Reflecting on the evolution of tourist and recreational development in the Finnish-Russian borderland

Abstract: This article examines the development of tourism and recreation in the Finnish-Russian borderland as a new promising area of regional growth. The unique natural, historical, and cultural resources, and a favourable economic and geographical position are basic prerequisites for the development of tourism in the region. Historically, the barriers of state borders hampered the development of tourism; and tourism was seen as an activity bringing no economic benefits to regions since most Soviet citizens travelled as beneficiaries of social programs. As a result of the socioeconomic transformations in the Russian Federation, the openness of border regions under the influence of integration process taking place in the world community facilitates tourist mobility between neighbouring countries. The article describes an approach that considers the border regions of Northwest Russia as attractive destinations for tourists from neighboring countries. The author presents an approach that interprets cross-border tourist routes as an instrument for the conservation, reproduction, and promotion of natural, cultural, and historical heritage and as a means to boost business activities in border regions. The author analyses statistical and analytical data and does the content analysis of regional strategies for tourism and socioeconomic development. The article explores the practices of tourism and recreation development in a historical perspective and examines the effect of barrier and contact functions of state borders on tourism. The article identifies factors hindering tourism development and suggests measures to stimulate tourism as a regional economic activity.

Key words: Finnish-Russian borderland, border region, Finland, Republic of Karelia, cross-border tourism development

Introduction

Nowadays, the development of tourism and recreation activities in the Republic of Karelia is perceived and recognized as a perspective direction for regional development at the level of government, business and society. The unique natural,
historical, and cultural heritage and a favourable economic and geographical position are basic prerequisites for the development of tourism in the region.

In the north-west the Russian Federation has the longest border with Finland (1,325.8 km) directly bordering on three regions – the Murmansk and Leningrad oblasts as well as the Republic of Karelia. Among these border regions, only the Republic of Karelia has the longest border between the Russian Federation and the European Union, Finland (more than 700 km).

The area of the Republic of Karelia (the region) is 180.5 thousand square kilometers and the territory makes 1% of the territory of the Russian Federation. Half of territory of the region is covered with forest, 25% is water. The lake fund totals more than 60 thousand lakes and more than 23 thousand rivers. Presence of protected territories and territories having the nature protection status (more than 5%) is a base component of tourism development. On the territory of the region there are more than 1.5 thousand monuments on state account. The most attractive and popular objects are historical-architectural and ethnographic museum-reserve “Kizhi”, architectural-natural complex of Valaam archipelago and others (Stepanova 2015). The population of the Republic of Karelia is 622,5 thousand peoples (01.01.2018) and a share of population of 0.42% of the population of Russia.

The paper aims to explore of the evolution of the tourism development in the Karelian part of the Finnish-Russian borderland and to examine the influence on the effect of the state border to tourism development.

Tourism and state borders: theoretical aspects

In many studies tourism is referred to as a promising cross-border cooperation area and the important development factor for regional economies especially for peripheral borderlands (Saarinen 2003, Więckowski 2010, Palmowski 2010, Batyk, Semenova 2013), as a factor of acceleration of the socio-economic processes in the regions of neighboring states (due to the diversification of the economy and the multiplier effect) (Spiriajevas 2008, Timothy et al. 2014). The geographic position determines the development of tourism and recreation (Löytynoja 2007, Aleksandrova, Stupina 2014, Więckowski 2018). Borders have an impending effect on the development of tourism, especially, international one, if the barrier function is strengthened and restricted areas are created. However, the contact function of borders can contribute to thriving tourism and recreation and the generation of a national and international tourist flows (Więckowski 2010, Bolychev et al. 2015, Stepanova 2016). The meaning of state borders for tourism, tourism development and cooperation in border regions has gained more attention in recent years. According to Timothy (2001), there are four different approaches to examining the relationship between borders and tourism: 1) national boundaries are barriers to tourism; 2) boundaries are lines of transit; 3) tourism modifies border landscape and 4) border as tourist attractions and destinations.
A border region as an attractive tourist destination is studied by a number of Russian and foreign researchers. Along with the increasing role of tourism in economy of the border regions the number of works on the potential of the national border from the point of view of tourist interest and creation of tourist attractions has raised (Löytynoja 2007, 2008, Gelbman, Timothy 2010, Aleksandrova 2012). The perspectives of the development of a new tourism place in the border area and cross-border tourism space have broadly discussed by researchers (Prokkola 2008, Biktimirova et al. 2013, Więckowski 2018).

