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## PROBLEMS AND TRENDS OF REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LATVIA

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**Introduction.** Tourism industry is one of the most promising and rapidly developing sectors of the global economy. In modern conditions of increased competition in the global market of tourist services, the problem of increasing the competitiveness of the tourism industry in Latvia is becoming more urgent, and studying the issue of the competitiveness of regional tourist markets is particularly relevant. The level of competitiveness of a particular region determines its success in relation to other regions of the state and the world, indicates the presence of existing problems and helps to find solutions to them.

**Aim and tasks.** This article explores some aspects of solving the problems of regional tourism in Latvia.

**Results.** Factors that hinder in the successful development of regional tourism, external and internal, has been revealed. The importance of combining the efforts of a number of territories to form a common tourist offer and its promotion both the level of Latvia and internationally. Successful initiative that promotes the development of regional tourism is a creation of tourism clusters at the national and regional levels.

As a promising direction for the development of regional tourism, it's possible to point out the expansion of the circle in territories of Latvia that have received resort status.

Rural tourism contributes to development of regional tourism, but there is a certain range of problems that impede the attractiveness of this type of tourism for foreign tourists. In the order to gain a competitive advantage, Latvian regions need to step up their efforts to form an unique tourist offers. More marketing activities to promote regional tourist product in local and foreign markets require attention.

**Conclusions.** Latvia has high potential for regional tourism, but there are a number of factors hindering its development. In analysis of regional tourism development programs Latvia has shown that regions are trying to conduct active work of the development, support and regulation of foreign and local tourism. It is necessary to develop measures to improve the tourism management mechanism, which would face coordination and cooperation among the various actors, avoiding disproportionate regulation and inefficient use of resources. In the framework of promoting the development of regional tourism, it is necessary to combine efforts of both the state and local governments, and entrepreneurs and other parties who can be involved in the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** regional tourism, cluster, cross-border cooperation, resort, rural tourism, marketing strategy.

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## ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ РЕГІОНАЛЬНОГО РОЗВИТКУ ТУРИЗМУ В ЛАТВІЇ

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**Вступ.** Індустрія туризму є одним з найбільш перспективних і швидкозростаючих секторів світової економіки. У сучасних умовах загострення конкуренції на світовому ринку туристичних послуг проблема підвищення конкурентоспроможності туристичної індустрії в Латвії стає все більш актуальною, і вивчення проблеми конкурентоспроможності регіональних туристичних ринків стає особливо актуальним. Рівень конкурентоспроможності того чи іншого регіону визначає його успішність по відношенню до інших регіонів держави і світу, свідчить про наявність існуючих проблем і допомагає знаходити шляхи їх вирішення.

**Мета і завдання.** У межах даної статті розглядаються деякі аспекти вирішення проблем регіонального туризму в Латвії.

**Результати.** Виявлено фактори, що перешкоджають успішному розвитку регіонального туризму, як зовнішні, так і внутрішні. Представлено важливість об'єднання зусиль ряду територій для формування загального туристичного пропозиції і його просування як на рівні Латвії, так і на міжнародному рівні. Успішною ініціативою, що сприяє розвитку регіонального туризму, є створення туристичних кластерів на національному та регіональному рівнях. Як перспективний напрям розвитку регіонального туризму можна виділити розширення кола на територіях Латвії, які отримали курортний статус. Сільський туризм сприяє розвитку регіонального туризму, але існує ряд проблем, які перешкоджають привабливості цього виду туризму для іноземних туристів. Щоб отримати конкурентну перевагу, латвійські регіони повинні активізувати свої зусилля по формуванню унікальних туристичних пропозицій. Більше уваги вимагають маркетингові заходи щодо просування регіонального туристичного продукту на місцевому та зарубіжному ринках.

**Висновки.** Латвія має великий потенціал для регіонального туризму, але існує ряд чинників, що перешкоджають його розвитку. В аналізі регіональних програм розвитку туризму Латвія показала, що регіони намагаються вести активну роботу з розвитку, підтримки і регулювання іноземного і місцевого туризму. Однак необхідно розробити заходи щодо вдосконалення механізму управління туризмом, який би стикався з координацією і співробітництвом між різними учасниками, уникаючи непропорційного регулювання і неефективного використання ресурсів. В рамках сприяння розвитку регіонального туризму необхідно об'єднати зусилля як держави, так і місцевих органів влади, а також підприємців і інших сторін, які можуть бути залучені в туристичний сектор.

**Ключові слова:** регіональний туризм, кластер, транскордонне співробітництво, сільський туризм курорт.

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**Introduction.** Tourism industry is one of the most promising and highly developing sectors of the global economy. According to statistical data, the tourism industry in Latvia creates 4.1% of the gross local product, export volume makes up 4.5% of the total Latvian export and together with related industries, the tourism industry provides 8.9% of working places in Latvia. Modern conditions creating competition in the global tourism market the problem of increasing the competitiveness in tourism industry is becoming more urgent and studying the issue in the competitiveness of regional tourism markets in Latvia particularly relevant.

