

TOURISM SERENDIPITY: CASE STUDY OF PERIPHERAL TOURISM REGION IN RAMBYNAS REGIONAL PARK

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“...Life is a permanent motion. Various shapes emerge and dissolve... For thousands of years stones grow and decay. Plants burst, animals and humans are born, and all these die down... Modern people learn to gaze at the nature more serenely. And the phenomena of life become ever more clearly seen in a definite relationship with the nature. It seems that all secrets of the nature and all its mysteries become revealed...”

Vydūnas

Povilanskas R. TOURISM SERENDIPITY: CASE STUDY OF PERIPHERAL TOURISM REGION IN RAMBYNAS REGIONAL PARK. Annales Geographicae 43–44, 2010–2011

Abstract. The paper analyzes the insights of the periphery of a priority tourism development region as a geographical phenomenon. The periphery of a priority tourism development region is the zone outside the core of the region. It comprises rural and suburban areas as well as the fringe zones of the protected areas (regional and national parks). The periphery of a priority tourism development region is determined by a comparatively intensive diffusion of the core functions and features of the region. The impact of the core decreases with the distance. The periphery of a priority tourism development region is the zone where the geographic features of the region experience a qualitative break. Such a peculiarity allows the emergence of other unexpected yet nevertheless attractive touristic features. We define them as sub-iconic features. A very important competitiveness criterion of a priority tourism development region is an integral tourism and transport infrastructure linking the core and the periphery of the region. Typically, the tourism infrastructure in the periphery is less developed and local destinations are less accessible. Yet, the tourists that venture visiting the periphery of a priority tourism development region usually are not disappointed.

References 19. Fig 1. In English, summary in Lithuanian.

Keywords: Tourism priority development region, insight, periphery, sub-iconic features, Rambynas Regional Park.

Received 14 June 2011, accepted 3 October 2011

Introduction

The layout of this paper was drawn in close cooperation with late Dr. Ričardas Baubinas. We both considered it as the first attempt to elaborate the seminal idea of the periphery of a tourism priority development region. Serendipity in tourism is the effect by which one accidentally stumbles upon something fortunate, especially while looking for something entirely unrelated (Hom Cary, 2004). Hence, the periphery of a tourism priority development region is an area, where a traveller can stumble upon something that is exciting, especially while looking for some other touristic experiences.

The role of the periphery of tourism priority development regions emerged with the accession of Lithuania and other Baltic States to the European Union (further referred to as EU) in 2004. One of the most important effects of the EU enlargement has been the multi-level regionalization of the European economic spaces (Komppula et al., 2006). In terms of the tourism regionalization, three coherent processes could be noted in the new member states of the EU:

1. Emergence of large Central and Eastern European tourist regions (e.g., the Višéhrad States, the Baltic States, the Adriatic Coast, the Balkan Mountains, the Carpathian Mountains etc.).

2. Evolvement of the priority tourism development regions within these larger Central and Eastern European tourism regions (e.g., the coastal regions of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Poland and Lithuania, the capital regions of all Central and Eastern European countries, islands like Saaremaa in Estonia and Wolin in Poland, EU frontier regions like the Bialowieza wilderness in Poland, Baltic Highland Lake districts in the Baltic States, etc.).

3. Differentiation of the priority tourism development regions into the priority tourism development core and the periphery due to the dynamism of tourist flows and the spatial differentiation of the EU Structural Fund support for the tourism infrastructure development.