In the studies on the development of tourism in border areas, researchers use the ‘cross-border tourism’ concept as a specific form of tourism development, which is only typical of regions having a special economic and geographical location (sharing a border with another state) (Stepanova 2014, Więckowski 2018). International practice considers the development of shopping tourism and nostalgic tourism as types of cross-border tourism (or one of the stages of its formation). Particular attention in research literature is paid to the development of cross-border shopping tourism representing a specific type of tourism that has a lot in common in all parts of the globe (Timothy 2005, Tömöri 2010, Bar-Kolelis, Wiskulski 2012, Bolychev et al. 2015, Shlapeko, Stepanova 2018, Studzińska et al. 2018).


Some articles are devoted to the distribution and intensity of cross-border cooperation networks in the Finnish-Russian borderland (Makkonen et al. 2019). According to international practices cross-border tourist routes are considered as an instrument for the conservation, reproduction, and promotion of natural, cultural, and historical heritage of the both sides of the border (Johansson et al. 2014, Shekov 2015, Nenonen, Stepanova 2018). Also developing cross-border tourist routes is an effective way of developing cooperation between neighboring countries and can boost business activities in border regions (Stepanova 2017).
The evolution of tourist and recreational development in the Republic of Karelia

One of major factors for the development of tourism and recreation in the Republic of Karelia as economic activity there throughout history has been the borderline position. Several periods in tourism development can be identified:

- tourist and recreational development in the Northern Ladoga region as part of the Grand Duchy of Finland, newly established within Russia (the 19th – early 20th century);
- development of tourism and recreation in the Soviet time as a sphere of social activity (the USSR in the 1960s–1990s);
- tourism as a business under the influence of integration process (since the 1990s onwards).

The traits for differentiating between these periods are:

- level of the tourism infrastructure development;
- volume of tourist flow;
- management of tourism development;
- attitudes of locals towards tourists and tourism development.

The first period of utilization of the modern Finnish-Russian borderland for tourism and recreation was the 19th – early 20th century. In Northern Ladoga region (as part of the Grand Duchy of Finland, newly established within Russia) first tourism infrastructure was being actively built, transport networks and catering companies emerged on this territory. Tourism development was influenced by the construction in the 1890s of the railway connecting Vyborg, Sortavala (1893) and Joensuu (1894). Also visitor guidebooks were published and tourism promotion campaigns were launched (Potakhin 2001). For example, in 1895 the Finnish Tourism Association (Suomen Matkailijayhdistys) published a detailed “Guide to Finland”, with its largest section (56 pages) devoted to tourism routes (local one-day tours as well as long trip) and accommodation possibilities in the Northern Ladoga region. European guidebooks pictured the northern shore of Lake Ladoga as the most marvelous land just slightly secondary to the Swiss Alps (Upravleniye 2008).

In the Soviet time, the region’s border with a capitalist state (Finland) turned into a dividing line in what concerned law, power, property, culture and traditions. It was a barrier to the traffic of goods and money, population migrations and cultural influence. In this sense, location at the border was the cause of poor development of the transport infrastructure (the Republic of Karelia began to lag far behind regions in the south of the Northwestern Federal District in terms of the density of hard-surface roads), limited business and investment opportunities (because of numerous military facilities) (Druzhinin 2005, Stepanova 2015).

Another constraint for tourism development was, in fact, the perception of tourism activities in the country. Traditionally, neither the authorities nor local people in the 1960s–1990s recognized tourism as an efficient (i.e. income-generating) sphere of economic activity. The primary reason for that was the concept
of tourism as leisure and entertainment, a social activity. On the other hand, one should remember about the social background of the majority of tours for Soviet people (tourism was subsidized by the state), the high percent of self-organized tourists, as well as the centralized income distribution in the country (Stepanova 2015).

