

**Yelena Kropinova**

**THE FACTORS AFFECTING  
THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE SOUTH-EASTERN  
BALTIC TOURISM  
AND RECREATION REGION**

*The territories of Vistula and Curonian lagoons, centrally located in the cross-border region, have numerous remarkable nature sites as well as monuments of history and culture. The article analyses the internal and external factors affecting the development of the Russian segment of the transborder "South-eastern Baltic" tourism and recreation region.*



**Key words:** cross-border tourism and recreation region, South-eastern Baltic, enabling factors, inhibiting factors

The analysis of development prospects of the South-eastern Baltic trans-border tourism and recreation region requires the identification of internal and external factors affecting the opportunities of the territory, which, in their turn, can be divided into enabling (contributing to the development) and inhibiting (impeding the development) factors. Such an approach makes it possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the territory.

**Internal enabling factors (strengths)**

*Favourable geographical position*

Regional benefits consist in an easy transport access to Vistula and Curonian Lagoon at different spatial levels. Partially, these benefits have already been exploited. This territory accommodates a significant part of the region's population, while railway and, especially, bus routes make it possible to reach the lagoon coasts in no more than 5 hours.

At the national and international levels, these benefits are as follows:

- the Khrabrovo international airport offering regular direct flights to 17 Russian and 12 foreign cities (data as of September 2010);
- Kaliningrad railway terminal offering direct passenger services to Moscow, Saint Petersburg, a number of other Russian cities, and Polish Tricity (Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot) and Berlin;
- regular international bus services to Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, German, and Belarusian cities;
- the Ust-Luga-Baltyisk-German ports ferry services for passengers and cars; since 2010, Vistula lagoon has been accessible to vessels introducing regular services;

In the long run, especially, after the reconstruction of communications and improvement of border crossing point functioning, all types of transport connections can be intensified.

*Unique natural complexes and objects*

An important factor behind the development of recreation activity is a 143 km seacoast including the coast of the Sambian peninsula, Vistula and

Curonian spits. The steep slopes of the peninsula are washed by sea waves. In the villages of Yantarny and Donskoye, beaches reach a width of 70 m; however, on the northern coast, for example, in the area of resort towns of Svetlogorsk and Zelenogradsk, beaches are overtopped by waves — therefore, bank protection measures are required there.

The lagoons have significant fish resources exploited for both commercial and amateur, including winter, fishing. The major environmental problem of Curonian lagoon is anthropogenic eutrophication relating predominantly to phosphorus pollution, which leads to annual occurrences of algal blooms in late summer, making the lagoon unfit for swimming.

The adjacent polder lands are protected from flooding by shores of up to 5 m height. Approximately 1000 kilometres of drainage canals is used to remove water, which is pumped out from fields by automated pump stations.

There are 97 fish and 3 cyclostome species, 58 of which fall into the group of least concerned species. Water pollution leads to the reduction in many fish species sensitive to water quality; moreover, many of them are harvested uncontrollably. So, the number of salmonids (salmon, trout, cisco, bulltrout) is decreasing.

There are 338 terrestrial vertebrate species, half of them are rare or endangered; 23 species (including 23 avian species) are critically endangered. 107 (22 mammal, 79 avian, 1 reptile, 5 amphibian) species require special protection [1, p. 54].

26% of 1436 plant species growing the wild in the region are threatened. A specific feature of the region's flora is a considerable number of species introduced to the territory by German forestry specialists. There are 683 species, subspecies, forms, and varieties of ornamental shrubbery, 74% of which are rare.

A unique natural formation is the Curonian spit, which is inscribed on UNESCO's world heritage list. In 1987, the Curonian Spit national park was established on its territory.

*Rich cultural and historical heritage (a large number of historic sites)*

The lagoon area is home to a large number of historic and cultural sites; however, most of them are poorly prepared for sightseeing and require restoration; many of them are falling apart. The list of cultural sites includes:

- 1) state-protected objects of federal, regional, and municipal significance [2];
- 2) recently discovered sites subject to state protection on the territories of municipalities [3].

There are 783 historic and cultural sites in the lagoon area. Most of them (634) date back to the German period of the region's history, 131 to the Soviet, and 18 to the Russian periods.

