

TOURISM AND RECREATION IN THE CURONIAN SPIT IN LITHUANIA – RECREATIONAL-GEOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES IN A NEW EU COUNTRY

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Abstract. Since the middle of the 19th century, tourism in the Curonian Spit has gained an increasing importance. Particularly since the restoration of Lithuania's independence in 1990, the Curonian Spit has to position itself as a holiday destination also at the international market. Besides the customization of the tourist offer, a long-term successful adjustment of tourism in such a way as to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the spit is of vital importance. This requires not only an evaluation of the present market, but also, in particular, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Curonian Spit as well as an analysis of the opportunities and threats for this destination. References 13, Figs 5, Tables 2. In English, summary in Lithuanian.

Keywords: Curonian Spit, tourism, sustainability, SWOT analysis.

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Introduction

The Curonian Spit of Lithuania with its unique cultural landscape offers excellent conditions for a holiday. This headland is still not anchored in the consciousness of European tourists, although it looks back on a very long tourist tradition. But the changing political affiliations have left marks in the tourism of the Curonian Spit, which influenced the tourist development in various ways and with respect to the latest independence in 1990 and the EU entry in 2004 still have an influence today. Based on the assumption that the process of the change and influence is not completed yet, the recreational-geographic developments and perspectives were examined within the scope of a research project in this new EU member state. Building up on the developments and consequences of tourism, the focus of the presented investigation was directed on a critical consideration of the tourism as it presents itself today. This assessment should not only serve for identification of strengths and weaknesses, but also for determining the profile of this destination in order to receive advices for the future development.

1. Background

The Curonian Spit stretches for 98 km from Lesnoje in the south to Klaipeda in the north and separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. The northern 52 km belong to Lithuania whereas the southern 46 km are a part of Russia (Kaliningrad District) (Fig. 1). This headland is a result of the interactions of natural forces like wind and waves, but also a damaging human influence. Human habitation dates back to prehistoric times when the Curonian Spit had already been covered with forests. Till the 18th century, the forests had



Fig. 1. The Curonian Spit (own illustration)
1 pav. Kuršių nerija (autorės iliustracija)

been significantly cut down, so that the drifting sand threatened settlements, streets as well as cultivated fields and buried several villages for more than one time. Since the end of the 18th century, human efforts have aimed at stabilisation of dunes and reforestation. At present, forests cover about 2/3 of the Curonian Spit, 1/3 of the area is still unforested.

Today's ethnic structure of the habitants is a result of the changing political affiliations over centuries. Up to the 13th century, the Livonian and Teutonic Orders had influenced the Curonian Spit. In the following centuries, different countries have occupied the peninsula: in the 17th century it was owned by Swedes, after that by Russians and from 1871 to 1918 it belonged to the German Reich. After a period under French protectorate, the Curonian Spit was part of Lithuania from 1923 until the Second World War, when Germans occupied the Memel Territory again. As the front line came nearer, most of the local population fled, and only few of them returned after war. From 1945 till the independence in 1990, the Curonian Spit belonged to Lithuania, which itself was occupied by the Soviet Union (Kuršių Nerijos Nacionalinis parkas, 2001–2007). These different influences have characterised the cultural and natural conditions for a long time.

2. Methods

To approach the subject of study in a wide range, a combination of different qualitative and quantitative methods of empirical social research was applied. Based on a comprehensive analysis of literature, numerous guide-steered interviews with persons who are involved in the tourism sector took place in the investigation period of June to August 2005 on the Curonian Spit. In addition, a guest survey with 400 guests was carried out in the investigation area whose results of a SPSS-supported evaluation should provide a basis for the future formation of the tourism on the Curonian Spit and as a starting point for concrete recommendations for action. Based on the literature analysis, the interviews, a mapping of the tourist infrastructure in Nida – the main location of the tourism on the Curonian Spit – and the guest survey, concrete topics for which exert urgent need for action, could be defined with the help of a SWOT analysis. This methodical aid was helpful for identification of the strengths as well as weaknesses and for focusing on future regional developments.

3. The development of tourism in the Curonian Spit in the course of time

Tourism in the Curonian Spit has a very long tradition which goes back to the 19th century and therefore gives a supra-local meaning to the places of the Curonian Spit. The typical architecture with stately villas and fishermen's summer cottages got ready formed (Fig. 2). Private room renting became a worth-while business of the Curonian Spit population. The number of guests reached their temporary climax shortly before the Second World War. Juodkrantė and Nida had become the principal places of tourism in the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit. The number of guests in summer excelled the number of inhabitants by multiple times. Before Second World War, the population of Juodkrantė had been about 600 people and additionally there were about 4,000 holidaymakers in summer; Nida with its 1,000 population accommodated about 5,000 holidaymakers in summer, as well (Bučas, 2001).