Nonetheless, it was during the Soviet period that the image of ‘touristic’ Karelia (unique attractions, clean environment) was shaped in the minds of Russian citizens. Thus, tourism had no significant effect on the region’s socio-economic development, and its economic dimension was neglected.

The watershed for tourism development in the region was the 1990s when formation of the modern tourism infrastructure began. In favourable geopolitical and institutional conditions, boundaries of intensive cooperation begin to expand functionally: the barrier function of the border is reduced and the contact function is becoming more active. The opening of ‘closed’ border regions, visa regime simplification, and cross-border cooperation generated a large influx of international tourists, including those taking ‘nostalgic trips’ – from Finland to the Republic of Karelia. In the early 1990s, the number of Finnish tourists reached 700 thousand people per year; ‘nostalgic tourism’ from Finland created a basis for a tourism industry in the Republic of Karelia (Russian 1994, Gromov 2003, Steanova 2015).

In most cases the development of cooperation between border regions of Russia and Finland were initiated by the regional and local authorities, including the signing of a number of agreements. The economic-geographic location (border-lands) was gaining in significance and beginning to act as a new factor for regional development. Tourism began to take shape as a sector of the regional economy that generates income for budgets of all levels and creates new jobs (Stepanova 2015).

The active, yet uncontrolled boost of tourism in the region highlighted some of negative factors that inhibited the competitive capacity of Karelian tourist products and hindered further development of tourism in the region: underdeveloped tourist infrastructure, low standard of tourist services, lack of qualified specialists, missing state strategy for tourism development, etc.

To keep up the rates of tourism development and enhance its efficiency in the region’s economy, tourism was for the first time highlighted as a development priority for the Republic of Karelia. Including tourism into the main regional strategic documents was a new step in the development of tourism business in region. The key strategic documents naming tourism as a major factor for the socio-economic development of Karelia are the following (Chubieva, Steanova 2009): the Concept as well as the Strategy of social-economic development of the Republic of Karelia; According to the Concept tourism development aims to realize the following trends (The Concept):

- formation of the most favourable image of the region in the international market;
- creation of a modern tourist-recreation complex;
- growth of the investment appeal of the region.
Cross-border tourism development in the Karelian part of the Finnish-Russian borderland

The opportunity of cross-border tourism development is determined by the cross-border cooperation as well as the type of cross-border space conditioned by a number of features (nature, settlement pattern, transport network close to the border as well as cross-border transport network).

In this paper, cross-border tourism is considered in terms of tourist mobility between a border regions of the Northwest Russia and Finland without taking into account the development and functioning of all the tourist system. The study of cross-border tourism in the Finnish-Russian borderland has shown some general trends in terms of tourist mobility of citizens of Russia and Finland.

During the period 2006–2013 there was a steady upward trend in the number of Russian citizens who visited Finland (Fig. 1). Finland observed inbound tourist flows from Russia, with the majority of tourists coming from the North-West and Central Federal districts. The number of tourists coming from these two areas of Russia averaged about 90% in Finland. It allows us to predict positive dynamics and increasing outbound tourist flows (with different growth rates) in the coming years (Stepanova 2014, Shulepov, Stepanova 2017).

Shlapeko and Stepanova (2018) point out that since 2014 “the introduction of sanctions against Russia and the increase of the euro exchange rate had a negative impact on the inbound flow of Russian tourists to Finland”. For instance, in December 2014, the duty-free sales in the border cities of Finland decreased more than 70% that affected the economy of border cities of Finland (such as Joensuu, Imatra, Kotka, Kouvola, Kajaani, Lahti and Kuopio). However, cross-border trade continues to develop thanks to the traditional preferences of Russian tourists: in 2016, high sales growth rates were observed in the cities bordering Russia: (for example, Lappeenranta +34%, Joensuu +32% (Shlapeko, Stepanova 2018).

Along with the growth of outbound flows of the Russian tourists, there is trend towards lower motivation among tourists coming from Finland to visit the Russian Federation (Fig. 2).

It is assumed that the flow of tourists from Finland to the border regions of Russia is particularly important in terms of further development of tourism. The flow of incoming tourists from Finland to the Russian Federation may be insignificant in the total inbound tourist volume but quite remarkable for a border region (which often takes a large share). Also it should be taken into account the financial costs of travellers and social and economic effect resulting from the development of this area of economic activity (due to the multiplier effect, the diversification of the regional economy) (Stepanova 2014).