The core (or the centre) of a priority tourism development region is characterized by the most iconic attractions having not only strong touristic, but also cognitive and educational functions as well (Krupickas, 2009). But is the core of a priority tourism development region necessarily the most attractive space for the regional tourism development? Not necessarily. Thus, the Parnidis bight of the Curonian Lagoon that was framed by the shifting dunes, for centuries was the most iconic feature of the Lithuanian Coastal region (Povilanskas, 2004). It served as a source of inspiration for the world-famous German Expressionist Painters' Movement and for Thomas Mann, the Nobel literature Prize winner in the 1930s. Yet, today the shifting dunes of the Parnidis bight are in decline due to the mismanagement in the 1970s, and, currently, they are completely sealed-off from any tourist access as a result of an excessively strict protection regime (Povilanskas et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Urry (2002) noted that post-modern destinations are featured by increased commodification and diversification. Hence, the core destinations of priority tourism development regions suffer from the commodification of the characteristic and iconic features and amenities. According to George & Reid (2005, p. 93): 'commodification of culture for tourism purposes is an attempt to summarise a long-standing culture into a series of icons and markers. It is often revisionist in order to fit it into the perception of a romanticized version of events that find appeal among the visiting public.' Certain sights, cultural heritage objects in particular, 'become marked off as 'must see sights' without which the destination or its culture cannot be consumed' (Richards, 2001, p. 15-16).

As a result of the commodification of the core destinations within the tourism priority development regions, in many cases, only the periphery of the regions can deliver many unexpected, authentic and fascinating attractions and amenities representing the entire region in the most pristine form (Armaitienė et al., 2006, 2007, 2009; Chaperon, Bramwell, 2011; Hall et al., 2006). This is the feature that we call the serendipity of the periphery of a priority tourism development region. It is the basis for securing the competitiveness of peripheral areas as tourist destinations, and, in many cases, the competitiveness of the entire priority tourism development region.

Study aim: To outline the key features of the periphery of a tourism priority development region, which determine its serendipity based on the example of Rambynas Regional Park.

Study objectives:

1. Inventory of the key tourist attractions of Rambynas Regional Park as a tourist destination.

2. Analysis of the key features of the periphery of a tourism priority development region that determine its serendipity.

Study Area: The Mid-Stream Zone of the Nemunas River is one of the six priority tourism development regions in Lithuania identified in the EU Accession Single Programming Document of Lithuania for 2002-2006 (BPD, 2002). The Mid-Stream Zone of the Nemunas River encompasses some of the most geographically and historically important tourism areas of Lithuania, from the mid-stream valley of the Nemunas River at Kaunas to the lower stream valley of Nemunas till the Nemunas Delta. Whereas the core of the Mid-Stream Zone of the Nemunas River comprises the Hanseatic City of Kaunas and the Panevėžius Regional Park, the periphery of the priority tourism development region includes the Rambynas Regional Park, inter alia. Rambynas Regional Park was established in 1992

seeking to preserve and maintain the semi-natural landscape and ecosystem of the lower stream valley of Nemunas, its nature and culture heritage values. The total acreage of the park is 4811 hectares. Currently, there are 8 inhabited settlements in the territory of the park with the total population of 1340.

The territory of the park covers the left side of the picturesque Nemunas lower stream valley and the southern slope of the Vilkyškiai glacial ridge, including floodplains, forests and riverside dunes. It stretches along a river bend at the town of Neman which belongs to the Russian Federation. Steep slopes, deep ravines, the diversity of the landscape, ecosystems, ecotones and soils, as well as regular spring floods determine the plant diversity in the park. Altogether 703 plant and 581 mushroom species are found in the territory of the park. 7 local plant species and 8 mushroom species are enlisted into the Lithuanian Red Data List, including Tartar Catchfly (*Silene tatarica*), Brown Galingale (*Cyperus fuscus*), Sand Pink (*Dianthus arenarius*), and several species of wild garlic, i.e. proper Wild Garlic (*Allium vineale*), Mouse Garlic (*Allium angulosum*) and Sand Leek (*Allium scorodoprasum*). The colony of Hedge Hyssop (*Gratiola officinalis*) by the Merguva Lake is the sole one in the entire Lithuania. Five riparian grass associations of the park are classified as rare ones and enlisted into the Lithuanian Red Data List.

