Sustainable Tourism Development on the Basis of Cultural Heritage in North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, Latvia

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Abstract
The article deals with tourism potential identification of cultural objects in North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (hereinafter: NVBR), Latvia territory. Authors decided to apply the auditing method-model Market Appeal –Robusticity Matrix of Tourism Potential and survey of local residents. Findings show that cultural resources are distributed equally through all territory which ensures sustainable tourism development planning. Finally, authors are divided potential tourism development zones.

Key-World: culture heritage, sustainable tourism, local population, biosphere reserve, nature protection

1 Introduction
The term sustainable tourism development implies implementation of all resource management in a way that economic, social, institutional and aesthetic needs are satisfied without losing cultural integrity, the basic ecological processes and life support systems. The objective of creation of biosphere reserves is to reach a sustainable balance between two frequently conflicting goals – retaining of biological diversity and economic development without forgetting cultural values. Biosphere reserves are places where these goals are tested, perfected, demonstrated and implemented.

Biosphere reserves are benchmark regions for sustainable development [4]. NVBR is one of the 531 biosphere reserves in 105 countries in the world. In Latvia such a place is NVBR, established in 1997, covering 8 % of the territory of Latvia. Alongside significant nature values in NVBR the cultural heritage is also essential – both the tangible and the intangible in this territory.

In accordance with Madrid Declaration, passed by the Third World Biospheres Congress (in Madrid, February, 2008) should enhance cooperation with the local residents, governmental institutions, the private sector, mass media, local governments, research and educational institutions and to implement the Madrid action plan in the period of 2008 – 2013. Therefore population, researchers and administrators of NVBR involvement in sustainable tourism development planning activities is important. Authors have researched sustainable development processes in NVBR since 2005. In the paper are compared results from two researches.

According to author research results in 2007 there were 168 state protected cultural heritage monuments located in NVBR 44 monuments are mentioned as tourism resources (they are mentioned in local governmental websites or in tourism brochures in the last years).

2 Problem Formulation
NVBR has three protection zones: special areas of conservation: nature reserve zone (34 198.3 ha, 7.2 %); landscape protection zone (240 106 ha, 50.5 %) and neutral zone (200 819 ha, 42.3 %). Development processes are important for neutral zone and tourism development is one of the economical diversification forms which could be appropriate for nature protected area. The most essential branches of economics that are developed in the territory of the NVBR are: timber industry, food processing, fishery and fish processing and building.
The last five years have witnessed growth of tourism industry – both in tourist accommodation sector and service diversity; tourism infrastructure is also improving. In 2007 there were 75 tourist accommodation places in the territory of NVBR. This number has grown by 2.3 times since 2003 while the number of beds has grown by 3.7 times. During the tourist season in 2007 tent sites were offered by 43 entrepreneurs, additional services – sightseeing, manufacturing of pottery, angling, paintball, etc. – were offered by 42 entrepreneurs and farms. The number of people visiting museums and attending events has also grown. NVBR has not prepared tourism policy of NVBR territory as well as they have not investigated chapter of tourism offers in their website www.biosfera.gov.lv. Crucial aim in this case is to identify potential tourism resources in NVBR by assessment of experts and local population.

As it has been noted by H.du Cros and B.McKercher [5], the assessment of culture or cultural heritage object tourism potential is complicated as it implies more than the market potential of these objects. It includes also visitors’ load carrying capacity. The cultural heritage object audit model by H.du Cros [6] was created by selecting 20 Hon Kong cultural heritage monuments and testing them. The assessors used indicators and sub-indicators and evaluated market appeal product design needs and robusticity cultural values. The model is a matrix into which heritage places can be classified as falling into nine general areas of suitability for tourism in terms of their market appeal and ability to withstand the impacts of visitation likely to be associated with that appeal. As the model was designed in Asia, and judging from the available literature, it is most frequently tested there [7, 8]. The authors of previous research wanted to test it in Latvia, assessing the cultural heritage objects located in NVBR.

The basic method for assessment of cultural heritage object tourism potential was the audit model Market Appeal – Robusticity Matrix of Tourism Potential described by H.du Cros [6], H.du Cros and B.McKercher [5]. At the beginning the authors selected objects for the audit. Two criteria were chosen for the selection of the objects: 1) the object should be a state significance cultural heritage monument; 2) the object being used as a tourism resource (information about it is available in tourism brochures, or local government websites in the subdivision of tourism or sightseeing sites in the period of previous five years).

The next step was collecting information on these objects, including: object ownership and its public accessibility, management history, cultural significance, available resources for interpreting information, existing tourism products and appeal in places of cultural heritage or in their neighbourhood, overall cultural tourism situation in the respective tourism destination.

