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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Stepanova, S. V. (2017). Russia's North-West Borders: Tourism Resource Potential. *Baltic Region*, *9*(2), 76-87. https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2017-2-6

RUSSIA'S NORTH-WEST BORDERS: TOURISM RESOURCE POTENTIAL

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Being an area of development of Russia's northwest border regions, tourism requires the extending of border regions' appeal. A unique resource of the north-western border regions are the current and historical state borders and border facilities. The successful international experience of creating and developing tourist attractions and destinations using the unique geographical position of sites and territories may help to unlock the potential of Russia's north-western border regions. This article interprets the tourism resource of borders — which often remains overlooked and unfulfilled — as an opportunity for tourism and recreation development in the border regions of Russia's North-West. The author summarises international practices of using the potential of state borders as a resource and analyses the creation of tourist attractions and destinations in the Nordic countries. The article explores the degree the state border potential is developed as a tourism resource in Russia's North-West. The author analyses opportunities and gives recommendations for a better use of this potential by the tourist industry to increase the contribution of tourism to regional economies.

Key words: tourism development, border, tourist resource, tourist destination, border regions, North-western Federal District

Recognizing tourism as a promising/priority area for the development of border regions of North-West Russia, it is important to identify advantages created by the regions' economic and geographic location for a more efficient development of regional tourism. Border regions of NorthWest Russia are equal in their natural, historical and cultural potential. For instance, the Kizhi Pogost architectural ensemble and the Solovki Islands historical complex, Komi virgin forests, Ferapontov Monastery

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Submitted on August 26, 2016

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2017-2-6

ensemble, Curonian Spit are on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In fact, some unique tourist destinations have appeared or survived largely owing to the past or present-day national borders, for instance, "Green Belt of Fennoscandia", Ivangorod Fortress, etc. It is the national border that underlies the regions' development and cross-border cooperation, which is exclusively specific to borderlands (e. g. cross-border tourism [20]). At the same time, national borders have often become a barrier to interactions between countries, hindering, among other things, tourism. This paper considers theoretical and practical aspects of establishing and developing tourist destinations near past and present-day borders. The article focuses primarily but not exclusively on national borders. We aim to explore how much the potential of the national border as a tourism resource is utilised in the development of regional tourism in Northwest Russia. The author offers recommendations for a more efficient develop of tourism and enlarging its contribution to regional economy. The author argues that the potential of the border is often overlooked. Consequently, the border remains an unused resource for the development of tourism and recreation in border regions of Northwest Russia.

Tourism and national borders: effects and interactions

The first studies of spatial relationships between national borders and tourism development in borderlands appeared in the late 1970s, initially in the works of foreign authors and then also in those by Russian scientists. One example is the paper by J. Matznetter "Border and tourism: fundamental relations". The author proposed three broad types of regions depending on the absence\presence of tourist attractions and the distance from them to the border: an area having no tourist attractions close to the border; an tourist area located only on one side of the border; and tourist areas located on both sides close to or across the border [34]. Professor D. Timothy (USA, Canada) has made an important contribution to this line of research; he analysed the potential of the national border from the point of view of tourist interest and creation of tourist attractions, and described how tourism can change the functions of international borders and independent territories [30; 37; 38]. M. Więckowski, a researcher from the Polish Academy of Sciences, explored the role and significance of political borders for the tourism business in Polish borderlands [40]. T. Löytynoja, a scholar from the University of Oulu (Finland), discussed the development of specific locations into tourist attractions [33]. As for the works of Russian researchers on this subject, one can mention the works by O. Stupina, who wrote that "studies [within Russia]… have appeared only recently, largely due to the belated interest in international tourism issues among Russian researchers" [22, p. 100]. A major cause of that was the specific development of borderlands conditioned by the barrier function that the national border has performed over a long period of the country's history. A paper by A. Aleksandrova, a professor from Moscow State University, describes the transformation of national borders under the effect of international tourism. Considering that "borders largely define

the volumes and geography of tourist flows, the condition of the tourism business … this effect can take the opposite directions: restrain development in some cases and expedite it in others" [2, p. 15]. A. Aleksandrova and O. Stupina [3] distinguish several types of national borders depending on international tourism development, border regime, tourism-related bureaucracy: closed borders (PDRK), difficult-to-cross borders (Benin, Guinea), passable borders (Russian citizens' trips to the USA, Schengen area), easily passable borders (Cyprus, Mexico), open borders, and transparent borders.