The diversity of bats is of particular interest for naturalists. 8 species of bats are recorded in 81 habitats in the territory of the park. The diversity of birds is even more fascinating. 206 bird species are recorded in the park: Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*), Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and White-tailed Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) nest in local forests. The swamps and marshes of the park are favorite habitats for Crane (*Grus grus*), whereas the floodplains are favored nesting spots of Corncrake (*Crex crex*). The pine grove near the Bitėnai village hosts the Lithuania's largest 18 nest colony of White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), while the Bardėnai pine grove is a habitat of a 24 nest colony of Grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*). 6 managed reserves, NATURA 2000 sites and key forest habitats are designated in the territory of the park for the conservation of the biological diversity.

1. Methods

Central to our research was a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in 2008. The sample size comprised of 22 interviews. The key interviewed persons were the management staff of the Rambynas Regional Park, local activists fostering culture and nature heritage and local tourism service providers. Duration of the face-to-face interviews (typically 60 to 90 minutes) was of sufficient length to allow complex issues to emerge. The kick-off question of the interviews with the interviewees was: 'What, in your opinion, are the main features ensuring the uniqueness of the Rambynas Regional Park?' Further we followed an interesting line of arguments that only occur during the conversation, and much of the information was collected by just being there (Roepstorff & Povilanskas, 1995).

2. Results

2.1. Key features of the tourism priority development region periphery

The periphery of a priority tourism development region is the zone outside the core of the region. It encompasses rural and suburban areas as well as the fringe zones of the protected areas (regional and national parks). The periphery of a priority tourism development region is shaped by an intensive diffusion of core functions and features of the region. The impact of the core decreases with the distance.

The periphery of a priority tourism development region is the zone where the geographic features of the region experience a qualitative break. The periphery preserves the key geographic features of the region, but these features are characterized by a lower intensity. Such peculiarity allows the emergence of other unexpected yet nevertheless

attractive touristic features. Therefore, while shaping and promoting themselves as tourist destinations, peripheral destinations have to emphasize their main competitive features – authentic and non-commodified tourist amenities and services (Hall et al., 2006).

A very important competitiveness feature of a priority tourism development region as a whole is an integral tourism and transport infrastructure linking the core and the periphery of the region. Usually, the tourism infrastructure in the periphery is less developed and local destinations are less accessible. Yet, the tourists that venture visiting the periphery of a priority tourism development region usually are not disappointed. Heritage entities in the periphery – space, objects and practices are appreciated and promoted in tourism development primarily for their distinctiveness, unique characteristics and ‘otherness’ (George & Reid, 2005), as well as for the meanings they represent (Porter & Salazar, 2005). Therefore, the importance of the periphery of the priority tourism development region as a competitive heritage tourism destination relies on the rising popularity and use of heritage resources in innovative and interactive ways (Timothy, Boyd, 2006). According to George & Reid (2005, p. 88): ‘We are witnessing a wave of demand for this type of cultural tourism whose participants are eager to consume a variety of new and novel life experiences’. In other terms, there grows a need to experience serendipity.

The competitiveness of the periphery of a priority tourism development region is determined by the development of the new generation rural tourism. It is important to stress, that the new generation rural tourism is not the conventional rural tourism as we know it. The application of technological innovations facilitates greater mobility in the peripheral areas, their better accessibility and visibility (Butler, 2011).

Rambynas Regional Park is featured by particularly favourable conditions for the development of the new generation rural tourism, first of all, for the cultural heritage events, nature and culture heritage experience and adventure tourism, due to a special natural and semi-natural landscape, nature and culture heritage, and sparsely populated areas. Yet, Rambynas Regional Park like any other similar Eastern European protected area suffers from a comparatively weak tourism infrastructure development, especially when compared with Western Europe (Jordan, 2006).

Another critical feature is that the periphery of a priority tourism development region is dependent upon the image of the entire region. Once the image of the region is bleak, the periphery cannot cater to the full touristic potential of the region (Hall et al. 2006; Jordan, 2006). The clearer is the image and brand of a priority tourism development region, the more attractive is the core of the region, the more abundant number of tourists are eager to visit the periphery of the region and enjoy its serendipity.

