EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES OF RECREATION AREAS AND TOURISM OBJECTS IN LITHUANIA

Salkauskiene Vilma[1], Abalikstiene Edita[1], Gudritiene Daiva[1,2], Pupka Darius[1], Berzonskis Aurimas[2]

[1]Kaunas Forestry and Environmental Engineering University of Applied Sciences

[2]Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Natural and separate zones' landscape complexes in Lithuania are favourable for recreation and tourism. Although Lithuania's territory in comparison with other countries is not large, it is characterized by a huge variety of geographical complexes and landscapes. By recreational potential Lithuania surpasses even numerous European countries, which are arranged along the northern coastline. Rivers, lakes and forests constitute 25 % of the total Lithuania's area. Forests, parks, sea, other water reserves, geomorphological structures are aesthetically valuable landscape complexes in the Republic of Lithuania and make up one third of the total area.

Having conducted assessment of the landscape in the selected territories and analysed territory-planning documents of Kretinga, Kaunas and Trakai municipalities with regard to recreation and tourism, it has been identified that although the main kind of recreational activity in the analysed municipalities is educational recreation, tourism infrastructure is not sufficiently developed and there is a shortage of accommodation-providing companies. After assessment of the landscape in recreational objects, it has been noticed that the assessed objects are characterized by high spatial flora variety, prevailing greenery and plants. In addition, landscapes are varied and not fully adjusted to recreation and tourism.

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to assess tourism and recreation resources and possibilities of their development in the selected areas in Kretinga, Trakai and Kaunas district municipalities.

Objectives of the article are as follows:

1. To analyse territory planning documents in Kretinga, Kaunas and Trakai municipalities with regard to recreation and tourism.
2. To conduct the assessment of the landscape in the selected recreational objects.
3. To introduce the possibilities of recreation territories' development.

Landscapes were selected in favourable air conditions when there was no fog or strong wind. In addition, no investigations were carried out in the sun. Possibilities of developing recreation territories were defined having analysed general plans of municipalities and conducted interviews with local inhabitants, visitors of objects and employees of protected territories' directions.

More and more people are annually concerned with the environment where they live and rest. Cities are more and more extending. Less space for public and open areas is left, whereas the city is planned regarding urban elements without paying enough attention and creative potential to areas (Piekienė, 2015). Growing attention to protection of nature and preservation of biodiversity all over the world encourages to establish new protected territories, to maintain the state of current territories and increase forest cover (Juknevičiūtė, 2012).

The most valued and picturesque territories of each country, i.e. country's pride and input into protection of world heritage is found in protected areas. Lithuanian system of protected territories includes a wide range of protected territories for both protection of landscape and biodiversity as well as preservation of natural and cultural heritage (Sakalauskaitė, 2010).

Methodology of research and materials

Tha data concerning the assessed objects was collected following the pre-designed questionnaire of landscape assessment. The territories visited by a huge number of individuals in the summer were selected for the investigation. By conducting field investigation, the selected territories were assessed by 4 criteria (table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for Landscape Assessment

Assessment criteria	Maximum assessment	Short description of the assessment
General impression of the landscape	21	Assessment was conducted following 11 criteria: landscape brightness, transparency, striped shape, planning, colourfulness, seasonal aspects, dynamic contrasts, naturalness, and other characteristics provided in the assessment methodology. Maximum points could be given to colourfulness of the landscape while minimum points could be provided for background brightness.
Relief expressiveness	49	24 criteria were used for the assessment: general landscape hilliness, abundance of hills and slopes, blurred hills and slopes, abundance of hills in the horizon, abundance of valleys and hollows, existence of blurred valleys and hollows, abundance of valley bends, brightness of exposures, and other characteristics as indicated in the assessment methodology. Maximum points could be given for abundance of valleys, hollows and hills in the horizon whereas the minimum points could be provided for their blurriness.
Spatial diversity of flora	58	24 characteristics were used for the assessment: flora, highlighting the relief, trees and herbaceous vegetation, fields in wooded landscape, abundance of different land plant communities, diversity of forest and greenery top line, existence of blurred tree objects, abundance of hills and slopes with wooded tops, brightness of tree lines and stripes along the coast (abundance of separate objects) and other characteristics indicated in the assessment methodology. The most important assessment parts are abundance of solid vegetation on the hills and slopes with wooded tops as well as flora highlighting rivulets and mountains.
Diversity of anthropogenic objects	42	21 criteria were used for the assessment: landscape urbanization, abundance of architectural highlights, relationship between settlements and buildings and the environment, adaptation of agricultural fields, adaptation of engineering equipment, existence of blurred anthropogenic objects, variety of protected natural objects, brightness of mounds and castles and other characteristics indicated in the assessment methodology. Architectural highlights as well as abundance of separate buildings collect the maximum points while the minimum number of points could be ascribed to landscape design of settlements and buildings.