The study reveals that most tourists from Finland visit the Republic of Karelia. The average share of Finnish tourists visiting the region of the total inbound tourist flow from Finland to Russia is 70.7% (2005–2016). The average share of Town of Saint-Petersburg with significant fluctuations in some years is 11.4%. The dominant share of the incoming tourist flow from abroad to the Republic of Karelia during the analyzed period is formed by tourists from Finland (98.4%).
Reflecting on the evolution of tourist and recreational development

Fig. 1. The dynamics of the outbound flow in 2006–2016
*Completed according to the source (Federal).

Fig. 2. The dynamics of the inbound flow in 2005–2016
*Completed according to the source (Federal)
The shares of the Leningrad region and Murmansk region are 50.2% and 19.5% respectively (Stepanova 2014, Shulepov, Stepanova 2017). Calculated according to the source (Federal).

It shows a high dependence of the development of international tourism in the Republic of Karelia on the dynamics of the entry flow from Finland and actualizes the challenges of the cross-border tourism development in the region.

A topical issue of the cross-border tourism is the balance of tourist flows, taking into account the level of tourism expenditure. Unfortunately, there is an imbalance in the regions of the North-West Federal District, where during the study period the number of Russian tourists visiting Finland exceeded considerably the number of Finnish tourists coming to the Russian Federation (Stepanova 2014).

In the sphere of tourist exchange between Finland and Russia, shopping tours of Russians to Finland and recreational trips of Finns dominate. There are four main conditions that reveal the development possibilities of cross-border shopping tourism (Timothy 2005, Shlapeko, Stepanova 2018):

• difference in the range, quality as well as price of the product on the opposite side of the border;
• information about opportunities on the opposite side of the border;
• the ability and willingness of the population to travel;
• transparency of the state borders.

Need to mention, that, Russian tourists are the largest group of foreign tourists in Finland.

Small businessmen from Russia, along with shopping tourists are a source of welfare for some parts of residents of Finnish border regions. Finnish businesses have taken a number of measures to attract tourists from Russia: most signs in the shops and cafes in immediate proximity to the border are in Russian, there are Russian speaking staff serving’s tourists. There is a lot of information and websites in Russian and so on. The system of tax refund functioning in the European Union is of particular importance (Stepanova 2014). Long cooperation of neighboring states leads to the formation of social infrastructure specially designed to meet the needs of citizens from another state. And gradually, a significant part of the population of adjacent areas is involved into the sphere of cross-border economic and social cooperation.

**Cross-border tourist routes in the Finnish-Russian borderland**

The global community has gained vast experience of designing, developing and improving cross-border tourist routes with different thematic profiles and transport options (pedestrian, bicycling, automobile, water, etc.). A general definition of a cross-border tourist route is that of a route (with descriptions of natural and man-made attractions) designed by tourist companies or other organizations that
connects territories of adjacent countries, usually with a thematic focus, which can be visited either individually or with tourist groups (Stepanova 2017). The unique natural, cultural and historical heritage as well as economic and institutional conditions is a base for designing and developing cross-border tourist routes in the Finnish-Russian borderland. For the Finnish-Russian borderland designing and developing cross-border tourist routes is a new phenomenon.

Development of these routes in the Finnish-Russian borderland has some features in comparison with similar kind of routes in EU-borderland. At first the configuration of the routes is pre-determined by border checkpoints. Custom and border-crossing formalities as well as the capacity of tourist companies along the route have a significant meaning for designing and developing cross-border tourist routes (Stepanova 2017).

The European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument cross-border cooperation programs (2007–2013) are one of the most effective tools for the implementation of international projects aiming to design and development of cross-border tourist routes between Finland and Russia.

Some of cross-border tourist routes in the Finnish-Russian borderland reproduce trade and other historical routes that existed in the past between adjacent countries. For instance, the “King’s Road” tourist route is a historical Royal road (the 13th–16th centuries) connecting modern Sweden, Finland and Russia (Leningrad region).