2.2. Geographical and historical features of Rambynas Regional Park

As it was already mentioned above, the periphery of a priority tourism development region is the zone where the geographic features of the region experience a qualitative break. It is like an interface between the core of the region and something which is completely different, both, historically and geographically. Thus, Rambynas Regional Park is an interface both, linking the mid-stream valley of the Nemunas River with the Nemunas Delta and the cultural historical landscape of Lithuania Major with the one of Lithuania Minor.

Fig. 1. Regional parks of Rambynas and Nemunas Delta
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The Rambynas riparian landscape area stretches along the picturesque Nemunas lower stream valley and the southern slope of the Vilkyškiai glacial ridge (Fig.). It is framed by the Nemunas River and its tributary, the Jūra River, and includes several interesting manor sites, villages and the townlet of Vilkyškiai. The Rambynas hill is part of the glacial ridge of Vilkyškiai. The riparian landscape area roughly coincides with the territory of Rambynas Regional Park. Its territory is ca. 5 thousand hectares. The altitudes of the surface



Fig. Regional parks of Rambynas and Nemunas Delta

range between 4.6 and 72.5 m. The total acreage of water bodies within the investigated territory is 247 hectares: 33 oxbow lakes are scattered over the riparian landscape site, Merguva (44.8 hectares) and Bitežeris (13.8 hectares) being the largest ones.

The Nemunas lower stream valley widens up to 1.5 km within the park, and vast floodplains cover the better part of the valley floors down from the confluence of the Nemunas and Jūra rivers. 33 oxbow lakes, particularly, the biggest ones, Merguva, Juodežeris and Bitežeris and five tiny creeks draining the slopes of the Nemunas River valley: Bitė, Žiogis, Skriaudupis, Šereiklaukis and Apsta form the peculiar features of local hydrology and aquatic ecology.

Forests and groves cover over 50% of the park territory. Scots pine and Norway spruce prevail in tree composition. Yet, the introducents, like Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*), Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Purple Beech (*Fagus sylvatica Purpurea*) or Sycamore Maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) are also rather widely spread since the German Imperial era of the late 1800s. A group of 29 Douglas fir trees (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) grows in the Bitėnai forest, and a plantation of European Larch (*Larix decidua*) covers 0.5 hectares in the Šereiklaukis forest.

Humans inhabited the territory of the park since the end of the latest Ice Age ca. 14 thousand years ago. The Scalvians, a Baltic tribe, had been the earliest inhabitants recorded in the historical times, i.e., since the early 1200s. However, by the end of that century, they were vanquished by the German Knights' Order which had conquered the lower Nemunas basin. Since the 1500s, that easternmost part of the Prussian State was resettled by Lithuanians and, later, was named Lithuania Minor in contrast to Lithuania Major, i.e., the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

In 1709 to 1711, the population of Lithuania Minor became almost extinct as a result of the Great Plague, and the territory was once again resettled, but this time by the settlers from Germany, Austria and Scotland. During the German Imperial era of the late 1800s, the territory of the lower Nemunas basin enjoyed a vibrant economic and cultural life with farmsteads, manors and towns scattered among vast fields and floodplains cut by a network of dikes, canals, roads and railway lines. It became the cradle of the Lithuanian National Revival being the birthplace of the first Lithuanian nationalist newspaper ("Ausra") in 1883 and the first Lithuanian heritage festival in 1896, and serving as the key outpost for printing and smuggling of Lithuanian press to Lithuania Major, where it was prohibited and persecuted by the authorities of the Russian Empire.