Today there are plenty of examples of a restrictive effect of national borders on the development of international tourism in the context of a changing geopolitical situation [21], potential terrorist threats, unfriendly relations between neighbouring countries. The national border between North and South Korea is a vivid example of a popular tourist attraction where are asked to sign a liability waiver stating they shall be themselves liable for their "injury or death as a direct result of enemy action" [36].

Opportunities for the tourism business development and the growing interest in international travels and recreation are clearly seen in the recently increased number of international border-crossings. However, the overwhelming majority of border-crossings are connected with transportation and not tourism. Border-crossing formalities (passport control and customs checks) take up to 20 % of the total duration of an international one-way leg of an international travel; border formalities are the main deterrent and reduce the number of international trips. Researchers have also pointed out the restricting role of the psychological factor expressing itself as uneasiness, anxiety or discomfort, making any trip 'longer' [2, p. 16]. For some tourists the necessity to cross national borders can be an underlying motivation not to travel.

On the other hand, as T. Löytynoja has justly asserted, "even if crossing political boundaries is now everyday activity, many boundaries carry strong symbolism and have become fascinating places to visit" [32, p. 35]. To support this statement, one can cite the words of A. Aleksandrova about the appeal that boundaries have for many travellers: "when approaching a boundary, especially a national border, many people feel the excitement of meeting the unknown, and the boundary itself acquires a fascination, i. e. people perceive the border and borderlands as contrast to their daily routine, and this is exactly what they seek in a tourist trip. Their appreciation of the moment of being at the boundary is evidenced by the fact that they are all eager to take a picture of it" [2, p. 17].

However, in this paper the focus will be shifted from interactions and effects of national border on tourism development to the identification of the theoretical and practical aspects of utilising and integrating the national border phenomenon as a tourism resource in tourism business development in border regions of Northwest Russia. The methods used in the study are the analysis of scientific literature and online resources on the subject, as well as the comparative, typological and diachronic analyses.

National border as a tourism resource: theoretical and practical aspects

Researchers recognise several stages in the complex and lengthy process of national border development into a tourist attraction: loss of the outpost function, weakening of the barrier function, strengthening of the contact function, intensification of cross-border communication, and transformation into a tourist attraction [2; 3; 30; 38].

A. Aleksandrova rightly remarked that "political-administrative boundaries are increasingly functioning as a kind of tourism resource" [2, p. 17], which is manifested in a variety of forms. The ways in which the national border is used by the tourism business in individual border regions of Russia depend on the specific functions performed by the border, formalities, and, last but not the least, on the existing understanding of the possibilities offered by this resource.

International practices feature multiple examples of the national boundary as a tourism resource — from being a tourist attraction to the creation of a tourist destination [2; 22; 37], which can be grouped as follows:

— *former national boundaries that used to exist in the past but lost their validity;*

One example is China's hallmark sight — the Great Wall, included in the majority of tours in PRC, with the number of visitors climbing to a record of 41.3 million in 2004 [4]. In Berlin, the 160-km route created along the former border "Berlin Wall Trail" (Berliner Mauerweg) has become a popular tourist attraction in Germany [5]. The total cost of this project, implemented in 2002—2006 by the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development, was 4 million euros. The route is an uninterrupted pedestrian and bicycling path, which was constructed to comprise sections with remains of the former patrol road used by customs officers in West Berlin and so-called convoy road used by GDR border troops for automobile patrolling [2; 4].

— *contemporary boundary with demarcation signage and technical facilities;*

For instance, a regular water route for tourists "The island of two rivers" was launched in June 2013 from Chinese Fuyuan around Heixiazi (Bolshoi Ussuriysky) Island, part of it running through Russian waters. A stop is made close to the Chinese-Russian border for tourists to take pictures near a border pillar. This route is an implementation of the programme for efficient and rapid development of the tourism industry in Heilongjiang Province and tourism development along the border rivers Amur and Ussuri [24].

