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Baltic Studies Centre
Sandra Šūmane
sandra.sumane@gmail.com

Snapshot: Expressions of Urban - Peri-Urban - Rural Relationships

(New) Tourism in Tukums

Tukums, Latvia

1. Brief Description

Tourism is one of the four priority and economic specialisation sectors in Tukums municipality (Tukums region development program 2015-21; TRDP). Well-preserved cultural and natural heritage, as well as good accessibility due to a developed infrastructure (i.e., roads, public transport) and a comparatively central location and proximity to the capital city Riga are good preconditions for tourism development and diverse tourist activities. Currently there are 167 tourist sites registered in the municipality. The number of registered visitors reached 355,000 in 2014 (TRDP 2015-2021). While considerable given Latvia's population, this number does not put Tukums among the top tourist destinations in Latvia, even though unregistered tourism means that the number of visitors is likely higher.

A “conventional” tourism offer in the region (e.g. museums, castles, Tukums old town) has been continuously updated and complemented by new tourist sites, activities and services, such as creative workshops, renovated manors, thematic routes, mobile applications, etc. Many of these new attractions are aimed at rediscovering the value of local (rural) capital, such as local food, traditions, natural resources, cultural heritage, and famous personalities from the region. Diversification and segmentation of the tourism offer are taking place in response to consumer tastes (e.g., ecotourism, agritourism, gastronomic, medical tourism). In addition, digitisation and ICTs offer new opportunities to reach out to visitors and provide them with services for a more informed and convenient tourism experience (e.g. mobile applications, digital maps).

Both public and private actors - Tukums municipality, the regional tourism office, entrepreneurs - are involved in implementing these new tourism initiatives. The development of tourism, at least from the point of view of planning and governance, is planned in a territory that extends beyond the administrative boundaries of Tukums municipality. The development and implementation of a (new) tourism offer is sometimes linked with the development of new regional and extra-regional cooperation and organisational forms, such as thematic networks for entrepreneurs involved in tourism, associations or collaboration for managing

the development of tourism in natural sites (e.g. Abava river valley or Ķemeri national park), interregional cooperation of tourism offices in developing a joint tourism offer.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

The core question addressed in the existing documents, both planning and research, is the role of tourism in regional development. The primary link is made to tourism's contribution to the regional economy, but it is also considered in the context of improving the quality of life, invigorating social and cultural life, maintaining rural lifestyles and landscape (TRDP 2015-2021; Ziemeļniece 2011), and managing environmental impact (Leitis, 2011).

A related challenge considered in the documents is how to build a new tourism offer that distinguishes the region from other territories and increases its competitiveness (in a sustainable way). The questions addressed include (i) what (new) resources are to be used for this purpose, (ii) how to link to extra-regional tourism flows and infrastructure, (iii) how to balance various dimensions of development (economic, social, environmental). Tourism is treated as a complex endeavour with an inter-sectoral character and involving many parties (tourists, tourism operators, rural entrepreneurs, residents, nature, and public institutions) who might represent different standpoints.

No explicit questions or challenges are formulated regarding the role of new tourism for urban or rural areas and their linkages; the rural and the urban seem to be implicitly integrated in the analysis and visions of the development of tourism in the region.

The issues raised above suggest a number of challenges that should be addressed as part of ROBUST: (1) to consider both advantages and disadvantages of more intensive urban - rural linkages; (2) to analyse these linkages in their complexity - including various economic, social and environmental aspects; and (3) to integrate the positions, opinions and interests of different stakeholders in the analysis.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

We can identify all three perspectives of space - absolute, relative and relational space - in relation to tourism development in Tukums municipality. Planning documents apply the perspective of absolute space that equates Tukums with the municipality's administrative territory. These documents do not strictly bind tourism development to the administrative territory, but it is the principal territorial reference that is used. Accordingly, the area of formal responsibility of Tukums tourism office is the administrative territory of Tukums municipality; however, in reality its field of operation and cooperation is much larger.

There are also specific formal governance arrangements put in place to facilitate interregional cooperation in supporting and promoting tourism in the region, (e.g. agreements with neighbouring administrative districts and the tourism agency of Kurzeme). Connection and cooperation of different regional actors operating in a single tourism area that is spread over several neighbouring administrative territories is stressed

as one of the key factors for successful tourism development (Klepers and Rozīte 2010). In his study on tourism's spatial structures at country level, Klepers (2012) notes that the long-term consolidation of absolute spaces of administrative territories (in terms of technical infrastructure and social networks of entrepreneurs that are attached to administrative territories) have hampered the development of relational spaces in the tourism sector across administrative borders.