“Blue Road” international tourist route (ca. 2000 km) is a successful project of cooperation and tourism development that runs along historical waterways from Norwegian town of Nesna through Sweden and Finland to Russia (the Republic of Karelia, the Arkhangelsk region) (Blue road). Many other international projects, including the ones aimed at the development of new cross-border tourist routes, build on the experience of the Blue Road. The development of the “Blue Road” tourist route is of fulfilling the sustainability requirement by an international project (Stepanova 2017).

Another example is “White Road” tourist route reproducing of the ancient trade route from the White Sea to Baltic Sea (modern Northern Finland – northern districts of the Republic of Karelia, Russia). An important results of the project were the opening of six tourist information centers in the several districts of the Republic of Karelia (White road).

The “Mining Road” tourist route (ca. 400 km) elaborated within international project unites about 20 main objects associated with the geological, mining and industrial heritage of the Finish-Russian borderland (North Karelia, Finland – the Republic of Karelia, Russia). One of the main outputs of the KA 334 “Mining Road” project in Russian part is a creation of new tourist attraction – Tulmozero Ore Park from mining plant ruins (XIX–XX centuries). Now Tulmozero Ore Park is one of a perspective tourist site where according forecast the number of visitors achieve 20–30 thousand peoples per year (Mining road, Shekov 2015, Stepanova 2017, Nenonen, Stepanova 2018).

The Mining Road project of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument’s Karelia Cross-border Cooperation Programme (Karelia ENPI CBC)
was recognized as one of the Programme’s best tourism-oriented projects (Mining road).

The designing cross-border gastronomic tour will be elaborated within international project “Kalitka – the development of cross-border gastronomic tourism’ (approved by the European Neighborhood Instrument cross-border cooperation programs). It will be a route of gastro-tourism development in Karelia region (North Karelia, Finland – the Republic of Karelia, Russia) (Kalitka).

Cross-border tourist routes development is one of success tool for developing cooperation between border regions of Finland and Russia. These routes can be considered as a tool for exposing the potential of the Finnish-Russian borderland and drawing it into economic circulation. Such routes form the basis for diversifying the tourist product and for the implementation of local initiatives. One of the key results of the designing and developing cross-border tourist routes are infrastructure development, invigoration of the business activities on the both sides of the border as well as an increase in the number of visitors at sights and facilities along the routes. Along with large opportunities for cross-border tourist routes development some hindrances in the Finnish-Russian borderland exist. Designing and developing cross-border tourist routes can be considered as a step towards a transboundary tourist space (Stepanova 2017).

Conclusion

The practices of tourism and recreation development in a historical perspective and the effect of barrier and contact functions of state borders on tourism are presented. Finnish-Russian border can be considered as a good example of a national boundary where permeability and tourist significance have changed many times as a consequence of the political situation and border changes (Löytynoja 2007). The practice of tourism development in the Republic of Karelia confirms that changes of the function of the border have had a influence on tourism development. The example of the Finnish-Russian borderland supports conclusions received from other border regions (Timothy 2001, Prokkola 2008, Więckowski 2010) There are the changes of the relationship between borders and tourism in the region from barriers to tourism through line of transit to modifying of border landscape (Timothy 2001). From the late 19th century to 1940, tourism was rapidly developing in today’s Karelian border districts, in the Soviet period, the border with the capitalist state of Finland became a watershed in terms of legislation, power, property rights, culture, and traditions. The border turned into a barrier to the movement of goods, people, and capital. Now, the development of tourism and recreation activities in the Republic of Karelia is perceived and recognized as a perspective direction for regional development at the level of government, business and society. Tourism is considered as a factor for conservation and reproduction of the natural, historical as well as cultural potential of the region.
The study of cross-border tourism in the Finnish-Russian borderland has shown some general trends in terms of tourist mobility of citizens of Russia and Finland. Along with the growth of outbound flows of the Russian tourists, there is trend towards lower motivation among tourists coming from Finland to visit the Russian Federation. The Republic of Karelia is an attractive tourist destination for Finnish tourists. The development of international tourism in the region is most dependent on tourists coming from Finland in the incoming tourist flow from abroad. It shows a high dependence of the Karelian tourist industry on the dynamics of the entry flow from Finland and actualizes the challenges of the cross-border tourism (Stepanova 2014). Shopping tourism is a type of cross-border tourism in the Finnish-Russian borderland. From an economic point of view, the development of cross-border shopping in the border regions can significantly influence the development of local commerce and the territory as a whole. At the same time focusing business on shopping tourism only can present a risk because of possible difficulties in crossing the border. Therefore, focusing on domestic demand and the needs of shopping tourists is most advantageous for the development of any border region (Bar-Kolelis, Wiskulski 2012). In spite of scientific interest, studies of cross-border tourism development in the Finnish-Russian borderland are limited to a number of works devoted to opportunities of Finnish part of the borderland. Further study will be focused on the specifics of the shopping tourism of Finns in the Republic of Karelia and elaborating measures of attracting tourist flows and revitalizing the economy of the borderland.