It was followed by investigation of the involved parties or those who might be involved in the protection of the cultural heritage in the future, and in the planning of its utilisation (owners, managers, cultural heritage conservation inspectors, planners). The above mentioned 44 objects were site-visited in 2006 and 2007 and after each visiting they were assessed by sub-indicators according to the available information (See Table 1). Each sub-indicator had a ranking scale of 0-5 (0 – low assessment, 5 – high) and the maximum possible total assessment was 54 points.

<table>
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Table 1. Cultural Heritage Tourism sub-indicators and ranking grades (by Du Cros and McKercher, 2002).
A good story about the object 0-5
Unique selling point 0-5
Complements other tourism products 0-5
Political support 0-3
Destination connected with culture or cultural heritage 0-3
Tourism activity in the region 0-3
Inclusion in specific tourism products 0-5

Product Design Needs

Accessiblity to parts of the object 0-4
Good accessibility of the object from populated places 0-3
Remote location from other cultural heritage attraction objects 0-3
Amenities (parking place, toilets, info, paths etc.) 0-5

L 0-18= low appeal
M 19-37= moderate appeal
H 38-54= high appeal

Educational value 0-2
Social value 0-2
Scientific value 0-2
Frequency 0-3
Typicality 0-4

Robusticity
Management plan exists 0-4
Regular supervision, maintenance 0-5
Object fragility 0-4
General (physical) condition 0-4

Potential for negative impact on the object’s physical condition from high visitation 0-5
Potential for negative impact on lifestyle and habits of the local community from high visitation 0-5
Potential for change within the framework of the development of the product, leaving a negative impact on the object physical condition 0-5
Potential for change within the framework of the development of the product leaving a negative impact on lifestyle and habits of the local community 0-5

L 0-18= fragile/low cultural value
M 19-37= moderate
H 38-54= high

After the assessment each cultural heritage object was plotted in matrix according to received grades. According to its place on the matrix each cultural heritage object was placed in one of the nine quadrants: if the object was placed in Quadrant A, its appeal on the market was from medium to high with high (from A1 to A2) robusticity level. The objects placed in Quadrant B have high (B1 to B2) appeal on the market, but they have low load carrying capacity level. The objects placed in Quadrant C have medium appeal on the market, but their load carrying capacity is high (from C1 to C2). The objects placed in Quadrant D, have low market appeal. On the basis of this assessment the authors have worked out recommendations for their more effective use in the tourism sector. [1]

A survey of local residents was carried out to identify the local residents’ understanding of sustainable development in three district administrative territories within the NVBR territory in autumn 2007. Results of the survey n=1038 responses to the questionnaires received, suitable for data processing; 1014 questionnaires from 38 administrative territories in the area of the NVBR. Survey questionnaire structured in three parts: first, included 38 statements representing four sustainable development dimensions: institutional, environmental, economic, social; second, respondent’s understanding of the term sustainable development, Perspective territories and popular tourism objects, infrastructure evaluation; third, Information about the respondent. In the paper are analysed
respondents’s understanding of the term sustainable development and popular tourism objects.

3 Problem Solution

In general NVBR cultural tourism activities according to visitation figures of cultural events and museums may be evaluated as expanding in year 2004-2006. The authors have analysed data compiled by the local information centres from tourism entrepreneurs regarding the number of visitors.

Optimisation of assessment of cultural heritage objects tourism potential is complicated, and each researcher has tried to include the most essential criteria to make the appraisal as objective as possible.

Most indicators are qualitative by nature which does not exclude subjective appraisal. Each sub-indicator has its own ranking grade, and that in its turn allows a relatively objective appraisal of each sub-indicator. The authors selected 44 state protected cultural heritage monuments in the NVBR territory. The highest market appeal indicators showed in figure 1. [1]

Fig. 1. Market Appeal –Robusticity Matrix for State protected cultural heritage monuments in NVBR territory [1]

On the basis of the achieved results the authors elaborated recommendations for each state protected cultural heritage monument, they could be summarised in five large groups [5] according to tourism potential development possibilities: 1. Deciding not to identify tourism as an objective as the asset has insufficient market appeal. 2. Select another asset that is less costly or easier to conserve or commodify. 3. Continue the development process with the original asset with higher priority on conservation measures to better manage its cultural values in face of projected visitation. 4. Continue the development process with the original asset with higher priority on commodification and tourism product design needs to boost or enhance market appeal. 5. Continue the development process with the original asset with equal emphasis on conservation measures and commodification/product design needs.