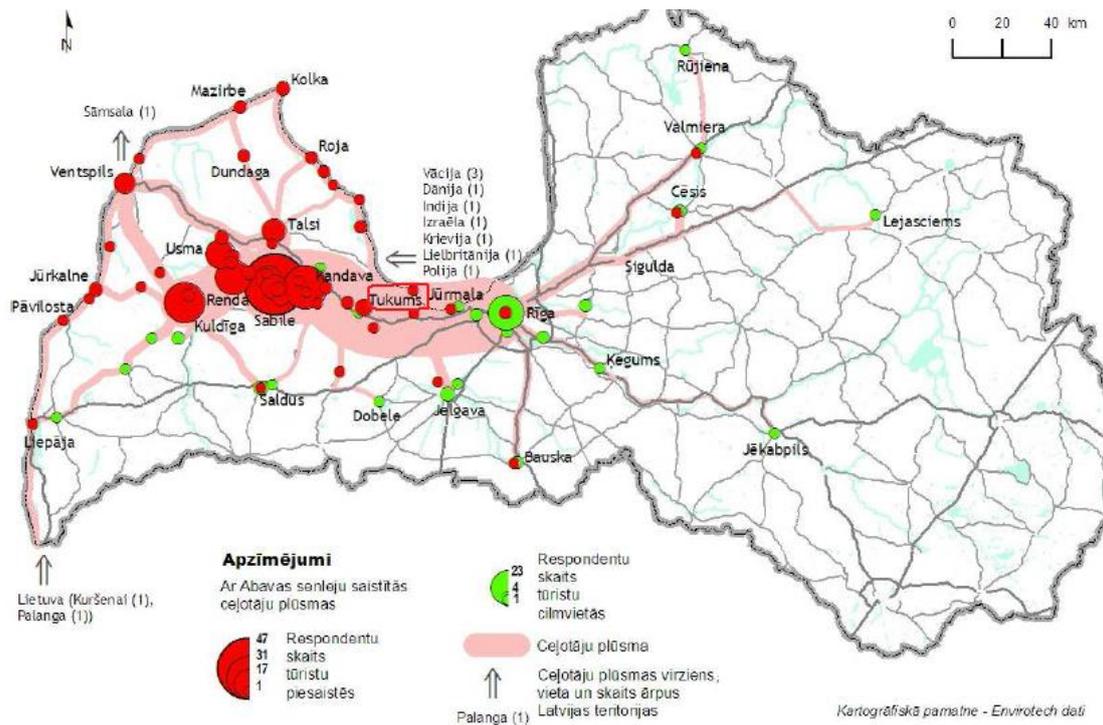
Otherwise, reported practices and scientific and analytical documents characterise tourism development in terms of relative and relational space. A central question in these perspectives is how to mobilise and connect various territorial actors and resources in developing a (new) tourism offer. The documents report that an intra- and inter-regional tourism offer has been developed by means of thematic and 'cluster' tourism which connects tourism services on a sectoral and territorial base. Examples of such collaborative tourism offers involve thematic routes that link natural, gastronomic, or cultural sites, and tourism offers that propose a set of related tourism services in a certain territory. These initiatives have been put in place in cooperation between Tukums municipality and other actors in Kurzeme (TRDP).

We can identify a mix and hybridisation of the rural and the urban in the tourism offer when "urban" and "rural" are detached from their spatial referents. There are tourism sites in the regional centre with "rural" contents (a weaving workshop or a hay museum in Tukums town), and vice versa - "urban" tourism sites in rural areas (Cinevilla, a movie town in a rural area).

Some regional actors and authors (Ivans 2013; Klepers 2012) point to the need to create new localities or tourism areas, i.e. to define more precisely a functional space of Tukums tourism region and its contents in terms of a tourism offer. A well-articulated vision of Tukums tourism area would be helpful in auditing and developing local tourism resources, and branding and marketing the region to potential visitors more effectively.

Different actors may have different perceptions of the tourism region. Klepers (2012) concludes that tourism regions, as they are perceived by tourists, are much larger than those of local tourism entrepreneurs. He has developed maps of functional or relational spaces around certain tourist sites, based on tourist flows, common itineraries and stops. For instance, **Picture 1** shows Tukums as a part of the Abava river valley area.

