant and predictable flow of tourists. It is not homogeneous, but with a pronounced seasonality. Thus, knowing the motivation of the travellers, there is a chance to develop purposefully new thematically related offers.

In Aglona, the neighbouring territory of Riebini municipality, one of the most popular tourist attractions of international recognition in Latgale region is situated – the Aglona Basilica with over 200 000 visits per year. Recently, the number of visitors has increased by more than 25% - from 250 000 in 2014 up to 314 734 in 2015.

The Aglona Basilica is one of the well-known sanctuaries in the world. Its interior – vaults, arches, and columns – are opulently decorated with Rococo style ornaments. The Aglona Roman Catholic basilica is the centre of the Latvian Catholic denomination, and the sanctuary of the world significance.

There are many tourist attractions and products in the Riebini neighbouring municipalities; they could become “partners” for attraction or cooperation. Local tourism destinations should be organized according to the principle of functional tourism districts taking into account characteristics of the destination, linked tourism flows, and networks of stakeholders.

In the case of Riebini municipality, there are three local tourism destinations developed:

- 1) Landlords' house of Riebini Manor, the Manor complex and park, Riebini Roman Catholic church;
- 2) Rušona Roman Catholic church, its buildings and monastery, fence; Rušona Manor;
- 3) Pastari windmill.



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