Fig. 2. Typical architecture on the Curonian Spit – “Villa Hubertus” in Juodkrantė (photo by B. Tutkunkardes)
2 pav. Tipiška Kuršių nerijos architektūra – Huberto vila Juodkrantėje (nuotr. B. Tutkunkardes)

After the Curonian Spit fell under the Soviet rule at the end of the Second World War, a radical change took place, which influenced the cultural landscape and physical scenery, which had grown in their appearance for centuries. Almost the whole ethnic German population was expelled or fled. The Lithuanian population, however, appreciated the cultural values only partly and therefore a large part of the cultural landscape went to ruin by dismantling, building activities or abandonment (Fischer, 2000). From the 1960s on, emphasis was placed on a massive expansion of tourism and for this reason countless rest houses, several hotels as well as gastronomic, leisure and cultural offers were established. For the Lithuanian population the regional variety and beauty of their country has had a high value, which is why a large number of Lithuanians always spent holidays in their own country, mainly on the coasts. However, also the Soviet state recognised the tourist potential of this landscape and disclosed this region early as a discharge area in the Soviet recreational system (Henningsen, 1994). However, the admission to the Curonian Spit was normally prohibited to non-Soviet citizens.

Because of the intensive new building activities, the space in the villages soon was not sufficient any more, so that the built-up areas spread out increasingly to the green dune back. The building boom of the 1970s mixed all architectural styles of the past centuries by the modern construction forms of the Soviet time, which neither fitted with the character

of the building development nor with its spatial dimension in the overall appearance of the locality. However, not only new building operations disfigured this appearance. In addition to this, most fishermen houses from the pre-war time have been affected considerably by rebuilding, building repairs and restoration measures, so that after a classification, carried out by Bučas in 1994, only 28% of the buildings could be counted to the authentic objects of the pre-war time. These few buildings have been preserved in the original state or have been changed only minimally in their original structure, their appearance and the building materials since start of construction (Bučas, 2001). Before the last restoration of independence, only about one quarter of the pre-war buildings had been preserved in their original form, the biggest part had been removed irreparably or has been changed.

The independence of Lithuania from the Soviet Union in 1990 implicated many changes, which in particular took place immediately after the restoration of independence. Caused by the new freedom of travel as well as by the economic restructuring to the free market economy, tourist suppliers now competed for the guests. They had to hold their own not only among themselves, but also in the international competition. Lithuania was discovered bit by bit as a new destination by European holidaymakers and therefore it became more and more important for the municipality of Neringa to position and establish itself at the international tourism market, which required an assimilation of the touristic infrastructure to West European requirements. Although immediately after the independence the first wave of international tourists visited the Curonian Spit, the financial means did not exist for bigger investments yet. Only when the economy recovered in the middle of the 1990s (Hamburgisches Welt-Wirtschafts-Archiv, n.d.), the touristic offer improved decisively in qualitative and quantitative respects for the rising number in guests.

Particularly sharply rising figures of foreign guests could be registered in 1991–1993. Several curious people and, above all, the “homeland tourists” flocked on the Curonian Spit. These guests were predominantly Germans who associated either Thomas Mann or the native country of their forefathers (roots tourism) with the Curonian Spit. Because of missing statistics, the official information about guest figures on the Curonian Spit only can be given for the years from 2000 onwards. However, these also allow supposing that a large number of guests in private lodgings (see below) were not counted completely. For the city of Neringa only two private renters were reported, in which, however, at least 334 guests were counted! This led to the fact, that the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania announced a volume of guests on the Curonian Spit of only about 41,000 guests in accommodation facilities for 2004 of which about 53% were Lithuanian. The number of the overnight stays in all accommodation facilities amounted in 2004 to about 110,000 (Lithuanian State Department of Tourism, 2004).

The end of the Soviet time represented an uncertain future for many Curonian Spit inhabitants. The dissolution of the kolkhozes caused an excursive increase of unemployment; privatisations and the transition to the market economy ran slowly. Hence, many locals used the chance to earn their money in the growing tourism branch. Therefore, since independence private renting gained in importance once more. Every-one who could spare one or several rooms rented them during the high season to holidaymakers, so that locals moved together or lived temporarily with friends and relatives. People who did not have this possibility searched for other niches to participate in the tourism business. Because no more new constructions were permitted since the establishment of the national park in 1991, unapproved constructions of garages-summerhouses in the green protective area in the district of Purvynė were developed during the last years for the purpose of renting (Bučas, 2001).

4. The Curonian Spit as a recreational area

The local recreation on the Curonian Spit is no modern appearance, though. It rather took place already at the beginning of the last century, at the time when the city of Memel

(today's Klaipėda) in 1900 bought land in Smiltynė and started with the construction of a quarter of villas some years after. The area around Smiltynė was meant to be converted to a suburban park, assisted by the ferry Memel–Smiltynė created in 1901. As well as in the other settlements of the Curonian Spit tourism flourished: paths were laid, catering and commercial pavilions were built, a yacht club and a sail school were established and the re-building of the fishermen houses to summer cottages began. After the Second World War, the local recreation in Smiltynė recovered faster than the tourism in the settlements situated in the south. In 1969, Smiltynė was declared as a suburban park for Klaipėda and in this context the construction of a sea museum in the fortress of Kopgalis was decided. When this museum opened in 1979, the flow of visitors rose rapidly once again. Today Smiltynė is the most important recreational area for the population of Klaipėda with about 25,000 visitors every weekend during high season (Bučas, 2001). The objective of most excursionists is the beach on the Baltic Sea and/or the sea museum at the northern point of the Curonian Spit, which attracts about 500,000 visitors every year (Sutkus; Peitsch, 1988).

5. The accommodation and leisure facilities on the Curonian Spit

The basis for the present tourist offer was already laid during Soviet time. Indeed, during the last years it was tried to adapt this offer to current requirements, but the prohibition of new construction set boundaries to the development of tourist infrastructure or big hotel complexes. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the city of Neringa and their population from aiming the whole economic power at tourism.