Picture 1. Abava river valley tourism area



Green circles: origin of a tourist; Pink areas: his/her itinerary; Red circles: tourists' reported stops. Source: Klepers 2012

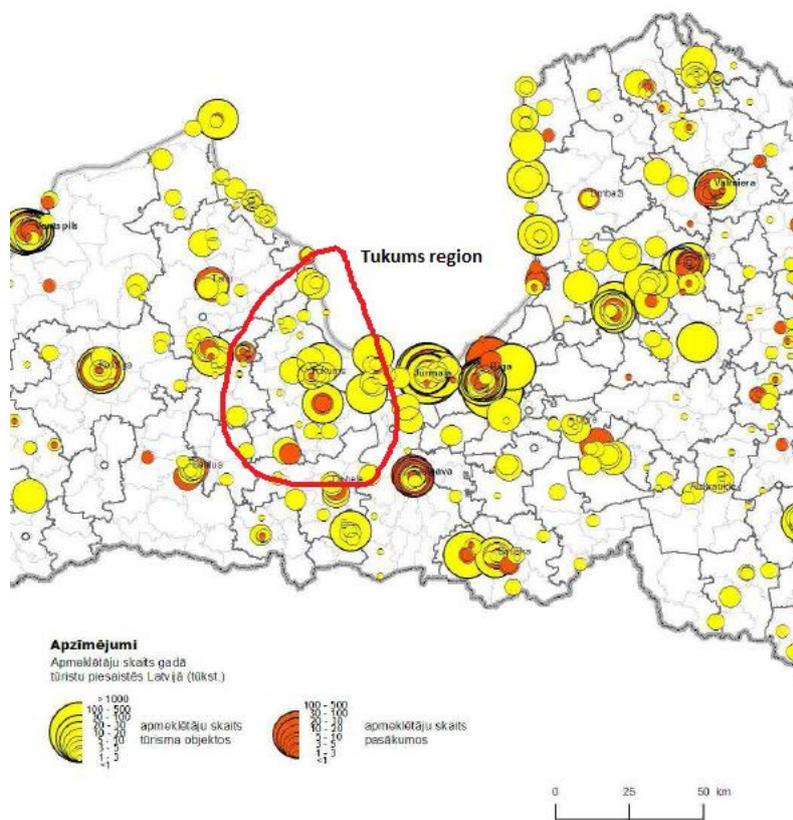
Intensification of tourist flows is often perceived positively. The increasing number of tourists is seen as beneficial to the regional economy, especially in terms of new employment possibilities in the region (and for rural residents in particular) because employment possibilities in rural areas are generally limited. Indeed, the number of people employed in the tourism sector in Tukums municipality is increasing (Krievs 2013). Tourism is interlinked with the development of other sectors of the regional economy (such as catering, transport, health, and entertainment) and is seen as a means of improving the quality of life of local residents (Tukums region development strategy 2033). The survey of the quality of life in the region and on the work of Tukums council shows that residents are most satisfied with sectors that are directly linked to tourism: roads, improvement of green zones, infrastructure for cultural and sports events (Apkopoti iedzīvotāju aptaujas rezultāti, 2016).

On the other hand, tourism development creates new or illuminates existing spaces of conflict. Such conflict zones emerge most often where environmental resources (landscape, biodiversity, nature as such) are confronted with expanding tourism infrastructure and an increasing number of tourists: intensive tourist flows can have a negative impact on the environment. Conflict areas also appear where diverse territorial development trends come across one other - for example, expansion of industrial agriculture and urban infrastructure for production *versus* maintenance of the rural landscape, including traditional cultural heritage sites that can be a resource for tourism development (Ziemeļniece 2011). In line with this, Dobeļe et al. (2018) argue that farms

engaged in rural tourism reported much lower EU co-funding for their business development than organic, dairy, beef cattle and fruit farms. The authors explain this disparity in the support received by differences in the available amount and kinds of support for the different holdings and the rural/agricultural development pathways they represent.

Tourism flows in the region are not evenly distributed (See **Picture 2**). Cities and bigger cultural events generally attract more visitors than areas with lower population density and a more limited tourism offer and infrastructure (Klepers 2012). Therefore, one can expect that the diverse impacts of tourism are distributed unevenly.

Picture 2. Number of visitors at tourist sites and events



Circles in yellow are the number of visitors at tourism sites; circles in red: number of visitors at events. Source: Klepers 2012.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

Several issues emerge when considering rural - urban linkages in the context of (new) tourism offer and smart development:

1) *Smart specialisation*. As mentioned above, some authors criticise the lack of a clear vision for Tukums tourism region, its under-defined tourism offer in the broader regional and national context, and rather poor tourism marketing. The lack of smart specialization of the

regional tourism offer is seen as undermining the region's competitiveness and hampering better use of its potential. This indicates issues with regional tourism governance.

