

ESTIMATING
THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE LATVIAN —
ESTONIAN — RUSSIAN
TRANSBOUNDARY
TOURISM
AND RECREATION REGION

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In 2004, the Pskov — Livonia Euro-region was established across the borders of Estonia, Latvia and Russia (the Pskov region). Tourism became a cooperation priority in the Euroregion. This necessitated research on the local tourism and recreation areas. This study aims to estimate the development prospects of transboundary microregions which have been identified by the authors within the Latvian — Estonian — Russian tourism and recreation mesoregion. The authors employ ten additional criteria proposed in the general conception of transboundary tourism and recreation regions. The article identifies five microregions: Pskov — Pechory — Tartu and Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis (first level), Pytalovo — Rezekne (second level), and Izborsk — Pechory district-Setomaa and Lake Chudskoe area (third level). The authors classify the microregions according to their level of development. The development of the Izborsk — Pechory district-Setomaa microregion is defined as 'above average', that of Pskov — Pechory — Tartu as 'average', and that of Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis as 'below average', and finally, the development of Pytalovo — Rezekne microregion is described as 'poor'. The Lake Chudskoe area microregion is classified as an 'emerging' one. The overall level of development of transboundary tourism and recreation microregions is assessed as 'below average'. The results of the study can be used in preparing recommendations for the development of transboundary microregions within the Latvian — Estonian — Russian tourism and recreation mesoregion.

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In 2004, at the junction of Estonian, Latvian and Russian borders, an association for promoting cooperation among cross-border regions, the Pskov — Livonia Euroregion, was established. Originally it included four Latvian districts, three Estonian counties and five administrative districts in the Pskov region [1]. Eventually this association expanded due to changes in the administrative division of the neighbouring countries, and a total of thirty municipalities participated in the Euroregion's functioning at different times [8].

Tourism activity is one of the most important directions of collaboration in the Pskov — Livonia Euroregion. The Euroregion has a number of advantages that contribute to the development of tourism and recreation, for instance, pollution-free land areas and numerous cultural and historical heritage sites, which makes the region more attractive for tourists. At the same time, there are a number of complicating factors in developing tourism and recreation within this Euroregion: its weak economic position, low population density, etc. [1].

In our point of view, the impetus towards development of tourism and recreation in the border areas can come from coordinated efforts of the neighbouring states within a transboundary region with specialisation in tourism and recreation. Its external boundaries do not have to correspond to the common borders of the members of the Pskov — Livonia Euroregion, which is formed on a voluntary basis. To establish a transboundary tourist and recreational region, a number of prerequisites are necessary, and they are discussed in this article.

The aim of the study is to determine a degree of regional formation for the transboundary Latvian-Estonian-Russian tourist and recreational region by assessing signs of regional formation at the level of its territorial components (microregions).

Background knowledge. The phenomenon of development of transboundary tourist and recreational regions is given a lot of attention by both foreign and Russian researchers. For instance, general issues of development of transboundary tourism are covered in works by W. Cudny [14], K.-L. Lepik, [17], M. Milencovic [19], N. Seric and S. V. Marcovic [21], T. Studzieniencki [22], H. Wachowiak [27], A. Weidenfeld [28] and others. The formation of transboundary tourist regions on the border of Poland and Russia was studied by R. Anisiewicz, V. Korneevets, T. Palmowski, T. Studzieniencki [13; 23] and others, on the border of Russia and Finland — by K. Jakocuo [16], on the border of Finland and Sweden — by E.-K. Prokkola [20], on the border of Slovenia and Croatia — by K. Vodeb [26], on the border of Hungary and Serbia — by P. Gulyás, V. Majstorović, U. Stankov, S. Stojanov [18], on the border of the USA and Canada — by D. Tymothy [24].

Several works by E. G. Kropinova [4—6] addressed the problems of formation of transboundary tourist and recreational regions in the Baltic

Sea area. In particular, E. G. Kropinova developed basic and additional markers of the formation of a region, worked out a hierarchy of regions and identified transboundary tourist and recreational regions of the meso-level in the Baltic Sea area, including the Latvian-Estonian-Russian tourist and recreational region, which is examined in this article. The overall level of its development was estimated as 'medium' [5, p. 119].

In our previous works [2; 9], we also analyzed the prerequisites for formation of this transboundary tourist and recreational mesoregion as well as tourism potential and special aspects of formation of one of its microregions.

The hierarchy of microregions. E. G. Kropinova suggests marking three hierarchic levels of transboundary tourist and recreational microregions. A microregion of the first level includes several municipalities of the highest level of the country's administrative division. A microregion of the second level consists of municipal units of the lowest administrative level but it can also include small municipalities of the highest level. Microregions of the third level include parts of municipalities or small municipal units of the lowest level. Transboundary tourist and recreational regions of the lowest level can constitute parts of the regions of a higher level [5; p. 167].