Tourism takes place mainly in Atragis village (Hakendorf) and Pagrindinis village (Hauptdorf) of Nida. Here not only the base infrastructure is concentrated, but in this part of Nida most gastronomic facilities, bicycle renters, souvenir shops and in particular most lodging facilities can also be found. For this occasion, the large number of private room renters is remarkable, in particular in Atragis village, the district which was constructed on the dune back in the Soviet time. According to locals, approximately 90% of the inhabitants rent their rooms or flats to visitors during high season. Officially, everybody who has acquired a licence from the municipality is allowed to let; the number of those, who "let" to friends and relatives is immensely high. In relation to the hotel accommodation sector on the Curonian Spit several problems can be ascertained, which complicate not only an appraisal considerably, but also concern the guests themselves:

- The inconsistent terminology in the tourist accommodation industry: the offer exists of a huge number of different facilities of hotel and non-hotel accommodation, which ranges from traditional hotels through to pensions, bed and breakfast facilities, holiday flats, apartments, a camping place and rest houses. But there is no consistent terminology for these facilities; so that many tourists do not know, which facility they should book before arriving.

- The discrepancy between the official and the actual encountered accommodation facilities: it concerns in particular the garages-summerhouses in the district of Purvynė in Nida (see above) and the apartments built on the dune back in Kuverto str. (similar problems exist in the villages of Juodkrantė, Preila and Pervalka) Here, apartments are let, which cannot be found in any accommodation guide.

- The absence of an accommodation guide for all lodging possibilities: according to own studies, a lot of guests travel without previous reservations to the Curonian Spit and ask for the lodging possibilities at the information centres only on arrival. Here, they can have a look at folders or they get a brochure in which the lodging possibilities are listed, almost exclusively lodgings in Nida, though. A complete list about all accommodation facilities on the Curonian Spit is totally absent.

In spite of the demonstrated problems, it can be stated that the facilities of the non-hotel accommodation amount to a clearly higher percentage in the whole accommodation

sector than hotels and pensions. This shows the strong dependence of the locals on the tourism as well as the dependence of the guests on the accommodation offer by locals, since without the countless private lodgings the capacities would have been exhausted already.

As a result of the rich regional and cultural heritage, the Curonian culture has become the basis of the leisure and cultural offer. In particular, traditions like the construction of the kurėnai boats and the carving of pennants for the weathercocks, the fishery and the history of the amber mining or the painting are integrated in the leisure and cultural offerings. According to own experiences, this cultural offer is on the one hand aimed one-sided at art and classical music, but on the other hand the exhibitions of the museums are insufficient, less informative and not up-to-date, so that even young guests are not attracted by this supply. However, with regard to the unsteady weather, the museums and exhibitions add to the bad weather offer, of which it lacks in total on the Curonian Spit, but which would be of decisive importance especially for young families with children.

Based on the natural conditions, comparatively more possibilities exist to spend time outside. Apart from the beach at the Baltic Sea and the places of interests, the Curonian Spit offers excellent conditions for cycling, which is useful for many inhabitants as well as seasonal workers by letting bicycles. According to the persons who let bicycles, this leisure activity is pursued especially by German guests, who rent the bicycles for days or even weeks, because they feel in contrast to the Lithuanian guests (who usually make demands on this rental service only for some hours) the prices as very good.

The cultural and leisure offer is added by the gastronomic establishments, which are concentrated, as well as the lodging facilities, with priority in Atragis village (Hakendorf) and Pagrindinis village (Hauptdorf) in Nida. A great importance is attached to these gastronomic services especially in view of the preferential lodging kind "private renting", because they indirectly complete this lodging offer.

6. Current pattern of requirements based on a survey

In the context of this study a survey should give information on the guest structure and the guest satisfaction to derive conclusions and guidelines for the future shaping and marketing at the source markets. For this purpose 400 guests were questioned on the Curonian Spit in July 2005 with the help of a fully-standardised questionnaire.

The analysis documents that 64% of the questioned guests came from Lithuania and 22% from Germany. The third-biggest group – indeed, with wide distance – describes the guests from Latvia and Russia (in each case 2%) (Fig. 3). In comparison to the total guest structure in Lithuania, the survey showed an above-average percentage of guests from Germany on the Curonian Spit (only 8% in Lithuanian accommodation facilities in comparison to 22% in accommodation facilities on the Curonian Spit). This fact based in particular on the former political affiliation to the German empire and the consequent "homeland tourism".

The questioning confirmed the traditional popularity of the Curonian Spit. 72% of all interviewees had already been on the Curonian Spit, more than half of them even frequented it more than five times (Fig. 4). Related to the recurring visitors, these guests were to 93% from Lithuania, whereas first time visitors came mostly from Western Europe. Not only this group of recurring visitors testifies the popularity but also the wish for a further holiday on the Curonian Spit: 92% of all interviewed guests replies that they would come back with pleasure.

A relatively prolonged length of stay of the overnight guests (N=352) arose from the dominance of the travel aim "vacation". On an average they spent 7.6 days on the Curonian Spit. Two thirds of all questioned guests stayed longer than four days. In contrast to this, the percentage of guests who spent a short break (2-4 days) was relatively low. 10% of the questioned guests visited the Curonian Spit within the scope of a day trip (Fig. 5).