The right side of the lower Nemunas basin (the so-called 'Klaipėda land') was detached from Germany after the World War I and united with Lithuania Major in 1923. However, after the World War II it fell into the Soviet Union together with the entire Republic of Lithuania. Such a geopolitical misfortune resulted in the dramatic change of the local population in the lower Nemunas basin, as most of local inhabitants had fled to Germany pushed by the Soviet regime. The Klaipėda land was once again resettled by Lithuanians

from the eastern regions of the nation, while Soviet authorities took efforts to erase any historical memory of Lithuania Minor and its culture heritage. Only the latest Lithuanian National Revival and the restoration of the Lithuanian statehood in 1990 finally broke the alienation of the settlers from the Soviet era to the historical memory of the area and revived cherishing of that very special 'spirit of place' of Rambynas.

The culture heritage stock of Rambynas Regional Park comprises 37 sites, including five culture heritage monuments, five heritage values and 27 items with heritage features. The park is the home of several heathen mounds, interesting manor sites from the German Imperial era of the late 1800s and several heritage farmsteads in the villages of Bitėnai and Bardėnai. The heathen mounds remind us about the ancient Baltic tribe of the Scalvians, including the castle mounds and ancient dwelling sites of Opstainys and Vilkyškiai. The historical Vilkyškiai townlet is a managed urbanistic reserve. The most interesting nature monuments include the unique 17-trunk Norway Spruce named 'The Tree of Witches', the oak alley of Vilkyškiai, the Lithuania's largest White Stork colony in Bitėnai and the crest of the Vilkyškiai glacial ridge.

Sereiklaukis comprises several sub-iconic attractions featuring the whole periphery of the Mid-Stream Zone of the Nemunas River. The Šereiklaukis manor estate from the German Imperial era is situated at the confluence of the Nemunas and Jūra rivers. It is one of the largest manors in the Klaipėda land with a distillery and a stud of the warmblood Trakehner horse breed. The manor estate covered the area of 4 hectares; while a park with fish ponds covered another 5 hectares. 12 local and 9 introduced tree species are still found in the former park, which had declined during the Soviet era along with the entire manor estate. Šereiklaukis contains surrounding landscapes with several interesting thousand-year-old monuments, including a prehistoric dwelling site called Sidabrakalnis (the 'Silver Mound'), and a burial mound called Milžinkapis (the 'Giants Grave') or Napoleono kepurė (the 'Napoleon's Cap'). A Scalvian castle mound from the 1200s is attributed to the last Scalvian warlord Sereika (d. 1283). It is located a couple kilometers away. All these heritage monuments attract visitors and researchers alike, although a lot is still to be done making them convenient and attractive for visit.

2.3. Infrastructure and sub-iconic features of Rambynas Regional Park

The periphery of a priority tourism development region preserves the key geographic features of the region, but they are characterized by lower intensity. A very important competitiveness feature of a priority tourism development region as a whole is an integral tourism and transport infrastructure linking the core and the periphery of the region. The park is rather conveniently located for motorized tourists to visit. It lies on the crossroad of the national highway A141 for domestic tourists coming from Vilnius, Kaunas or Klaipėda and the "Via Hanseatica" highway E77 (for international motorized tourists coming from the North (i.e., from Helsinki, St Petersburg, Tallinn or Riga), and from the South (Kaliningrad, Gdansk, Berlin). Yet, the provision of tourist services is just in its embryo stage. Currently, there are just two hotels and one café in Vilkyškiai on the national highway A141 and not a single farmstead providing regular rural tourism services. The park has a relatively dense road network (5.4 km of paved roads per sq. km). Yet, the best itinerary for visiting all the tourist attractions of the park is to follow the local road 4229 (Vilkyškiai – Panemunė). Rambynas Regional Park is mainly visited by motorized tourists and excursionists.