— *items specially created along delimitation lines, such as signs, monuments, memorials and other material evidence;*

At present, there are 157 to 207 points where the boundaries of three different nations meet (Tripoints). They are often marked by various signs, monuments or border pillars [39]. An interesting example is the sculptural group at the border junction of Austria, Hungary and Slovakia — an equilateral triangular table and benches with symbolic coats-of-arms of each of the

states, where one can stay within the boundaries of three European countries at the same time [26]. Another place attracting thousands of tourists a year is the three-border-point of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands (Drielandenpunt), where a stone pillar with border signs and country flags were installed in 1926. In fact, nearly 100 years ago this used to be a quad-point (the fourth mini country being Neutral Moresnet, which was joined to Belgium in 1919) [23]. A popular tourist attraction in the southwestern United States is the Four Corners monument standing where the boundaries of four states (Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah) drawn at right angles along meridians and parallels meet (installed 1992, the first marker appeared in 1912) [29]. In the Ural Mountains, the divide between Europe and Asia, there are many obelisks and border pillars (the first one appeared in Pervouralsk, on the old Siberian tract, in 1837) put up near the cities Pervouralsk, Ekaterinburg, Orenburg, Magnitogorsk [6].

— *opening of museums and sites thematically focused on boundaries and borderlands;*

The Borderland Museum in Teistungen (Germany) is an example of a man-made border attraction. The construction of a tourist attraction on the zero parallel in Ecuador (the Equator crosses 14 countries of South America, Africa, and South-east Asia) is a success story in the use of geographic lines in tourism. The officially recognized "Middle of the World" is situated in Ecuador's Cuidad Mitad del mundo (Spanish for 'middle of the world city'), 20 km from the country's capital city Quito, with an enormous amusement park, where the main sights are the yellow Equator line and 30-m tall globe-topped tower, and where around a million and a half tourists from around the world come every year [18]. The site worth mentioning in Russia is the Central Border Guard Museum of the Federal Security Service (founded in 1914 in St. Petersburg, re-opened in 1932 in Moscow) with over 80,000 exhibits related to history of border guarding from Ancient Russia to modernity [13].

— *construction of parks, specialized trails shared by several countries, etc.;*

The International Peace Garden (founded in 1932) on the border between Canada and the USA, which is marked with rows of flowers, attracts a great number of visitors, especially during summer time, when various festivals and events are organized there [37].

— *construction of vista points from where the territory of another country can be observed;*

For instance, a vista point on Cyprus overlooking Turkey-occupied northern territories was a popular attraction on the island in 1990—2000 [3]. Large flows of tourists visit the observation point at the Russia — China — North Korea border junction; it is included by Chinese tourist companies in the itinerary of the weekly one-day tour "Three borders", alongside "the climbing of the "Dragon and Tiger Pagodas", local sight-seeing, taking photographs, watching the territory of the three countries through binoculars, and a visit to the border pillar (China — Russia) [27].

— *villages, buildings (such as restaurants, hotels) and other objects on the border between several countries;*

The Baarle community (founded in the Middle Ages) is one of the world's most intricate boundaries. The border between Belgium and the Netherlands runs along streets and amidst houses and is marked with white crosses. The village of Baarle is situated in the Netherlands (Baarle-Nassau). However, 26 parts of it belong to Belgium (Baarle-Hertog), so there are duplicates of the town hall, police department and even two metropolitan cathedrals [16].

Another example is the Arbez Hotel in the town of La Cure. Tourists are attracted by its position on the border between France and Switzerland. Tourists can walk from one country to the other: the border runs across the hotel's dining area and kitchen, and crosses several rooms [10].

Germany has some 35 communities divided by national borders with Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland [3]

— *organization of border-related events;*

An example of this type is the Indo-Pakistani border closing ceremony at the Attari-Wagah checkpoint (Wagah Border, the only crossing point open to foreigners), which attracts hundreds of tourists and locals every day [17].

— *others*

Natural and man-made wonders located at the border attract thousands of tourists, e. g., Victoria Falls (the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe), the Niagara Falls (USA — Canada), the Iguazu Falls (Brazil — Argentina), the mountain ski resort and national park Krkonoše (Czech Republic — Poland), mountain ski resorts (France — Switzerland, Italy — France), etc. [3].

An important factor for arousing tourists' interest in national boundaries is their high symbolic or historical value [32]. In addition to traditional photo shoots, sights and other attractions, the very process of crossing the border is of interest to tourists. For instance, the amusement park Parque EcoAlberto in the Mexican state of Hidalgo decided to set up the Caminata Nocturna Simulation in 2004. Tourists can re-enact an illegal crossing of the USA border (in reality the park is situated a hundred km away from the border). Tourists are offered an experience of a night-time "border-crossing" (12 km through scrub and rugged land, crawling under barbed wire fencing, hiding away from foot and automobile "border guard" patrols) while being pursued, alongside smugglers, by border patrol officers with dogs and sirens [35].

