

### TOURISM IN BORDER REGIONS: THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF A GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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*This article considers theoretical aspects of tourism studies and development in border regions. The work aims to identify key areas of geographical studies into tourism in border regions. Its research significance lies in a review of Russian and international literature on border territory and the role of tourism in socioeconomic development. In terms of methodology, it is an analytical work. The authors stress a need for a systemic approach to analysing tourism in border areas and describe the particularities of tourism on such territories. It is stressed that institutional barriers have become a major obstacle to the development of transboundary tourism regions. Borders are classed depending on the border regime and strictness of tourist entry procedures. Special attention is paid to the attractiveness of state border areas. The authors identify external and internal conditions affecting tourism development and functioning in border areas. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using its findings in developing tourism development programmes for border territories in contemporary Russia.*

**Key words:** tourism, border regions, transboundary tourism and recreation systems, attractiveness of state borders

### Introduction

Today, both national and international research literature pays significant attention to studies into the spatial socioeconomic development of border regions. Many of them focus on tourism. Understanding relevant processes is impossible without analysing international experience of tourism development in border regions. A market economy re-

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quires considering European experiences to identify current views on the role of borders in the socioeconomic development of neighbouring territories and analyse the practical implementations of relevant programmes. Many European researchers agree that, although the diversity of transboundary practices has made national borders a relative thing, borders remain new delineation areas.

Today, studies into the problems of tourism development in border regions embrace several aspects:

- features of tourism development in border areas in view of the effect of border functions, border factor, and institutional barriers on regional tourism;
- integration in tourism and tourism development accounted for by a gradient between transboundary prices (shopping tours, recreational tourism, etc.);
- attractiveness of borders and border regions for domestic and international tourists;
- tourism potential and development in border areas with a focus on resorts and tourist attractions, differentiation in tourism infrastructure development, etc.

Certain aspects of tourism development in European countries' border areas have been addressed by researchers from Central and Eastern Europe [1; 10; 13; 21—24; 30]. Tourism in border areas does not escape the attention of Russian researchers either. Numerous articles on the topic have been published in the past five years. In terms of border tourism development prospects, the most fully-studied territories are the Kaliningrad [2; 6—8], Smolensk [5], Pskov [11], Amur [3], and several other regions.

### Research hypothesis

Based on an analysis of existing perspectives on border and transboundary tourism regions, the following conclusions can be drawn. Throughout Russia — a country that has both closed and open borders — there are significant disproportions in the development of border and transboundary tourism. At the same time, a uniform approach to this phenomenon is lacking. Closed-border regions, which encounter difficulties with tourism development, require a package of measures aimed at simplifying border-crossing procedures for tourists. In the case of an open border, cross-border differences contribute to the development of commerce and tourism — the latter being the most important element of border region economies in most European countries and often the only chance for development. These considerations have become a basis for integration of neighbouring countries' territories. Investment and an appropriate policy provide an impetus for international tourism and promote economic development. Such transformations change the perception of border regions, in particular, through providing targeted support for tourism development. Moreover, it is important to under-

stand how border-crossing simplification can be combined with anti-terrorist measures and initiatives aimed against irregular migration amid increasing terrorist threats and large-scale forced migration.

### Concept of 'border region'

In European usage, a border region is a zone extending 15 km on either side of a border checkpoint. This administrative framework correlates with Russian laws. Border regions are areas of special concern for any state. On these territories, all socioeconomic processes are affected by additional factors, such as national borders, socioeconomic and ethnocultural influence of the neighbouring states, weakened power of the parent political centre, etc.

State borders are important elements of socioeconomic space. They serve as either barriers to, or drivers for development. Areas contiguous with state borders have specific features shaped by their positions. National borders and their characteristics change in time and space. Thus, their effect on socioeconomic development, including tourism, is rather versatile. Numerous studies focus on this issue. The significance of political borders to space organisation is addressed in the works [12; 17; 19; 20; 28].

As a rule, the authors of the above studies focus on the following problems:

- a) concept of borders and their role as barriers;
- b) concepts for the development of border regions, in particular, from the perspective of central place, polarity, growth pole, and regional development theories;
- c) border space integration concepts.

Globalisation is changing the functions of borders. In the EU, such a change was brought about by integration.

### A geosystem approach to studying border tourism

Border regions require a theoretical framework for the process of territorial organisation. A geosystem analysis involves establishing a correlation between territories or relevant territorial systems and their actual content [15]. The discrete framework for a transboundary region is a transboundary territorial system and, for border zones within national jurisdictions, this is a border territorial system. A national border with its barrier and contact functions is a special element of both a transboundary system and a border territorial system [9].

Border regions have a significant potential for development. This holds true for tourism as a rapidly growing industry. Various objects, which comprise a transboundary tourism and recreation system (TTRS), can be divided into several subsystems — infrastructure, organisation and management, nature and recreation, history and culture, recreation, utilities, human resources, consumption, and others.