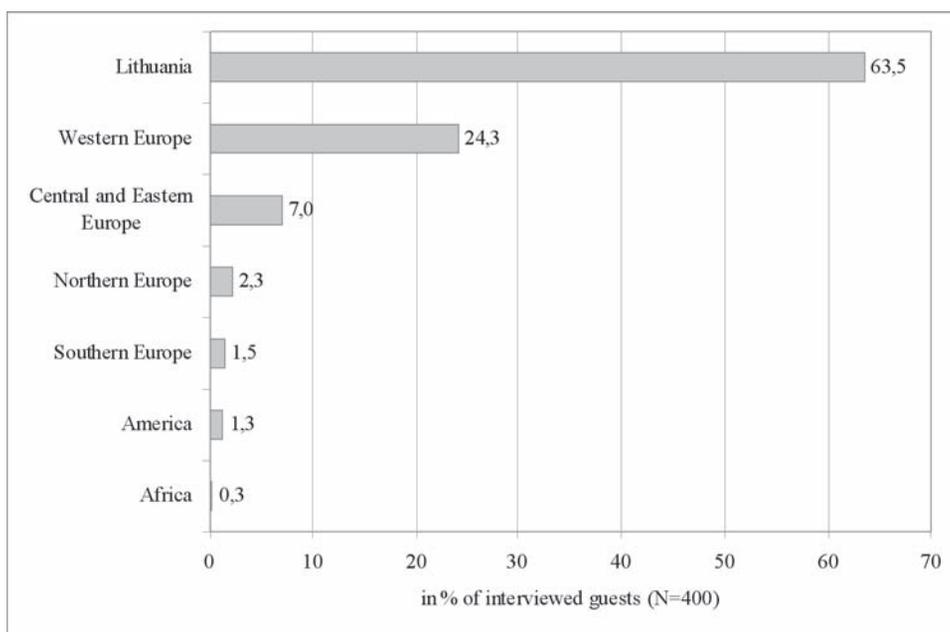


Fig. 3. Country of origin of the interviewed guests (own survey) – graphics-interpretation: Western Europe: Belgium, Germany, France, Netherlands, Austria; Central and Eastern Europe: Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Belarus; Northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, Sweden; Southern Europe: Greece, Italy, Spain; America: Canada, USA; Africa: South Africa

3 pav. *Apklaustųjų svečių kilmės šalis (individualus tyrimas). Grafinis vaizdas. Vakarų Europa: Belgija, Vokietija, Prancūzija, Olandija, Austrija; Centrinė ir Rytų Europa: Estija, Latvija, Lenkija, Rusija, Slovakija, Slovėnija, Čekija, Vengrija, Baltarusija; Šiaurės Europa: Danija, Suomija, Didžioji Britanija, Norvegija, Švedija; Pietų Europa: Graikija, Italija, Ispanija; Amerika: Kanada, JAV; Afrika: Pietų Afrika*

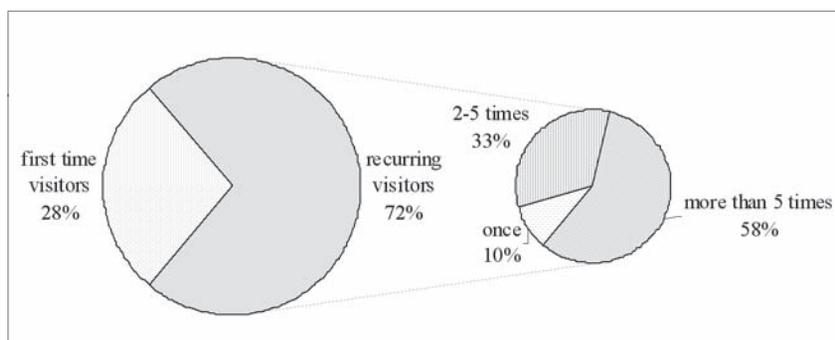


Fig. 4. Frequency of travelling to the Curonian Spit (own survey; big circle: N=400, small circle: N=239)

4 pav. *Apsilankymų Kuršių nerijoje dažnumas (individualus tyrimas: didelis apskritimas: N = 400, mažas apskritimas: N = 239)*

By the analysis of the age structure a mostly young audience emerged. 75% of the 400 questioned guests were younger than 46 years. Differentiated between the nationalities the analysis showed an obvious lower age average for the Lithuanian in contrast to the Western European guests: 85% of the Lithuanians were younger than 46 years, while 53% of the Western European guests were 46 years and older. With re-gard to the perspective development of tourism on the Curonian Spit, the lower age average is to be attached major importance, because these guests will also be able to make a journey in the next twenty or thirty years.