Discussions and results

Altough Lithuania's territory is relatively not large, is it characterized by a variety of geographical complexes and landscapes. With regard to geographical aspects, landscapes of 22 types can be found here. From aesthetic point of view it was found that even 27 % of Lithuania's territory is picturesque and highly spectacular. There are plenty of objects in Lithuania (fig. 1), which have historic, cultural, natural potential and attraction for tourists. It allows developing cultural, educational, and medical tourism in regions where there are many of such objects whereas in non-fertile lands establishing rural tourism, water attractions and other forms of active tourism due to appropriate water and natural resources is possible.

Figure 1. Arrangement of Lithuania's recreational and tourism objects and extract from Kretinga district landscape, recreation and tourism drawing

However, numerous cultural, historic objects and settlements are not adjusted to touristic visits. Business infrastructure is not sufficiently developed (namely, catering and accommodation). The same could be said about physical infrastructure (access to touristic objects: road network, cycling tracks, information references, road signs). There is not enough support for tourism objects as well.

Due to huge amount of recreational resources, a part of recreation objects in the analysed locations has been forgotten or abandoned though they have favourable landscape for recreation and tourism. In order to assess attractiveness and sustainability of territories, the assessment of objects was conducted (table 2).

Having conducted the assessment, it was found that the objects which scored most points were located in Trakai municipality whereas the objects of Kretinga municipality scored the smallest number of points. Landscapes of the assessed objects are not very spectacular but they can all be adjusted to recreation. For instance, Jaurykla park in Kretinga district within the territory of the city can be fully arranged and adjusted to recreational needs of Kretinga town inhabitants while Kartena mound and Prystovai exposure can be included in natural routes of the recreational purpose as both these objects are within the territory of Salantai regional park.

Abundance of natural recreational resources establishes especially favourable conditions for the development of recreational toruism. Thus, it is reasonable to pay attention to improvement of recreational infrastructure and its development in all analysed municipalities.

Table 2. Summarized data of the assessed objects

Assessment characteristics	Kartena mound	Prystovai exposure	Jaurykla park	Trakų Vokė manour	Trakai island castle	Užutrakis manour	Varnikai cognitive trail	Saidė cognitive trail	Kaunas 5th Fort architectural reserve	Kaunas Reservoir Regional park observation point	Pažaislis architectural ensemble	Dubrava marsh reserve
General impression of the landscape	11	14	8	9	14	15	12	17	14	14	14	16
Relief expressiveness	19	27	14	9	21	19	17	29	15	13	15	16
Spatial diversity of flora	30	28	21	33	27	38	34	35	28	29	27	22
Variety of anthropogenic objects	21	11	13	22	30	25	12	12	17	28	29	27
Total:	81	80	56	73	92	97	75	93	74	84	85	81

Conclusions

1. Having analysed general and development plans of Kretinga, Kaunas and Trakai municipalities, it was discovered that the main kind of recreational activity is educational recreation. However, in the analysed municipalities tourism infrastructure is not sufficiently developed and there is a shortage of companies providing accommodation.
2. Having assessed landscapes of recreational objects, it was noticed that in the objects assessed there is a big spatial diversity of flora and greenery prevails in the landscape. Landscapes are different but not very spectacular (the impression of object landscape does not exceed 50 points possible). They are also not fully adjusted to recreation and tourism.
3. In order to increase attractiveness of Kretinga, Kaunas and Trakai municipalities, the already established tourism and recreation spots should be maintained. Moreover, abandoned and forgotten territories should be established and prepared for visiting. Rural tourism spots, campsites and other accommodation places should be arranged.

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