In the Pskov region, there are two urban districts and 24 municipal districts that are referred to the highest level, and there are urban and rural settlements (mostly townships) that are referred to the lowest level. In Estonia, there are 15 counties that are the highest level administrative units, and they are divided into urban and rural municipalities. Since 2009, Latvia has been divided into 110 one-level municipalities and 9 republican cities. One-level municipalities are subdivided into municipality parishes and municipality towns. These one-level municipalities are considered to be administrative subdivisions of the highest level, but in terms of their size and population they are smaller than Estonian counties and Russian municipal districts. Latvia's former administrative division (i. e. 26 districts and 7 republican cities until 2009) was much more similar to those of Estonia and Russia. This fact was taken into account in ranking transboundary tourist and recreational microregions.

Within the transboundary Latvian-Estonian-Russian tourist and recreational mesoregion, we suggest identifying two microregions of the first level (Pskov — Pechoru — Tartu and Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis), one microregion of the second level (Pytalovo — Rezekne) and several microregions of the third level, with the Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa and the Lake Peipsi / Chudskoe district amongst them. The evaluation of the development of the Latvian-Estonian-Russian mesoregion is based on the analysis of region formation undertaken for these microregions — they illustrate different stages of formation: from the final stage to the initial one, which is characteristic of "potential" transboundary tourist and recreational microregions.



Fig. Transboundary tourist and recreational microregions within the Latvian-Estonian-Russian mesoregion

Borders: 1 — state; 2 — the subjects of the RF; 3 — municipalities of the highest level; 4 — centers of the microregions of the first level; territories: 5 — microregions of the first level (Pskov — Pechory — Tartu and Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis); 6 — microregion of the third level (Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa); 7 — microregion of the third level (Lake Peipsi district); 8 — microregion of the second level (Pytalovo — Rezekne)

Region-forming markers. To identify a transboundary tourist and recreational region, six basic (region-forming) and four additional (optional) characteristics are applied [3; 5]. Provided below is an analysis of the degree of presence of these characteristics within the five transboundary tourist and recreational microregions: three Russian-Estonian microregions (Pskov — Pechory — Tartu, Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa and the Lake Peipsi district), one Russian-Estonian-Latvian microregion (Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis) and one Russian-Latvian microregion (Pytalovo — Rezekne). First, six basic characteristics of region formation are analyzed.

1. Continuity of the territory, i. e. availability of direct transportation links, without a need to cross the borders of the transboundary region.

In almost all transboundary microregions, there are direct transport routes that connect the constituent territories. Their usage, however, has reduced since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and now it depends on traffic capacity of the border-crossing points on the borders between Russia and the EU member states. In fact, transport routes (first and foremost, road transport routes) are the connective links that ‘form’ the transboundary microregions. The border-crossing point Kunichina Gora (Pechory) — Koidula (Estonia) is located on the road transport route Pskov — Tartu; the border-crossing point Shumilkino (Pechory district) — Luhamaa (Estonia) operates on the road transport route Pskov — Riga (including Cesis and Riga); the border-crossing point Ubylinka (Pytalovo district) — Grebnevo (Latvia) is located on the road transport route Pytalovo — Daugavpils (including Rezekne). Only the Lake Peipsi district is an exception in this respect as nowadays there is no passenger traffic in this transboundary area, although there are some plans to resume it.

2. Complementarity of natural, cultural and historical potential of tourism development that encourages tourist flows.

On the whole, the Latvian-Estonian-Russian mesoregion is not characterized by high biodiversity, and there are no rich recreational resources that can be provided, for instance, by seashores or mountains. However there are some landscape distinctions resulting from contrasting landforms (the Haanya Upland in Estonia, the Aluskene Upland, the Vidzeme Upland and the Latgale Upland in Latvia, and the lowland area on the shores of Lake Pskov and Lake Peipsi) and an important land boundary between two natural subzones (south boreal forest and sub-boreal forest) that goes along the south end of Lake Pskov. At the same time, this transboundary tourist and recreational mesoregion is notable for wide cultural and historical heritage variety, especially at the heart of the region — in the Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa microregion, which also belongs to two microregions of a higher level (i. e. Pskov — Pechory — Tartu and Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis). The mesoregion is also characterized by ethno-cultural diversity, which is discussed below. Together with the region’s cultural and historical heritage, it serves an important resource for developing tourism.

3. Common or coordinated transport infrastructure.

A substantial level of coordination of passenger traffic has already been achieved on the opposite sides of the borders of Latvia and Estonia, on the one side, and the Pskov region, on the other side, which makes it convenient for people to cross the border by car or bus (motor transport) or even on foot (for instance, at the border-crossing point Kunichina Gora in Pechory). Moreover, a transport and logistics hub is planned to be built

in the Pskov region. Although this project is aimed, first and foremost, at increasing cargo traffic across the region, it can also solve some problems relating to border crossing procedures.