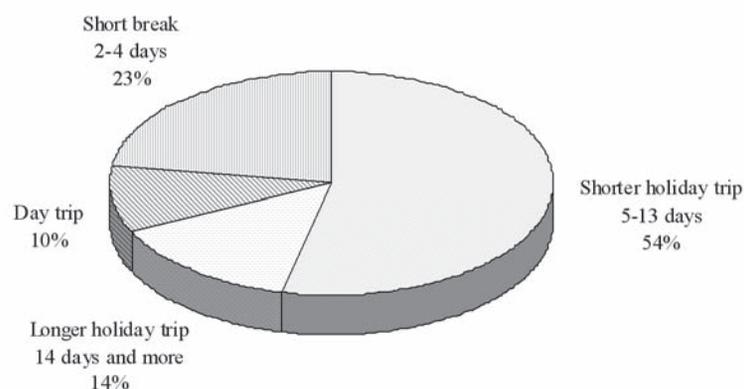


Fig. 5. Length of stay of the interviewed guests (own survey; N = 400)

5 pav. *Apklaustųjų svečių buvimo Kuršių nerijoje trukmė (individualus tyrimas: N = 400)*

The main holiday resorts on the Curonian Spit are traditional and on account of the accommodation facilities the villages of Nida and Juodkrantė. The dominating accommodation type was with 48% the holiday flat or rented private room, which is mainly observed in the countless fishermen houses. The accommodation type “hotel” was given merely from 16% of the questioned overnight stay guests and was mainly demanded by the West Europeans. The only camping place of the Curonian Spit in Nida was used to a comparatively less degree by 5% and with priority by Western Europeans. For the marketing at the source markets an analysis of the guest profile as well as the habits and requirements of the different nationalities is of high relevance. A target-oriented advertising at the suitable markets is the basis for winning new guests. Table 1 shows separately essential characteristics of the Lithuanian and Western European guests, as the proportionately biggest groups of all interviewees.

Table 1. Characteristics of the holiday behaviour of Lithuanians versus West Europeans on the Curonian Spit (own survey)

1 lentelė. *Atostogaujančių svečių iš Lietuvos ir Vakarų Europos elgesio skirtingumai (individualus tyrimas)*

Characteristics	Lithuanian	West European
Frequency of travelling	Recurring visitors, also in future	First time visitors
Length of stay	Shorter holiday trip (5-13 days)	Short break (2-4 days)
Place of accommodation	Mainly in Juodkrantė	Mainly in Nida
Accommodation type	56% in holiday flats	33% in hotels, in total more indifferent
Age	Younger age groups predominate	Older age groups predominate
Travel incentives	Scenery, sun/ sand/ beach	Discover an unacquainted country, scenery
Aspects to attract attention	Have been before	Friends or relatives, print media
Main activities	Experience of landscape, recovery & idleness	Enjoy the culture, see the sights, experience of landscape

7. Guest satisfaction

In view of the marketing and the future development the purpose of the investigation was to examine what puts out the special charm, or what the guests especially like. According to the results of the survey, in addition to the beauty of scenery (67% of the

interviewees stated this aspect) and the beach at the Baltic Sea (31% of the respondents), it is the tranquillity (29% of the respondents) that is appreciated in particular by the Lithuanian guests. Due to the fact that for a domestic holiday at the seaside, there are merely available the cities of Palanga and Neringa, this aspect is stated more often by the Lithuanians. While the touristic intensely developed Palanga on the northern Baltic coast resembles an "entertainment district" in high season, the Curonian Spit emits comparatively a lot of rest. In addition to this, positively to be mentioned is the relatively high percentage of those, who has highlighted the inhabitants and her way of life, 10% of all interviewees gave this answer. The climate (9%) and the cleanliness (6%) are also aspects, which positively attract the guests' attention.

To be aware of the positives, nevertheless, is not enough to guarantee the high number of regular visitors or to attract new ones. For this, grievances should be identified, which have an annoying affect on the stay. The analysis of the survey shows that on the one hand the guests were very content in general (36% of the interviewees noticed that nothing displeases them), but on the other hand it also demonstrates great weaknesses in leisure facilities (18% of the interviewees). In particular, the absence of entertainment facilities in the evening and attractions for children was criticized. Furthermore, the survey has resulted that also shopping facilities (14% of the interviewees) are insufficient. Not only the quantity of stores is low, but also the range of goods. Moreover, in contrast to non-tourist regions the prices are comparatively high, so that the local population does their shopping mostly in Klaipėda. Another aspect concerns the cultural offer (6% of the interviewees), which is regarded not only as too limited, but also according to own experiences, as not acceptable and not up-to-date. Likewise 6% of the interviewees criticized the gastronomic offers, which were appraised qualitatively as well as quantitatively as insufficient. Also the critical remarks to the service (5% of the interviewees) and unfriendliness (3% of the interviewees) should finally be emphasized, because of their relevance for the guest satisfaction and thereby for the return. As well, this point of criticism can be an expression of a changing mentality of the local population or of the tourist suppliers. The "snub" of a big mass in guests seems to gain in importance in contrast to quality of guest relations, with which the Curonian Spit could run the risk to lose its friendly and cosmopolitan character.

8. The regional-economic meaning of tourism

The tourism is a growth trade, which consists of a huge number of services and material goods, which form a complex net of interactions. All services and material goods that a guest asks directly at the supplier, lead to the direct added value in the region. Therefore, direct effects arise mainly in the field of lodging and catering, in the field of traffic, in retail trade as well as for tour operators. Since these tourist suppliers are dependent on ancillary industries and these again on other ancillary industries, long value chains originate. This indirect demand arises especially in the field of construction, in the trade and crafts sector, in the wholesale trade, in the food economy, in advertising agencies, at energy providers and insurers. The turnovers from the direct and indirect demand lead to a higher purchasing power of the regional population, which allows on the other hand a higher demand in consumption goods and leads to an increase in total demand (induced added value) (Eisenstein; Rosinski, 2004).