2) *Good tourism governance.* Tourism is set as the priority in Tukums' economic sector. The regional development strategy and action plan describe the sector and set general targets and actions. However, presently there are no specific planning documents that would detail the sector's strategic development (the previous regional tourism development strategy expired in 2013). The council's tourism information office is the principal actor responsible for the facilitation of tourism and the development and coordination of tourism offer in the region. It cooperates with regional tourism businesses, and provides several services, such as marketing, education, market research and joint tourism product development (Smušková 2013). Better cooperation among regional tourism businesses and regional development stakeholders is needed in order to develop a smart tourism offer. Some good examples include cluster tourism offers in Tukums and its suburbs, in the coastal area, in the area surrounding Jaunpils medieval castle, and the Abava river valley (Krievs 2013). Leitis (2011) raises the issue of sustainable tourism management in order to promote eco-friendly and socially responsible tourism.

3) *Brands, labels, slogans, certificates.* Recently Tukums council has created an official slogan for the region - "Uz Tukumu pēc smukuma", or "Go to Tukums for beauty", for marketing purposes. The slogan has been used in various cultural and sporting events. There are several quality certificates and prizes for tourism enterprises. Although these provide some information, analysis and evidence of their efficiency is currently missing.

4) *Valorisation of local resources.* Novel tourism activities are developed in the region that place value in various local resources. For instance, agritourism introduces local farming traditions; gastronomic tourism routes offer the possibility of discovering local or traditional food and recipes (e.g. wine, fruit, milk and dairy products etc.); new routes are established to include local natural and architectural sites (castles, manors); a range of creative workshops showcase many traditional handicrafts, such as weaving, pottery, forging, wicker working and others. Many of these tourism offers are interactive, engaging visitors in activities (making pottery, participating in farm works etc.). These initiatives respond to consumer demand for experiencing specific local culture and rural life. Monitoring of tourism sites and their visitors suggest that sites that invest in developing their offer and infrastructure attract a higher number of tourists.

5) *Connecting to a broader region.* As outlined in section 3.1, there are good cooperation examples with tourism actors in the greater Kurzeme region.

6) *Digitisation.* The role of digitisation and use of ICTs in developing regional tourism is growing (TRDP 2015-2021). Tourism information is provided on websites, portals, and mobile applications. Several tourism operators are active on social media. However, quite few rural tourism businesses, agritourism farms and craftsmen in particular, run their homepages or are present on social networks. However, these digital tools prove to be effective in connecting regional tourism service providers, both urban and rural, to distant

potential visitors, from Latvia and abroad, as, for many, the internet has become the principal source of tourism information (Krievs, 2013). On the other hand, increasing digitisation has also lead to growing demand for tourism services that are disconnected from the virtual world and provide authentic experiences.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Data / Indicator	Source
Tourism businesses: Accommodation businesses (number, number of beds, number of visitors). Catering businesses and deugstation sites (types and number); other businesses related to tourism.	Central Statistical Bureau, Tukums tourism information office (Statistika: Tukuma tūrisma reģions 2004-2016), rural tourism association (https://www.celotajs.lv/)
Tourism sites: types, number	Tukums tourism information office (Statistika: Tukuma tūrisma reģions 2004-2016), Tukums municipality (www.tukums.lv)
Tourists: number, duration of stay and money spent, country of origin, flows	Central Statistical Bureau, Tukums tourism information office (Statistika: Tukuma tūrisma reģions 2004-2016), original studies (Klepers (2012))
Tourism areas: tourism flows, routes, itineraries, clusters	Klepers (2012), Ivans (2013)
Digital communication in tourism: website visitors, their origin, used devices, downloads of mobile application	Tukums tourism information office (Statistika: Tukuma tūrisma reģions 2004-2016)
Transport infrastructure and accessibility: Public transport, accessibility to international tourists: distance to the nearest airport, road lengths, travel in km and time units.	Tukums region development programme
Tourism governance: support measures, regulating frameworks, organisations, networks	Relevant policy and regulation documents, opinion surveys (Apkopotī iedzīvotāju aptaujas rezultāti (2016))

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

There is good availability of basic statistical data on tourism in Tukums. However, these data are used in a rather descriptive manner, and more in-depth analysis is missing.

Most of data are aggregated at the level of Tukums municipality, and as such, they do not provide information on intra-regional trends and possible connections, similarities or differences between rural and urban areas.

There is little original research work done on tourism in Tukums. In general, the urban - rural dimension is not explicitly addressed in the analysis of tourism development in the region. This means that these data and knowledge gaps will have to be filled in as part of ROBUST.

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