4. Close links between the subjects of tourism that are members of the transboundary region.

Latvia and Estonia are among the most popular destinations of out-bound tourism in the Pskov region, which is predetermined by the political and geographical location of the region [12]. The tourist flow is stimulated by increasing a validity period of visas issued by the neighboring states. For instance, the Pskov office of the Consulate General of the Republic of Estonia in St. Petersburg and the Latvian Consulate in Pskov provide the residents of the Pskov region with long-term multiple-entry visas for a period of two to five years. The presence of offices (authorized agencies) of major tour operators in the centers of municipalities of the neighboring countries is an important factor in the development of tourism in the transboundary region. For instance, the tour operator 'Tez Tour' has offices in Pskov in Russia, in Rezekne, Balvi, Cesis and Daugavpils in Latvia, and in Tartu, Pylva and Vyru in Estonia [29]. The upcoming celebrations of the Hanseatic Days-2019 in Pskov will also contribute to the growth of international contacts.

5. Transboundary tourist trails.

Within the microregions, there are a number of transboundary tourist trails that are parts of 'longer' routes linking Pskov with the capitals of Estonia and Latvia or other tourist centers located outside the transboundary microregions. At the same time, there are tourist trails (routes) developed particularly within the microregions, for example, an ethnographic tour across Russian and Estonian territories on the borders of Setomaa (it is mostly aimed at individual tourists).

The largest number of tourists is recorded in Pskov — Pechory — Tartu, the microregion of the first level. It offers several routes, ending not only in the centres of the microregions but also in Vyru (visits to Vastelina and Otepya). In the microregion Pskov — Izbork — Cesis, there are tourist routes that run through the three centres only or have final destinations in Sigulda and Riga. The microregion of the second level, Pytalovo — Rezekne, has not developed full-fledged tourist programmes so far; however the statistics show a large number of tourists visiting these two towns. In the future it will be possible to include Balvi and Gulbene in the tourist trails.

In the microregions of the third level, the highest tourist flow is recorded in the Pskov-Pechory district / Setomaa. This microregion benefits from its transit location, and unique natural, cultural and historical heritage. The development of tourist trails in the Lake Peipsi district is constrained by the lack of passenger traffic. After water transport infrastruc-

ture is developed here, it will be possible to initiate tourist programmes with visits to Gdov, the Trutnev Caves, Spitsino (Russia), Alatskivi, Py-ltsmaa, Kallaste, Mustvee (Estonia), etc. Excursions to the islands in Lake Peipsi and Lake Pskov can also become part of these programmes.

Every year, travel agencies in Estonia, Latvia and the Pskov region develop unique routes that cover new territories and sites. Travel agencies in Pskov are responsible for the Russian part of the programmes, and their foreign partners develop the Estonian and Latvian parts. Such cooperation leads to gaining experience in development of cross-border tourist routes.

6. Availability of state and/or public institutions organising and coordinating transboundary tourist flows.

Nowadays there are several projects of transboundary cooperation, including tourism and recreation, the implementation of which involves governmental agencies and public organisations of the neighbouring states. In 2014—2020, a number of large scale projects will be implemented in the framework of the cross-border cooperation programmes ‘Russia — Estonia’ and ‘Russia — Latvia’. These programmes are co-financed by the European Union (from the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)), the Russian Federation, the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Latvia.

The project ‘Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in Latvia and Russia’ is one of the examples. It is jointly implemented by the Administration of Pskov, several Latvian municipalities and the state joint stock company ‘State Real Estate’. The project aims to preserve cultural and historical heritage and to promote cross-border tourism between Russia and Latvia [30].

Further, the additional features of the development of transboundary tourist and recreational regions are examined.

7. The general level of social and economic development.

The north-eastern part of Latvia and the south-eastern part of Estonia are socially and economically inferior to the capitals and the adjacent (neighbouring) regions, being, in fact, the peripheral territories of these countries. The development of international tourism is also characterized by a gap. For instance, in 2016, Tartu accounted for only 5% of overnight stays of foreign tourists (and only 4% of Russian tourists) in Estonian hotels [25]. A similar situation is typical for Vidzeme and Latgale, Russia’s neighbouring regions, in Latvia.

Although the Pskov region is among the least developed Russian regions in social and economic spheres, it has a more favourable position compared to its neighbours. The most densely populated areas, including the regional center, adjoin the junction of the borders of the three countries. The most developed tourist and recreational area in the region, in-

cluding the city of Pskov and the Pechory municipal region, has also been formed here [10]. Due to this fact, the level of tourism development in this part of the Pskov region is equal in many aspects to the development of the tourism sector in the neighbouring regions of Estonia and Latvia or even surpasses them [8]. On the whole, tourism development should provide an impetus for socioeconomic development of these areas, which have been faced with a difficult (peripheral) socioeconomic situation, especially in the post-Soviet period, due to the barrier nature of state borders.