In addition to these value chains, important employment effects originate from tourism. In the course of the independence of Lithuania and the implementation of the free market economy, circulations took place also in the catering and hotel industry. According to information of some tourist suppliers, there were temporarily a lot of dismissals in this sector during the immediate years after the independence. In contrast to this, the official statistics for 1995 till 1998 show rapidly increasing employee's figures in hotels and restaurants (118 on 323) on the Curonian Spit, which have slightly decreased again

during the subsequent years. For the year 2003, 222 employees are indicated in all hotels and restaurants (Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2005). At this point, it should be pointed out again that only hotels and restaurants enter the statistics, but not the private suppliers. Even if they have no employees, the employment effects, which are insufficiently quantifiable, affect this segment of the hotel industry likewise.

The distinctive seasonality does not allow a continuous employment in tourism on the Curonian Spit. In particular, the seasonal workers like bicycle renters, souvenir and fish sellers or icemen pursue their specific seasonal work on the Curonian Spit only for few months of the year, off-season they work in other economic sectors. This activity means a profitable second job for which they even take a vacation from their regular work. This division of labour cannot only be regarded economically but also spatially: According to information of many suppliers, most employees in the tourism sector are only living on the Curonian Spit during the season, their main residence and main workplace is mostly located in the bigger cities.

9. Future efforts for the destination

To extend the market position in the intensifying competition, increased efforts are made by the Curonian Spit to enhance the guest figures. Based on the relatively short season an expansion of this is obvious to increase the economic efficiency. According to information of the travel agency BaltTours in Nida, strategies exist to establish a second season at the turn of the year by the organisation of New Year's Eve travelling and the traditional ice fishing. The municipality of Neringa pins their hopes on a bridge, which should connect the Curonian Spit with the opposite side of the lagoon. As the bridge will entail probably an even higher traffic volume than exists already, this plan is to be seen quite critically. However, there is no written information available to the municipality of Neringa. Forward-looking are efforts in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation. According to information of the national park office, these measures range from zoning, planning of a new visitor centre in Juodkrantė, the construction of pathways and a visitor management up to environmental education projects for children and school classes. Even if these activities in the nature conservation do not contribute directly to an increase of the visitor figures, they are still an important element of the tourist development on the Curonian Spit. To present itself at the market as an eco-friendly destination becomes more and more important today and additionally contributes decisively to the fact that this destination is still also preserved for future generations. Nonetheless these divergent attempts cause conflicts of interests, of which many of the responsible persons are aware of and who try to take remedial action by qualified projects.

10. The Curonian Spit in the European context

Apart from the enlargement of the tourist market accompanied by the positive economic effects, the integration in the European context enabled the Curonian Spit to participate financially as well as cooperatively in Europe. By financial assistance of different EU programs (in particular PHARE and EFRE), several transnational co-operations are already developed in which also stakeholders of the Curonian Spit were involved. Against the background of the vulnerable landscape, a growing action readiness can be ascertained, which is based on the knowledge that:

- in Soviet time less consideration had been shown for the nature and environmental protection, respectively massive overexploitation was practised.
- an intact nature (as the capital of the tourism) is the basic condition for the success of a sustainable tourist destination.
- the tourist offers have to adapt to the demands, so that the Curonian Spit can remain on the tourism market.

- all components of a sustainable development should be considered to strengthen the regional economy.
- the return to common cultural-historical history in the Baltic Sea region facilitates the integration in the European context.
- co-operations and exchange of experience are necessary to solve transnational problems.

Exemplary for the engagement of the most different stakeholders on the Curonian Spit can be named the projects “Coastal Sustainability as a Challenge”, “EAGLE” or also “LAGOMAR Key to history - Key to the future”, which, apart from the removal of apparent problems, are aimed at pointing out new strategies and courses of action for the touristic future as well as to guarantee exchange of experience by passing on best-practice-examples (BSR Interreg III B, n.d.).

11. SWOT analysis

Although a wealth of positive first signs can be recognised to adapt the tourism to international standards and to make tourism consistent with the damageable nature, deficits exist in different fields as the following SWOT analysis demonstrates. By a comparison of strengths and weaknesses which are based on the present situation as well as opportunities and threats which deal with the future formation, important fields of action can be identified. In table 2 the central results of the presented study are summarised.

Table 2. A comparison of essential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
2 lentelė. *Pagrindinių privalumų, trūkumų, galimybių ir pavojų palyginimas*