Cross-border tourist routes are presented as an instrument for the conservation, reproduction, and promotion of natural, cultural, and historical heritage and as a means to boost business activities in border regions on the both sides of the border. Designing and developing cross-border tourist routes as well as cross-border tourism development are steps towards a transboundary tourist space (Stepanova 2017).

One of the impeding factors peculiar to Russian border regions is border zones having restrictions on economic activities and the movement of people. Tourism development in the border regions having nature parks and reserves is regulated by a number of documents concerning visits, economic activity and border control procedures. For instance, this applies to the Kostomuksha reserve in the Republic of Karelia and the Pasvik reserve in the Murmansk region (Stepanova 2016).

Taking the topicality and future development of cross-border tourism in the Russian regions into the consideration, the following measures for strengthening its role in the socio-economic development of the Republic of Karelia, can be offered (Stepanova 2014):

- development of transport and tourism and recreation infrastructure allowing to fully meet the needs of tourists;
- implementation of strategic documents for the development of tourism in the region focusing on the cross-border tourism;
- identification and promotion of tourist products of the border region in the international tourism market;
• meeting the interests of tourists who come from neighbouring countries;
• interregional cooperation of Russian regions and their inclusion in multi-day tours;
• integration of border regions of two or more neighbouring countries allowing to include these border regions into multi-tours;
• developing a research framework for tourism development.

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Rozważania na temat ewolucji rozwoju turystyki i rekreacji na pograniczu fińsko-rosyjskim: aspekty historyczne, kulturowe i gospodarcze

Zarys treści: Niniejszy artykuł analizuje rozwój turystyki i rekreacji na pograniczu fińsko-rosyjskim jako nowy obiegu obszar rozwoju regionalnego. Unikalne zasoby naturalne, historyczne i kulturowe, a także korzystne położenie gospodarcze i geograficzne to podstawowe warunki do rozwoju
turystyki w tym rejonie. W przeszłości bariery graniczne państwowych utrudniały rozwój turystyki, która była postrzegana jako działalność nieprzynosząca żadnych korzyści regionom, ponieważ większość obywateli radzieckich podróżowała jako beneficjenci programów społecznych. W wyniku przemian społeczno-ekonomicznych w Federacji Rosyjskiej otwartość regionów przygranicznych pod wpływem procesów integracyjnych zachodzących na świecie ułatwia ruch turystyczny pomiędzy sąsiednimi krajami. W artykule opisane jest podejście, w którym graniczne regiony północno-zachodniej Rosji uważane są za atrakcyjne miejsca dla turystów z sąsiednich krajów. Autorka przedstawia transgraniczne szlaki turystyczne jako narzędzie ochrony, odnawiania i promocji naturalnego, kulturalnego i historycznego dziedzictwa i jako środek, który pobudza działalność gospodarczą w regionach przygranicznych. Analizuje dane statystyczne oraz treść regionalnych strategii na rzecz turystyki i rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego. Bada praktyki rozwoju turystyki i rekreacji w ujęciu historycznym oraz wpływ barier i funkcji kontaktowych granic państwowych na turystykę. W artykule zidentyfikowano czynniki utrudniające rozwój turystyki i zaproponowano środki stymulujące turystykę jako regionalną działalność gospodarczą.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pogranicze fińsko-rosyjskie, region przygraniczny, Finlandia, Republika Karelii, rozwój turystyki transgranicznej