Another border-crossing attraction is the 720 m long international zip line (1 min long flight at 70—80 km per hour) across the Guardiana River, connecting Sanlúcar de Guardiana (Andalusia, Spain) with Alkoutim (Algarve, Portugal), offering beautiful views and charging with positive emotions. The capacity of the zip line is around 25—30 persons per hour [28].

North European experience of forming tourist destinations

The experience of Northern Europe in turning borders into tourist attractions and destinations is both valuable and practical. There are quite a few fascinating cases to be analysed — the North Cape (Nordkapp) in Norway, the Arctic Circle, and the easternmost point of the EU in Finland [33].

In the 1960s, Finnish border regions were one of the examples of facilitating the development of the tourism industry by stimulating the interest in the national border, which at that time was also the ideological boundary between the capitalist and socialist worlds. According to M. Kosonen and J. Pohjonen, it was this mystical boundary between East and West that stirred everybody's interest, when the majority of foreigners travelling by car wanted to visit south-eastern Finland. The researchers wrote that in the mid-1960s, "the border, frontier zone and border guard activities themselves became objects of interest for tourists" [31]. In this sense, an interesting piece of research is T. Löytynoja's study considering the Russian-Finnish national border from three different angles [32]. Firstly, the national border has a certain structure which can be observed at checkpoints (border infrastructure). Secondly, the border has its historical meaning, for instance, the easternmost mainland point of the EU, having both geographical and historical significance. It is the point where the borderlines of various ages meet (the northern part of the border dates to 1617). Finally, the border as an experience. Since many tourists find crossing national borders entertaining, it is interesting to look at the experience described by T. Löytynoja: two Finnish tourist companies actually "staged border crossings". One of these companies operated in a municipality that does not share a border with Russia. In the programme offered by the tourist agency the bus approached the 'border', 'Russian border guards', wearing the uniform and carrying guns, got into the bus, and asked to show passports in Russian. After that tourists were asked to leave the bus and go for a stroll; then they were offered to taste Russian vodka. Because the situation was so unusual, many tourists believed they had gone through all customs checks at an interim checkpoint. Staging of 'fake' border-crossings is a well-rehearsed part of the programme that these companies have been practicing for more than 20 years, since 1988 [32].

One of the best examples of a geodesic line transformed into a tourist attraction and then into an international tourist destination in Northern Europe is the residence of Santa Claus in Rovaniemi, Finland (ca. 471,000 nights stayed in 2015). The story of this northern destination shows that it started with an installation of a signpost near Rovaniemi, followed by the construction of Santa's village and the necessary tourist infrastructure meeting international standards [33].

The geodesic line of the Arctic Circle is quite actively used for tourism purposes by other countries too — Norway, Greenland, the USA, Russia, and others. Take, for example, Chukotka's tourist agencies offering trips to the unique intersection of the Arctic Circle and the 180 meridian — the only point on land being on the Chukotka Peninsula and the Fiji Islands. It has been agreed internationally that the 180 meridian is the place where the new day begins, but for simplicity purposes the International Date Line (IDL) was drawn only across the Pacific Ocean [1].

An interesting summertime tourist route was opened in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region in August 2016. The region is the easternmost point of Europe — a unique site above the Arctic Circle, located at the junction of Europe and Asia [25].

Borderlands of Northwest Russia

There are numerous success stories of creating and developing tourist attractions based on the special and unique geographical position (on geodesic lines or political boundaries) in the border regions of Northwest Russia. The unique geopolitical position of Northwest Russia borderlands, at present and in retrospect, gives a competitive advantage to these territories over other regions of Russia. In Karelia, for instance, one can still find stones marking former national borders with Sweden and Finland which still attract tourists. There is a popular tourist route to the boundary stone put up in 1934 by the road on the outskirts of the village of Pogrankondushi — a rare specimen of a border marker denoting an old national border between the USSR and Finland (1917—1940) [15]. Another boundary stone, which has become a part of a tourist route, used to mark the Russian-Swedish border in the past, which ran across the middle of Lake Paanajarvi. Now there is a national park named after the lake [9]. National parks are often organized along\across former national boundaries or are located near the present borders. Thus, the descriptions of three out of the 11 routes offered by the Paanajarvi national park mention the "easily traceable former Russian-Finnish national border (1920—1940), which now appears as a wide cleared strip" [12].