	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
Landscape, nature and environment	Diversity of landscape Bracing climate Distinction of the beaches of Nida and Juodkrantė with the „Blue Flag“ for cleanliness Environmental education offers	Dune slips and demolition as a result of disregard of interdictions (Fischer, 2000) Damage of the vegetation cover and decrease of the vegetation diversity (Olšauskas, 1996) Air pollution as a result of eutrophied lagoon in summer	Trend towards the experience of nature and nature tourism Added value from tourism can invest in nature protection Interdiction of new building activities in the whole national park	Disturbance of flora and fauna by high flood of tourists Decline in biodiversity Conflicts of interests between ecological and economical development
Culture, population, overall appearance of the locality	UNESCO World Cultural Heritage/ historical structure Regional initiatives for the protection of natural and cultural heritage Typical regional cuisine Cultural interest of the guests	Minor and deficient cultural offerings Displacement of locals to the suburbs during season Deserted places in the off season based on high percentage of secondary residences	Preservation of cultural values by cherishing tradition and custom Discussion the Soviet time and its integration as a part of history Strengthening of cultural tourism	Change of cultural peculiarities (Losang, 2000) Decline of cultural values Development of fringe groups by out-of-town seasonal staff
Tourist offer	Good offer in private rented accommodation facilities Diversity in gastronomic offer Wide-ranging tourist infrastructure on the beach	Unclear accommodation offer Deficient leisure time facilities (in the evening, for children) Missing attractions in the off season	Enlargement of diversity of attractions Presenting the accommodation offer in <u>one</u> brochure	Elimination of the rural character and of traditional appearances of locality
Transport	Very good conditions for bicycling based on the plane landscape Regular bus service from the ferry to the settlements	No continuous cycleway over the Curonian Spit Traffic congestions and long wait at the ferry during high season Impairment of nature and landscape by heavy traffic and parked cars	Upgrading alternative means of transportation and concurrent monetary restrictions for motorists Airport of Palanga (about 30 km far from Klaipėda) Cycling as leisure activity is very popular with guests	Noise exposure, air and environmental pollution caused by increased traffic

	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
Figures of guests	Increasing figures of guests Growing diversity of source markets	Problems with statistic data based on the high percentage of private room renters Figures of guests are too high from guests' point of view	Young average age of guests and high percentage of regular visitors as a capital for the tourist future Saving the future market by customizing the offer	Decreased figures of guest because of saturation the market (Losang, 2000) Decline of figures of Lithuanian guests as a result of price advances
Economy	Increased purchasing power at local inhabitants Employment effects/ private renting as a second job	Increased cost of living for local inhabitants Short season/ seasonal unemployment	Encouragement the low season by conference tourism, wellness or specific events	Growth of economic disparities Migration of young inhabitants as a result of the mono-structured labour market
Cooperation		Insufficient willingness to communicate and cooperate between the national park management and the municipality of Neringa	Involving the local population in planning processes and projects Clarifying the authorities to raise the effectiveness	Self-interests abort common projects
Marketing/ Image	Participation at international tourism fairs Increased presence in media in West Europe	Still low level of awareness at the European guests No consistent internet presence of the Curonian Spit	High quality and cultural tourism related to experience of nature Target-oriented marketing and formation of an image Benefiting from the inquisitiveness to a new EU-country for the marketing	
European integration	Active cooperation of stakeholders from the Curonian Spit at transnational projects Facilitated regulations on arrival for West European	Laborious and expensive purchasing of visa for the visit of the Russian part of the Curonian Spit	Enlargement of transnational co-operations Claiming of benefits for projects which aim at a sustainable regional development	Labour migration of young inhabitants to EU-countries Tourism on Curonian Spit is not able to maintain its position in the international competition
Quality	High percentage in guests who travel more times High percentage in guests who aim at come back for another visit High guest satisfaction	Missing know-how in tourism management and at tourist providers Unfriendliness and missing helpfulness of staff in the tourist information	Saving and intensification the quality by (eco-)labels Qualification measures for the tourism staff Regular evaluations	Quality loss because of the commercialisation

12. Need for action

To maintain itself at the international tourist market, the Curonian Spit has to remain competitive and, at the same time protect the touristic basis – the natural and cultural heritage. But for this, a big call for action exists in several sectors, so that based on the SWOT analysis the following fields of action can be identified:

- Protection of culture and environment
- Intensification of transnational co-operations
- Enhancement of quality
- Formation of a specific image and marketing

Field of action 1: Protection of culture and environment

As a base not only for tourism, but also as the basis of life of locals, it is required to force the preventive measures of the regional and cultural values. The growing importance of tourism and the increasing number of tourists strengthens the impact on nature as well as on the ethnic culture. The further tourist development requires a high level of sensitivity towards these values, which is only possible if conflicts of interests will be eliminated and a common purpose will be defined. Therefore, the strengthening of the collaboration between the national park management and the municipality should be the central aspect of planning.

Field of action 2: Intensification of transnational co-operations

A further object for a sustainable tourism development describes the intensification of the transnational and transregional co-operations. In this connection, not only the financial aspect should be emphasized, but rather the exchange of experiences with other countries and regions, which depend on tourism as the Curonian Spit on the one hand, but on the other hand committed themselves to environmental protection. In view of the trend towards the experience of nature, the national park tourism becomes more important (Eagles; McCool; Haynes, 2002), however, conflicts of interests are mostly preprogrammed. Here best-practice-examples can help to avoid problems and to find sustainable solutions for a linking of tourism and nature conservation.

Field of action 3: Enhancement of quality

Even if the tourism still prospers, the competition between the destinations aggravates and the quality management becomes more and more important. In order to not risk losing the position in the international competition, evaluations and qualification measures are necessary. However, in the discussion about enhancement of quality in tourism, it has to be marked critically that quality has its price and that a high-priced tourism will have consequences on the composition of the guest structure. In this context the question arises whether the trend towards the high-priced quality tourism is really welcome or whether a mixed offer should be aimed for all social classes.