*A developed transport network*

The lagoon area, especially, its southern part bordering on Kaliningrad boasts a dense railway and motorway network. The Kaliningrad-Zelenogradsk-Pionersky-Svetlogorsk-Kaliningrad sections of the railway are electrified. A European gauge railway connects Kaliningrad (via Mamonov-Braniewo border crossing point) to the railway network of Poland. The Khrab-

rovo international airport handled 1.3 mln passengers in 2008. There are also seaports (Kaliningrad, Svetly, Baltysk, Pionersky); however, sea passenger services are poorly developed, river passenger services are nonexistent.

*A developed settlement system, including a city, a number of town, and numerous villages*

One city — Kaliningrad, 9 towns and 1 urban-type settlement, as well as 347 villages are situated in the lagoon area. Most towns are located in the western part of the area, in the vicinity of the Kaliningrad lagoon and on the coast. The territory adjacent to the Curonian lagoon is populated less densely.

*International cooperation experience*

Regional and municipal authorities, educational and cultural institutions, and non-governmental organisations of the Kaliningrad region in general, and the lagoon area in particular, have considerable experience of international cooperation, including various ties with partners from the neighbouring countries.

*The regional tourism development programme*

Until 2006, the State programme for the development of tourism and recreation in the Kaliningrad region for 2002—2006 had been in effect in the region. It was replaced by the Development of the Kaliningrad region as a tourism centre for 1007—2011/2010—2014 target regional programme. Among other matters, the programme includes important international events [4]:

- experience-sharing workshops in collaboration with the Lithuanian Association of rural tourism and the Department of tourism of the Marshal of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship;

- international project on the establishment of a training centre — a model rural complex — on the territory of the Kaliningrad region in collaboration with the Department of tourism of the Marshal of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship;

- Russian-Lithuanian-Polish project on the development of hunting and environmental tourism in the Lake Vištytis area in the framework of the neighbourhood programme;

- project on creating a cycle lane network in the framework of the common European EvroVelo bicycle route in collaboration with Neringa municipality (Lithuania);

- the *Three ports* Russian-Lithuanian-Polish project aimed at the establishment of a network of marinas for the development of joint water routes in the framework of the CBC Program in collaboration with Krynica Morska (Poland) and Neringa (Lithuania) municipalities.

**External enabling factors** (opportunities):

*The vicinity of developed tourist regions of Poland and Lithuania*

The neighbouring Polish and Lithuanian territories boast a high level of tourism development and active measures aimed at the maintenance and exploitation of historical and cultural heritage, which is closely linked to the heritage of the Kaliningrad region's lagoon area. Sopot, the Vistula spit (Krynica Morska), Mikołajki, and Mrągowo, as well as manors in the Masurian Lake

District in Poland, Neringa and Palanga in Lithuania are famous tourism and recreation centres, while Gdansk, Malbork, and Elbląg are important urban tourism destinations. International experience and joint exploitation of tourist infrastructure facilitates the solution to the problem of maintenance and reconstruction of tourist sites, tourist itinerary planning, etc.

*Opportunities to welcome both Russian and European tourists*

The south-eastern Baltic is considered the most promising territory for inclusion into international tourist itineraries in the Baltic Sea region. It is not a coincidence that it was Kaliningrad that hosted the 3rd Baltic Sea tourism forum, which was initiated and financed by the government of the Kaliningrad region.

*Tourism is one of the regional development priorities*

The programme for the socioeconomic development of the Kaliningrad region for 2007—2016 pays special attention to tourism. One of the five programme modules is entitled "The development of tourism and recreation complex, hospitality infrastructure and the improvement the region's image".

*Tourism as a municipality development priority*

The strategies and development programmes of all municipalities of the lagoon area give priority to tourism, for some of them — the Svetlogorsk district, Pionersky and Yantarny — it is the number one development priority. It implies the allocation of funds to tourism infrastructure development and tourist site reconstruction, support for tourist companies and hospitality facilities.

Of importance are the amendments to the federal law on the general principles of organisation of local self-governance in the Russian Federation vesting, which give municipalities the right to "create favourable tourism conditions", which was an important step in the development of tourism and recreation sphere.

*The tourism-focused special economic zone on the Curonian spit*

The Curonian spit is the location of several tourism-focused special economic zones. It implies federal investment in the development of tourist infrastructure and allocation of state owned land plots for the construction of tourist facilities.