One of the oldest known border markers is the Cross stone (Ristikivi) in the Leningrad Region, signifying the national boundary between Sweden and the Novgorod Republic in 1323 and between Russia and Sweden in 1595 [8]. The Sestroretsky Line open-air museum exhibits border pillars from the early XX century Soviet-Finnish border, which were installed on the border with the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1910 [19]. Since the area had long been a borderland, the system of fortifications and fortresses (Ivangorod, Vyborg/Viipuri) was built and developed there, including border pillars (e. g. border pillar # 641, Ivangorod), which are of interest for Russian and foreign tourists. For example, some tours offered by the Silver Ring Group [11] highlight the specificity of borderlands and include visits to former national boundaries.

Cadastral files containing information about the Pasvik Strict Nature Reserve (the Murmansk Region) describe some structures and artefacts (old frontier towers, pillars, piers and outposts) related to the former and the contemporary national border (the reserve's western boundary concurs with the national border). There is a remark in the files saying "a thorough study of this territory, which has always been in borderlands, is needed" [7]. The Murmansk Region (Pechengsky District) boasts a unique Russia-Finland-Norway tripoint. In July 2015, a new monument was opened in the town of Nickel: Russian, Finnish and Norwegian border pillars signifying the junction of the three national boundaries. The Muotkavaara monument (erected in 1945, Rajakoski village) was used as a prototype. Tourists can visit the tripoint monument only once a year, during the international "Ski Track of Friendship" competition [14]. One more tripoint is situated in Sebezhsky District, the Pskov Region, where a prime border marker stands at the junction of the national borders of Russia, Latvia and Belarus.

The above-described practices of using national boundaries as a tourism resource demonstrate a unique potential of the borderlands of Northwest Russia. On the other hand, this potential is insufficiently used in the regional tourism business. The existing tourist attractions are not as actively promoted; tourist agencies matter-of-factly mention them in their brochures, thus losing the opportunity of widening the borderlands appeal. However, we must, keep in mind that the main function of national borders implies certain formalities which in a way restrain the development of tourism along national borders. Also, tourism development in borderland protected areas has to meet both border control and environmental requirements (e. g. visits to the nature reserves Kostomukshsky in Karelia or Pasvik in the Murmansk Region).

Conclusions

The border, functioning or not, offers an essential competitive advantage for any territory. Some borderland communities draw on this resource to create a unique tourist product and built their publicity and marketing campaign upon it [2, p. 17]. The specific geographic position largely predetermines these advantages and possibilities for transforming the border and borderlands into a tourist attraction. Yet, the high tourism and recreation potential and the benefits of the economic-geographic position as such cannot guarantee positive socio-economic effects for border regions of Northwest Russia unless they properly plan their spatial development and use the potential of boundaries (both past and present) to the full. Another important observation is the need to revisit the problem of the identification and promotion of border symbols. An important prerequisite for a full inclusion of the border in regional tourism practices is awareness of the unique potential of this territory, capacity-building of borderland tourist sites, development of tourist products on their basis, and a wise and artful marketing policy. International experience of promoting the symbols of national boundaries and related objects, as well as the creation of tourist attractions and destinations based thereon requires a targeted effort and collaboration of authorities, business and local communities. This necessitates creating a networking of stakeholders, and a more efficient planning process for the development and promotion of the border for regional tourism.

The following actions can be recommended for promoting the inclusion of the tourism resource of boundaries in the practices of the regional tourism business:

— compilation of a register of borderlands objects and boundaries that can be visited either individually or in groups, including descriptions of the borders' (past and present) symbolic nature;

— information support and promotion of the unique potential of boundaries and objects related to borderlands and borders, including the development of roadside signs, info boards, thematic guidebooks;

— placemaking of unique sites and areas;

— working out of tourist routes and products, including tourist visits to borderlands and borders (past and present) either individually or in groups;

— development of the strategy for creating and transforming unique objects related to borderlands and borders into tourist attractions;

— organization of borderlands- and border-focused events, museums, sites keeping in mind the existing international experience;

— etc.

The paper was prepared within the implementation of State Order № AAAA-A16-116011900255-1 of 19.01.2016 "The methodology of studying the evolution of northern peripheral regions, and working out of mechanisms for managing their economic development".

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To cite this article:

Stepanova, S.V. 2017*,* Russia's North-West Borders: Tourism Resource Potential*, Balt. reg.,* Vol. 9, no. 2, p. 76—87. doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2017-2-6.