Some very specific iconic and sub-iconic amenities attract all those interested in visiting the Mid-Stream Zone of the Nemunas River to Rambynas Regional Park. The Rambynas hill once was the place of inspiration in Lithuania Minor. It is the main landmark featuring Rambynas Regional Park. It is full of myth and legend. It eludes a sense of mystery and history with visitors from all over Lithuania and abroad. The sacred image of the place stems from an ancient legend about the hill as the great heathen Baltic sanctuary devoted to the Goddess Laima. Rambynas was first mentioned in the itineraries to Lithuania made by the German Knights' Order in 1385. The Rambynas hill as the sacred place of Lithuania Minor was first highlighted in 1595 by Caspar Hennenberger (1529-1600), a German cartographer. The heathen altar stone of Rambynas was a 3 m

high glacial boulder of gneiss rock with a mica layer glittering at sunrise and sunset. Unfortunately, a local mill-stone maker destroyed the magic stone of Rambynas in 1811. Not for good, since the better part of the Rambynas hill fell into the Nemunas River as a result of several very intensive spring floods in the 1800s, and since the local community fell a victim to the two World Wars. Now the hill looms 40 m above the Nemunas River. Currently, Rambynas attracts visitors as the National Pantheon of Lithuania Minor. The prominent theosophist Vydūnas (1868–1953) and Martynas Jankus (1858–1946), the Patriarch of the Lithuanian National Revival, rest in the graveyard at the hill.

Conclusions

1. Rambynas Regional Park is a good example of the periphery of a priority tourism development region determined by a comparatively intensive diffusion of the core functions and features of the region.

2. Our survey confirms that the importance of the periphery of the priority tourism development region as a competitive heritage tourism destination relies on the rising popularity and use of heritage resources in innovative and interactive ways.

3. The clearer is the image and brand of a priority tourism development region, the more attractive is the core of the region, the more abundant number of tourists are eager to visit the periphery of the region and enjoy its serendipity.

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PRIORITETINĖS TURIZMO PLĖTROS REGIONO PERIFERIJOS TYRIMAI (RAMBYNO REGIONINIO PARKO PAVYZDŽIU)

Santrauka

Rambyno regioninio parko pavyzdžiu nagrinėjamos turizmo išvalgos kaip geografinis reiškiny ir jį galintys sukelti prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regionų periferijos ypatumai. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono periferija – tai teritorija, esanti už pagrindinių turizmo centrų, kuriai galima priskirti prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono kaimiškas vietas, priemiestines zonas, saugomų teritorijų (nacionalinių ir regioninių parkų) paribio zonas. Prioritutinio turizmo plėtros regiono periferija yra zona, kurioje vyksta kokybinis regiono geografinių bruožų lūžis: ji išsaugo svarbiausius regiono bruožus, bet pasižymi mažesniu jų intensyvumu, leidžiančiu pasireikšti ir kitoms, netikėtoms, bet ne mažiau patrauklioms turistinėms charakteristikoms. Prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono periferijoje pasireiškia santykinai intensyvi branduolio arba centro turistinių funkcijų bei jų įtakų sklaida, kuri laipsniškai mažėja tostant nuo prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono branduolio. Svarbi prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono konkurencingumo sąlyga yra vievinga branduolio ir periferijos infrastruktūra. Paprastai turizmas periferijoje pasižymi mažesniu turizmo infrastruktūros išplėtojimu ir sunkesniu pasiekiamumu. Tačiau tie turistai, kurie pasiryžta pažinti periferijos turistinius privalumus, dažniausiai nelieka nusivylę.

Prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono periferijos konkurencingumą lemia naujos kartos turizmo veiklų taikymas. Būtent naujos kartos turizmas kaimiškose teritorijose – pagrindas turizmo plėtrai prioritutinės turizmo plėtros regiono periferijoje. Rambyno regioniniam parkui būdingos itin tinkamos sąlygos naujos kartos, visų pirma gamtos, kultūros paveldo renginių ir nuotykių turizmo plėtojimui dėl natūralaus ir pusiau natūralaus kraštovaizdžio, gamtos ir kultūros paveldo bei retai apgyvendintų teritorijų.