*The gambling zone project*

The Kaliningrad region was selected as one the four regions to host a gambling zone.

*The federal target programme for the development of the Kaliningrad region*

The programme includes measures aimed at the development of necessary tourist infrastructure, especially the transport one, as well as ensuring gas supply to residential areas.

*International projects*

The region and its municipalities, as well as social welfare and non-governmental organisations take an active part in the implementation of international projects. The most active municipality is the Baltysk town dis-

tract, which participates in a number of Interreg — the Baltic Sea and Lithuania-Poland-the Kaliningrad region neighbourhood programmes. It is the lagoon area that is studied within the Lithuania-Poland-the Kaliningrad region neighbourhood project entitled *Crossroads — the lagoon area: cultural and historical crossroads of the peoples of the south-eastern Baltic*.

**Internal inhibiting factors** (weaknesses):

*Poorly developed tourist infrastructure*

By all parameters (accommodation, catering industry, transport, etc), the tourism infrastructure of the lagoon area, although surpassing that of the rest of the region and many other Russian territories, can hardly compete with the neighbouring Polish and Lithuanian regions in terms of price/quality ratio.

*Unsatisfactory condition of tourist sites*

Most tourist sites are not financed sufficiently and are in poor condition.

*Not immaculate environmental condition*

The major problem consists in the absence of due sewage treatment and household waste storage and recycling. Large amounts of untreated sewage enter the lagoons and the sea. The conservation of inland water bodies, forest and parks is also insufficient. The air in the city and towns and along busiest motorways is polluted with exhaust fumes.

*Military facilities in potentially attractive tourist areas*

A significant part of the territory lies within the 5 kilometre restricted border zone. Military facilities occupy a number of coastal and inland territories of the Sambian peninsula. It complicates, in particular, rational planning in Baltyisk. Military facilities impede direct tourist transit on the Vistula spit.

*The lack of a unified territory development plan*

Since the lagoon area belongs to a great number of first-level (urban and rural settlements) and second-level (municipal and urban districts) municipal formations, with the land being owned by municipalities, rational spatial planning appears rather complicated. Thus, for example, the comprehensive scheme of development of the so-called Coastal functional recreation zone (situated on the Sambian peninsula and the Curonian spit), which was developed in the early 2000s, has never been implemented.

*Insufficient financing*

Regional and municipal budgets do not have enough funds to finance the tourist infrastructure sufficiently; federal financing is not sufficient either, while private investors do not risk financing long-term projects relating to the comprehensive development of territories, including the maintenance of tourist sites.

*The absence of a single administrative body*

Typical of all Russian regions, the Kaliningrad region faces problems with the development of horizontal relations between municipalities, which is the only way to ensure an integrated administration of the lagoon area.

*The liquidation of natural preserves and other types of specially protected natural sites since 2005*

As in Russian in general, the Kaliningrad region, including the lagoon area, specially preserved natural sites. According to the environmental protection scheme for the Kaliningrad region, as of 2004, such territories include:

- natural sites of federal significance:
- the Curonian spit national park,
- the resort town of Zelenogradsk;
- natural sites of regional significance:
- four wild animal preserves (Novoselovsky, Dyunny, Zapovedny, Goromovsky);
- a natural preserve of a general type (the Vistula spit).

Moreover, this territory included a small (northern) part of the Kamensky wild animal preserve of regional significance.

A significant part of the 57 regional natural (botanical) sites and 32 protected water bodies (swamplands) is situated in the lagoon zone.

There is a need to create new specially protected natural sites in view of the earlier practice and develop a corresponding legal framework. As of today, efforts are underway to create a specially protected natural site of Rominka Forest.

**External inhibiting factors (threats):**

*The visa regime*

The visa regime for visiting the neighbouring Poland and Lithuania by Kaliningraders and the Kaliningrad region by the citizens of these countries is mentioned by most experts as the major reason for the lack of a stable tourist inflow.

*Difficulties in the overland transport connection to other Russian regions*

An overland journey between the Kaliningrad region and other Russian territories involves crossing the borders with Lithuania and Belarus or Latvia. Unfortunately, an agreement on free transit through the territory of Lithuania has not been reached. Although one does not need a visa for such transit, it is replaced by the so-called simplified transit document, which entails additional time and financial costs relating to receiving a permit of the Lithuanian side.