The character of a TTRS is determined by its constituent elements and the nature of connections between them. Key features of a transboundary TRS stem from the fact that different elements of a system are located on different sides of the border. Moreover, there are legal and economic differences. As a result, the development of a cohesive transboundary TRS requires political and legal efforts aimed at solving the problem of effective functioning of the tourism industry. Foremost, this concerns the visa regime and visitor rules. Changes in the regulatory framework in one of the neighbouring states causes a steep reduction in tourism numbers, as was the case in summer 2016, when Poland unilaterally terminated the simplified border-crossing regime with the Kaliningrad region.

An important characteristic of social geosystems is manageability, which does not exclude self-organisation as a universal system quality. In the case of transboundary TRSs, there are differences between the legal frameworks of neighbouring states and between the functions of public and regional authorities. System-building is regulated by market mechanisms. Through influencing development conditions and factors, one can affect dynamic processes taking place within a territorial system. This is directly applicable to the development of the tourism industry.

For transboundary TRSs, of special importance are relevant geoterial factors.

A major factor is the presence of a state border, on either side of which people are engaged in tourism and recreation.

### National borders in development of border tourist areas

National borders play an important role in tourist flow distribution and serve as the boundaries of geographical, legislative, tax-paying, administrative, and political spaces of sovereign states. From the perspective of international tourism and depending on the features of border regime and strictness of visitor regulations, several types of states borders are identified:

- closed borders (visiting border regions for tourism purposes is almost impossible due to military, defence, political, and other reasons);
- lowly permeable borders (visiting border regions requires certain measures, including obtaining a special permit);
- permeable borders (formal procedures are required, including obtaining a visa);
- highly permeable borders (electronic or on-arrival visas);
- open borders (border control procedures are due, however no visa is required).

The political situation has a significant effect on the functions of national borders and their very existence. European integration has changed dramatically the function of borders, made them open, and contributed to the integration of neighbouring territories. At the same time, the external borders of the EU and the Schengen area are being strengthened and border control is being tightened. Nevertheless, it is much easier to cross them now than it



was before 1989. In general, one can speak of liberalisation of border regime, which has caused an increase in transboundary mobility. Increased mobility is also a result of European socioeconomic conditions — higher living standards, wider personal opportunities, and abundant free time. People travel more frequently, although this depends on their needs and means. Political changes in Europe and European integration processes contribute to changes in the functions of national borders. Development of cross-border cooperation between neighbouring states became possible after 1989. However, the blurring of borders and ensuing freedom of travel did not result in the expected intensification of long-term cooperation. Countries abandon the idea of borders and preserve them at the same time. The term ‘phantom border’ was coined to describe this phenomenon [25]. Such a research approach is based on the assumption that cooperation in border regions is hampered by linguistic and sociocultural aspects, institutional incompatibilities, economic factors, and systems of governance [14].

Studies show that the blurring of borders within the European Union often has unexpected results and consequences. The ‘us against them’ sentiment emerged in the EU, because the mutual divide is based on identifying the position towards neighbours. It rests on changing cultural, historical, and socioeconomic differences, which hinders active and effective transboundary cooperation. Opinions have been voiced that trends towards a division based on socioeconomic differences will result in stronger barriers at the EU’s external borders [26].

The experience of intergovernmental cooperation was considered in the cases of Polish-Lithuanian and German-Polish border territories. The authors stressed the phantom preservation of borders and discrepancies between territorial borders and social divides [16; 18; 29].

A special case is the aggravation of a geopolitical situation and poor political relations between countries.

Tourist entry procedures have a significant effect on the development of international tourism. They can be interpreted as institutional barriers to the development of transboundary tourism. Other obstacles are the complex and protracted procedure of obtaining entry (exit) documents, increased processing times, arbitrary visa denials, high fees, and mandatory personal presence at consulates of some countries. A general trend is the weakening of barrier function and increasing openness of borders.

As to Russia, the new system of national borders has led to the emergence of ‘new borderlands’ — a border position became a reality for regions that did not have such historical experience or had had it in their distant past. This holds true for the western section of the country’s border from the Baltic to the Azov and Black Seas and the southern section from the Caucasus to the Altai Mountains. Underestimating this fact often leads to erroneous strategies for border region development.

Thus, the development of transboundary TRSs requires treating a national border as the key factor behind the formation of a tourism and recreation system. Moreover, national borders per se have become a tourist attraction.



## Attractiveness of political borders

Borders restrict tourist flows and connect counties and regions but they also may have a special tourist potential. A border may be attractive in itself and of educational interest for tourists [4].

Attractiveness of borders depends strongly on the transboundary cultural, economic, confessional, and political gradient. The greater the differences between countries, the higher the attractiveness. An example of extremely high attractiveness is the demilitarised zone at the border of the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Daily, hundreds of tourists visit this territory. There is a hierarchy to borders, and the most attractive ones are immediate borders.