According conducted survey in 2007 results showed that 66% of respondents answered question about sustainable development meaning. The most active respondents are in the ages 60 to 69 (71%) and 45 to 59 (68 %), with secondary education 61 % and higher education 53 %, persons which are living in NVBR more as 20 years 74 % or native persons in NVBR 82 %. Full understanding of sustainable development was demonstrated by half (49%) of the respondents although 34% of the respondents did not answer this question at all. 42% of responses by sustainable development are similar with Brundtland Report in 1987 which noted as long-term development, slow and care of future. 20% noted sustainable development as protection of nature values and 10% as economy of resources, 11% has narrow understanding of sustainability and 2% noted that it is consumption of resources. Example of one explanation: “Sustainable
development is like a house: one generation lays the foundations and builds it while each next one perfects it without destroying the previously created.”(an anonymous Aloja resident, from North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve survey in October, 2007)

Perspective tourism development territories by local residents are showed in Figure 2. They are mentioned as perspective tourism areas ten places, including nature objects, small towns with surrounding area, soviet cultural urban heritage (area X – Seda town). Responses of perspective tourism territories collected from 61% of respondents. The findings are similar with auditing of aesthetic landscape values in NVBR ecological landscape plan, which is approved in 2007.

Fig. 2. Perspective tourism areas in NVBR by survey results.

Local residents (60% of respondents) are mentioned most popular tourism objects and places in NVBR. It is showed in Figure 3. Most popular tourism object is Skanais kalns nature Park and Mazsalaca town (with number 1 in Figure 3) 36% mentioned it, Burtnieki Lake area with cultural heritage (with number 2 in Figure 3) 21%, Vidzeme seaside (with number 3 in Figure 3) 16%, Red rocks in Salaca river valley (with number 4 in Figure 3) 14.3%, Koni mills – industrial heritage in rural area (with number 5 in Figure 3) 13.1%, Munchausen's Museum and Forest Trail (with number 6 in Figure 3) 11.9%, Dikli manor - State protected cultural heritage monuments (with number 7 in Figure 3) 12%, Randu meadows (with number 8 in Figure 3) 11%, Zilaiskalns – mystery place (with number 9 in Figure 3) 9.7% and Liivs’ sacrificial caves (with number 10 in Figure 3) 7.4%.

Fig. 3. Most popular tourism objects, places in NVBR by survey results.

4 Conclusion
Analysing state protected cultural heritage monuments in NVBR, which are offered in tourism, the authors concluded that by using the cultural heritage object auditing method, elaborated by du Cros [6], where the results are depicted in Market Appeal – Robusticity Matrix, we may obtain a good idea about the object’s tourism potential. In order to do the object appraisal by using indicators and sub-indicators, it is necessary to do work consuming research and compile a large amount of materials on each object; a site visit is also mandatory. The selected and analysed state protected cultural heritage monuments in NVBR revealed the following problems hindering the use of cultural heritage in tourism: insufficient state support in maintenance of cultural heritage monuments as it does not promote object saving, conservation, restoration and repair. This makes the monuments visually unattractive, their economic potential is not sufficiently utilised (social or public functions of the objects: schools, libraries, museums in these premises).

In general, assessing state protected cultural heritage monuments tourism potential in NVBR, it may be concluded that majority of the objects have moderate tourism potential, moderate tourism market appeal un moderate robusticity which means that the capacity of these
objects allows a more intensive visitation in the future planning.

Finally, comparing results from TOP 10 visited objects during 2004-2006 [1], Market Appeal –Robusticity Matrix [1] and local resident survey in 2007 by tourism potential areas in NVBR and TOP tourism objects and places in NVBR, we find Mazsalaca town area with Skanais kalns nature park and Dikli manor (Dikli is well-known as the birthplace of the traditions of the Latvian theatre and song festivals) as tourism attraction places which are dominated in all previous researches about sustainable tourism in NVBR. Dikli manor has high potential for sustainable tourism development on the basis of cultural heritage. Mazsalaca town area with Nature Park can develop tourism activities by nature and culture tourism integration in the future. There are potential to develop active tourism on the basis of nature value. Lake Burtnieki area has high potential of tourism development. There are nature values (one of the largest lakes in Latvia) and cultural heritage. We made deeper research of Lake Burtnieks and according with results we determined four tourism development zones around Lake Burtnieks neighbourhood area. South part of lake in Burtnieki settlements and South east part of lake by nature and culture-historical resources is similar. Other two zones have dispersedly resources [2]. According with results of local residents’ survey which included respondents from whole territory of NVBR we conclude that local population has friendly attitude about sustainable tourism development in NVBR. There are diffusion of tourism objects and resources in NVBR which have positive impact to strong sustainable development in NVBR.

Regarding sustainable tourism development principles, one might say that inclusion of cultural heritage into tourism in the territory of NVBR is at an initial stage; therefore definition of future development directions for each of the objects is very important.

References:
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