*Competition from other Baltic tourist regions*

Regarding the competition from similar specialised regions in the Baltic Sea area, it is important to take into account that Russian citizens need visas to visit international resorts, which decreases their competitiveness. Moreover, western resorts are quite expensive. However, one cannot but mention the potential of, first of all, Latvian and Polish resorts and the leniency of Latvian consulates towards Russian tourist applying for a visa for visiting Latvian resorts. At the same time, there is a new option of obtaining a short-term visa (valid for up to 72 hours) at marine border crossing points.

#### *Insufficiency of the regional and municipal budgets*

In the conditions of the current crisis, the budgets were further reduced (in 2009, regional budget was cut by a third in comparison to the plan). Consequently, municipalities received reduced transfers (all territorial units of the region, except Kaliningrad, receive federal subsidies). The law stipulating an increasing role of municipalities in the tourism development should be equipped with special financing mechanisms.

#### *Lack of strategic investors*

As long as the regional tourism sphere lacks sufficient concentration of capital, one can hardly hope for large investments.

### Conclusion

The Curonian and Vistula lagoons boast a natural and cultural heritage of remarkable richness, being, to a degree, an integral natural complex with common history and culture, which today enjoys active transborder contacts. A strategy for the development of marine cultural and historical heritage on the Russian territory of the Curonian and Vistula lagoons was formulated within the Lithuania-Poland-the Kaliningrad region neighbourhood project entitled *Crossroads — the lagoon area: cultural and historical crossroads of the peoples of the south-eastern Baltic*. This territory can be interpreted as an integral tourist region with international tourist itineraries including the local administrative territorial units and municipalities of Russia, Poland, and Lithuania. The transformation of the area into a competitive transborder tourist region requires a solution to the following problems, including those mentioned in the action plan in the framework of the Strategy implementation:

1. The assessment of potential of natural and cultural heritage of the lagoon area in all three countries (Russia, Poland, Lithuania).
2. The evaluation of conditions introduced in these countries initiatives aimed at the maintenance and development of natural and cultural heritage of the lagoon area.
3. The evaluation of the current state and prospects of international cooperation on the maintenance and development of natural and cultural heritage at the state, regional, and municipal levels between cultural and education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and business.
4. The development of recommendations on the maintenance and development of natural and cultural heritage of the lagoon area in each country at the international level.
5. The delegation of responsibility for the implementation of a common strategy, identification of areas of responsibility, and formulation of a plan of joint initiatives within the Strategy.
6. The adoption of a harmonised strategy for the maintenance and joint exploitation of the natural and cultural heritage of the lagoon area, in particular, for tourism in recreation purposes.

### References

1. *Cybin, Ju. A.* 2004. Shema ohrany prirody Kaliningradskoj oblasti. M-vo prirod. resursov RF, Federal'naja sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere prirodopol'zovanija, M-vo prirod. resursov RF po Kaliningr. obl., Upravlenie prirod. resursov i ohrany okruzhajuwey sredy. Kaliningrad.
2. *Prilozhenie* k Postanovleniju Pravitel'stva Kaliningradskoj oblasti №132 ot 23 marta 2007 g. "Ob obektah kul'turnogo nasledija regional'nogo i mestnogo znachenija". Sprav.-pravovaja sistema "KonsultantPljus".
3. *Prilozhenie* k prikazu Sluzhby gosudarstvennoj ohrany obektov kul'turnogo nasledija Kaliningradskoj oblasti ot 20 ijunja 2008 goda №9. Sprav.-pravovaja sistema «KonsultantPljus».
4. *Celevaja* regional'naja programma "Razvitie Kaliningradskoj oblasti kak turisticheskogo centra na 2007—2011 gody". Sprav.-pravovaja sistema "KonsultantPljus".
5. *Kropinova, E. G.* 2008. Vestnik Rossijskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. Immanuila Kant, №7, pp. 85—88.

### About author

*Dr Yelena Kropinova*, Associate Professor, Department of Sociocultural Service and Tourism, Immanuel Kant State University of Russia.

E-mail: kropinova@mail.ru