Tourist attractiveness of certain territories was increased by the establishment of artificial virtual 'states'. The most famous ones are Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen, Užupis in Vilnius, the Conch Republic, the Principality of Seborga, and the Principality of Sealand. Virtual 'micronations' lay increased emphasis on delimitation. When leaving Christiania, one sees a sign that reads 'You are now entering the EU'. Fame, excitement associated with the visit, successful branding, merchandise, and other marketing techniques attract thousands of tourists. Tourist flows contribute to the development of tourist infrastructure, which does not only generate income, but also solve employment problems.

High attractiveness is characteristic of the borders of unrecognised or quasi-states, for instance, Vatican or the Order of Malta.

There is a difference between modern and historical borders, which existed in the past but continue to fulfil their function. Historical borders that had major significance in the past can be highly attractive. Examples include the Berlin Wall, the Curzon Line, the Maginot Line, the Stalin Line, etc.

A new tradition of putting up special signs at the sites of historical borders has emerged. Thus, Berlin's educational tourist attractions include not only the Brandenburg Gate — once part of the border between the GDR and West Berlin — but also Checkpoint Charlie, which was restored in 2000 and functions as a museum now. National borders often follow natural features. Traditionally, border areas boast interesting and unique natural objects that can become educational tourist attractions. The world's four most-visited waterfalls — the Victoria Falls, Iguazu Falls, Niagara Falls, and Ban Gioc-Detian Falls — are located in border regions. A special type of political borders and tourist attractions is a mountain pass.

National borders often divide unique natural sites. In Russian border areas, these are the Curonian and Baltic Spits, the Ubsunur Hollow, the peaks of the Greater Caucasus and the Altai Mountains, Lake Khanka, and others.

Depending on their nature and function, borders can serve as filters or barriers to tourism development. They can change contiguous territories and act as integration elements. Borders affect tourism development through creating motivations and incentives for travel, tourism infrastructure development, and marketing.

Tourist spaces are very sensitive to changes in border positions and functions. The emergence of a new border (or the closure of an existing one) may destroy an established tourist space and bring about serious changes in the functioning of tourist spaces in neighbouring countries amid a breach in relations.

Complete disappearance of borders can give extra incentives to development. The absence of barriers stimulates the movement of goods and people and adds importance to towns and villages located near a border.

The major forms of modern tourism in border areas are as follows:

- shopping,
- food tourism,
- entertainment,
- wellness tourism,
- transit tourism,
- environmental tourism,
- cultural and educational tourism,
- event tourism.

In Russia's borderlands, tourist spaces can be divided into several classes characterised by:

**a)** synergy-based close transboundary cooperation resulting in transboundary tourist regions (Blagoveshchensk — Heihe);

**b)** independent development of neighbouring regions, which compete in the case of open borders (Greater Sochi — Abkhazia) or have little contact in the case of closed borders (Curonian Spit);

**c)** tourist space development on only one side of the border (Vistula Spit);

**d)** non-existent development of tourist space due to a territory's unattractiveness or completely closed borders.

The signing of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014, which came into force on January 1, 2015, provided an additional boost to transboundary tourism development in the member states. However, there is a need for amendments to visa agreements. The EAEU requires a visa regime that would allow citizens entering with a visa of one of the countries to visit all the member states.

## Conclusions

Tourism at the borders of neighbouring states is based on complementarity accounted for by prices for goods and services, hospitality and excursion offers, transit convenience, and a variety of tourist attractions. In each case, there is a disproportion in tourist flows and the level of tourism development on different sides of the border. The neighbouring parts of borderlands are always characterised by asymmetry. There are gaps in tourist space and imbalances in socioeconomic development. Such areas resemble a mosaic.

It would be difficult to identify the tourism development factors that have a crucial effect on border areas. A tourist space develops and enlarges

on the territories that are attractive to tourists. There are numerous external and internal conditions affecting tourism development and functioning in neighbouring border areas. They include:

- degree of border openness;
- price gradient;
- availability, number, and popularity of tourist attractions;
- quality of the tourism product;
- structure of tourist preferences;
- service companies' skills in embracing innovations and the quality of human capital.

Geographical borders boast special attractiveness, which can be used to promote educational tourism. Open and accessible borders are part of a territory's tourism potential. Tourism-driven development of borders may contribute to economic growth in border areas. An increase in the tourist attractiveness of villages and towns can be brought about by creating infrastructure at the sites of once famous historical borders. Increased border transparency can contribute to the scale of transboundary tourism.

The opening of borders creates an incentive to tourism development in border areas, if this process is accompanied by economic and social changes, i. e. it contributes to mobility, including tourist travel.

Regardless of the nature of borders, there are disparities between the border areas of two neighbouring countries. These disparities manifest at different levels and they have different scales. This concerns tourism infrastructure development and transport capacities. Differences in economic development and the quality of and prices for goods and services also facilitate tourist travel.

It is worth noting that the process of Russia's tourism market integration into the global one has been sporadic. It lacks a single organisational and economic mechanism. An effective measure can be tourism development in border areas based on the creation of transboundary and cross-border tourism and recreation clusters.

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