Field of action 4: Formation of a specific image and marketing

In view of the future development of tourism, another central action field can be named: the insufficient marketing strategy so far. Although the presently high figures of guests give the impression that a re-working of the current marketing strategy is redundant, this becomes more important, the greater the market becomes. As on the one hand the trend to travelling abroad has also reached the Eastern European countries and additionally, concerning the German guests meanwhile the question come up whether the home-land factor or the inquisitiveness factor is possibly already discussed, but on the other hand the Curonian Spit has become increasingly more interesting for Southern European guests, a target-oriented high-quality marketing of the Curonian Spit will be unavoidable in new source markets. To be able to develop an effective marketing strategy, it is still to be clarified with which image the Curonian Spit should be commercialised and at the same time stand out against other destinations. For this purpose planning agencies of the Curonian Spit should work increasingly on their image and on a unique selling proposition.

Formation of a master plan

As the objectives of the above mentioned fields of action strongly differ from each other and, in addition, a lot of individual measures are usually ineffective in view of a sustainable

development, it is necessary to form a master plan which is aimed at the strengthening of the regional economy as well as at the preservation of the ecological and socio-cultural bases and contributes therefore to a sustainable tourism development. This master plan should not confine itself to measures for the realisation, but contain in particular also instruments for monitoring and evaluation. According to own studies and the questioning results this aspect seems especially important. Furthermore, the planned and realised measures as well as the evaluation results should be put forward for discussion. Additionally local stakeholders should be involved to ensure the exchange of experience and therewith to benefit from the evaluation process. It still lacks of such a comprehensive master plan on the Curonian Spit, which could provide improvements.

Conclusions

Encouraged by the increased figures of guests and the traditional popularity of the Curonian Spit as well as the “new” guests especially from Southern Europe the municipality of Neringa and the national park management aim at consolidation of Curonian spit as a tourist destination. In addition to several minor points of criticism, an explanation of the prospective direction and the marketing is essential. As previously mentioned, due to the price increase accompanied with an exclusion of low-income social classes, a positioning in high-priced cultural tourism should be seen critically. Based on the natural potential, a shifting of the priorities in favour of environment appears very useful. Accordingly, a positioning in nature tourism in combination with some high-quality cultural experiences seems to be the only possibility to run the tourism on the Curonian Spit sustainable. Even if the persons responsible already rose to varied challenges, the process of change is not finished yet. The main task, however, is to be aware of the changing demands and to be aware of the vulnerability of the environment, so as to react adequately. In this way, it can be guaranteed not only that the inhabitants will be able to consolidate their basis of existence, but also that the following generations of tourists will find an unspoiled nature, too.

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Turizmas ir rekreacija Kuršių nerijoje – rekreacinis geografinis vystymasis ir perspektyvos ES šalyje narėje

Santrauka

Turizmas Kuršių nerijoje turi labai senas tradicijas. Jis pradėjo vystytis XIX amžiuje. Tuo metu Kuršių nerija pirmą kartą nustojo būti tik vietinės reikšmės gyvenvietė. Buvo sukurta ir vietinė architektūra: didingos vilos ir žvejų vasaros nameliai, skirti turizmui. Tačiau priklausymas Sovietų Sąjungai radikaliai pakeitė statybų ir patalpų nuomojimo pobūdį ir gyventojų struktūrą. Prasidėjo išplėstinis turizmo infrastruktūros vystymas. Jis sustiprėjo po nepriklausomybės atgavimo 1990 metais ir po Lietuvos įstojimo į ES 2004 metais. Atsakingi asmenys stengėsi nekartoti sovietinės epochos klaidų ir atgaivinti Kuršių nerijos prieškarines tradicijas. Šias pastangas atspindėjo ne tik žvejų namelių atstatymas ir išsaugojimas, bet ir pasiūla turistams. Be to, dėl integracijos į Europos kontekstą atsirado galimybės Kuršių nerijai finansiškai ir kitaip bendradarbiauti su Europos valstybėmis. Atėjus finansinei pagalbai iš Europos Sąjungos, Kuršių nerija ėmė dalyvauti įvairiose tarptautinėse programose ir bendruose projektuose.

Svečių apklausa parodė, kad Kuršių nerija yra ypač populiari tarp Lietuvos gyventojų. Svečiai iš Lietuvos yra gerokai jaunesni nei svečiai iš kitų šalių. Pagrindiniai nurodyti Kuršių Nerijos traukos veiksniai yra šie: gražus kraštovaizdis, galimybė praleisti atostogas pajūryje ir troškimas pažinti naują šalį. Rytų Prūsija ir ypač Vokietija yra pagrindiniai potencialūs turistų šaltiniai rinkoje. Paskutiniaisiais metais, Lietuvai įstojus į ES ir tapus plačiau žinoma Europos valstybėmis, Kuršių neriją vis dažniau lankė ir kitų šalių turistai.

SWOT analizė parodė, kad nemažai dar reikia nuveikti įvairiose srityse. Be kraštovaizdžio ir kultūros, kaip turizmo pagrindo, išsaugojimo, reikia sustiprinti bendradarbiavimą ir gerinti turizmo infrastruktūros kokybę. Be to, subalansuoto regioninio vystymo vardan ypatinga reikšmė tenka ne tik ekologinio pagrindo išsaugojimui bet ir ekonomikos vystymui, kadangi nerijos gyventojai ekonomiškai labai priklauso nuo turizmo industrijos. Atsakingieji asmenys turėtų skirti nemažai laiko Kuršių nerijos įvaizdžio kūrimui ir marketingui. Tuo atveju Kuršių nerija turės puikias galimybes įsitvirtinti tarptautinėje turizmo rinkoje.