8. Ethnic similarity of population as the potential for developing ethnic and ethnographic tourism.

The states borders, dividing this tourist and recreational mesoregion, have a threshold nature in terms of ethnic population structure. However, in this case, the ethnic and cultural distinctions are an additional tourist resource. This small territory is an area of junction of five nations and three religions: the Lutherans (the Estonians and the Latvians), the Catholics (the Latgalls) and the Orthodox Christians (the Russians and the Setu). It is also necessary to mention the culture of Old Believers (mostly the Russians), whose small communities spread over the transboundary region (especially in Estonia and Latvia). For example, the descendants of Old Believers live on the Estonian shore of Lake Peipsi (Mustvee and Kalastee); they settled there in the 18th — the 19th centuries. More Old Believers live in the southern regions of Latgale, the eastern part of Latvia.

The exception is the transboundary microregion “Setomaa” (translated as ‘the land of Seto’). Its unity is determined by the historical area of residence of a Finno-Ugric people Setu (native name — Seto), who converted to Orthodox Christianity. Now they live in the Pechory district of the Pskov region (about 250 people) and in the neighboring Estonian townships — Vyrumaa and Pylvamaa [11]. Historically, Lake Peipsi has not always served a distinct ethnic divider. From the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, large groups of the Estonians and the Latvians, who accounted at that time for more than 10% of local population in the eastern part of the Lake Peipsi district, lived on its shores. They were descendants of the settlers from Livonia and Estonia, who arrived to these lands in the second half of the 19th century, immediately after the abolition of serfage in Russia [7].

9. Common historical past.

Although the territory of the transboundary mesoregion is not characterized by a common historical background, this fact, along with the region’s ethnic and cultural diversity, can be viewed as an additional tourist resource. Since the 13th century, over a period of five and a half centuries, these lands were parts of different state formations. They were part of one

state only for two and a half centuries (1721—1917 — in the Russian Empire, 1940—1991 — in the Soviet Union). Being parts of different state formations led to differences in cultural landscapes and cultural and historical heritage (types and forms of constructions, architectural styles, etc).

The only exception is the transboundary microregion Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa. It was divided by the state border only a quarter of a century ago, after the dissolution of the USSR. Before that, the territory of this microregion had been developing as a constituent part of one political and administrative formation: first, it subordinated to Pskov (from the 13th century to 1920), then it was part of the Republic of Estonia (from 1920 to 1944), later on it was divided between the Estonian SSR and the RSFSR (from 1944 to 1991) but even at that time Setomaa was within the borders of one state (the USSR) [8].

10. Developed relations in the social sphere (culture, sports, medicine, education, science, etc.).

Pskov (Russia) and Tartu (Estonia) — two regional centers as well as large university centers — are located near the border. This fact provides a more stimulating environment for developing relations in the social sphere (especially in education and research) in the microregion Pskov — Pechory — Tartu, compared to the Russian-Estonian-Latvian microregion Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis. It is worth mentioning that Pskov is a twin town for several towns in Latvia (Cesis, Valmiera, Rezekne, Daugavpils) and in Estonia (Tartu and Varska) [30]. The Russian-Latvian microregion Pytalovo — Rezekne finds itself in a less favourable position. The microregion of the third level Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa successfully takes advantage of its transit position between Pskov and Tartu. The Lake Peipsi district microregion loses a lot in this respect; although the resumption of water transport between Pskov and Tartu and the development of new water routes can help to regain close social contacts that were lost in the post-Soviet period. The implementation of the cross-border cooperation programmes ‘Russia — Estonia 2014—2020’ and ‘Russia — Latvia 2014—2020’ stimulates the development of relations in the social sphere.

Summary. Based on the above analysis of the signs of regional formation at the level of transboundary tourist and recreational microregions, as well as taking into account current flows of tourists, the following levels of region formation can be determined: ‘average’ for the Russian-Estonian microregion of the first level Pskov — Tartu; ‘below average’ for the Russian-Estonian microregion of the first level Pskov — Izborsk — Cesis; ‘low’ for the Russian-Latvian microregion of the second level Pytalovo — Rezekne; ‘above average’ for the Russian-Estonian microregion of the third level Izborsk-Pechory district / Setomaa; ‘initial’ for the Russian-Estonian microregion of the third level the Lake Peipsi district (it can be considered as a potential transboundary tourist and recreational microregion).

On the whole, the level of formation of the transboundary Latvian-Estonian-Russian mesoregion should be identified as ‘below average’ if all the above-mentioned microregions are taken into account, or as ‘average’ if two peripheral microregions (the Lake Peipsi district and Pytalovo — Rezekne) are excluded due to the initial stage of their development.

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