Level of competitiveness particular region determines a success in relation to other regions of the state and the world, indicates the presence of existing problems and helps to find a solutions for them. In one hand, the development of tourism contributes the solution of many socio-economic problems of a particular region, and in the other, the socio-economic conditions of the region, along with the tourist and recreational of potential and regional activity regarding the development of tourism, determine the success of tourism development and its competitiveness.

Since regions are influenced by many different degrees in factors and conditions (natural, economic, social, environmental, historical, political, etc.), then the levels of development of the regions are not the same. The state mainly addresses regulatory issues and international marketing of regional tourism, while the most important role is ensuring support and promote regional tourism is made by regional and local authorities.

**Analysis recent research and publications.** In the course of the previous topic, author done research of the latest works of Latvian and foreign authors. The problems of the development of the regional economy and tourism. European experience of regional tourism development and increasing contribution of the regional gross local product is presented in :Romão J., Neuts B. [1]. Interest of various study aspects of regional tourism of foreign countries, in particular study of Saarinen J. [2], Kvach, Y., Koval, V., Hrymaliuk, A. [3], Andraz J., Norte N., Goncalves H. [4]. Margaras V. [5] draws attention to diversify needs to regional tourism product, promotion of alternative forms of

tourism. Study of existing theoretical approaches in the organization of tourist destination marketing is contained in Pike S., Page S. [6].

Tourism as a tool for sustainable regional development and importance of clusters in Latvia using examples of Sigulda and Ventspils are examined by Klepers A., Rozīte M. [7]. The study of T. Grizane [8] devoted a problems of seasonality of tourism in the regions of Latvia. Mazaro R.M. [9] notes that number of studies in regional competitiveness and innovation has been increased significantly, there is noticeable lack of research on the convergence of data from the two topics. Author proposing a model that constitutes the methodological basis of research in the field of innovation in tourism, taking into account the competitiveness of destinations [9].

Panasiuk A., exploring use of EU funds in the implementation of regional tourism policy for example as individual Polish regions, notes what funds means for developing regional tourism and [10].

In general, it has to be noted that in recent years has been high interest of researchers in the problems of regional tourism, but in the national level number of aspects of strategic forecasting and planning of tourism development, as well as issues of strategic management of the entry in tourism industry to the international market and its promotion in the scientific literature today.

**Aim and tasks.** This article explores some aspects of solving the problems of regional tourism in Latvia. In the course of study, author used the following main research methods: analysis of official documents defining the directions of the Latvian state tourism policy; analysis of statistical data of the Central Statistical Bureau and the Ministry of Economy of Latvia, including their comparison, grouping, reflection of trends; empirical research methods, in particular, obtaining primary information about the tourist offers of the regions of Latvia – Zemgale, Vidzeme, Latgale and Kurzeme; Interviews with representatives of the tourism industry in Latvia.

**Results.** In 2018, Latvia became the fastest growing tourist destination in Europe. Latvian tourist accommodation facilities serviced 2.81 million guests, an increase of 9.0% compared with 2017.

The number of nights spent by guests increased to 8.4% and reached 5.37 million. The average length of stay for guests in accommodation sites was 2 nights. Of the total number of tourists served, 1.93 million are foreign visitors, which is 8.2% more compared to 2017. In turn, the number of nights spent by foreign guests increased by 9.9% and amounted to 3.74 million nights.

Most of the guests were from Russia (259.0 thousand), Germany (225.9 thousand), Lithuania (190.9 thousand), Estonia (169.7 thousand), Finland (114.6 thousand) and the United Kingdom (108.3 thousand). In 2018, the number of tourists from Ukraine (by 32.8%), Japan (by 20.2%), Poland (by 18.8%), France (by 16.5%), Denmark (by 15.8) significantly increased. %), The Netherlands (by 15.2%) [11]. In the same time, only 5% of all nights spend by foreign guests in Latvia, they spend nights in places located in the regions. This is the lowest number in European Union.

State policy of development tourism industry in Latvia is aimed to promote the growth of the number of multi-day travelers, reducing influence of the seasonality factor, ensuring the growth of profitability of tourism products, as well as annual increase in the

export of tourism products. According to "Main directions of development tourism in Latvia for 2014-2020"(consistent with Strategy Europe 2020 [12]), the purpose of this policy is the long-term development of tourism, increasing the competitiveness of Latvian tourism in the international market. The main directions of tourism development are:

–promoting development of competitive tourism products, supporting new developments, innovative, high value tourism products, as well as developing tourism infrastructure, promoting the formation of regional tourism clusters and including Latvian tourism products in the overall tourism offer of the Baltic Sea region countries;

–assistance in improving a quality of the tourist product, including ensuring to improvement of the legal regulation in the industry and support of both merchants and consumers of the services of the tourism industry;

–ensuring the recognition of offers of Latvian tourism in target markets, paying particular attention to the use of modern media [13].

One of the current challenges facing tourism industry in Latvia is the development of regional tourism.

**Table 1. Top 5 cities and areas by serving tourists from the overseas in 2018**

City or area name	% of the total number of served foreign tourists
Riga	77,1
Jurmala	8,5
Liepaja	1,8
Sigulda and Area	1,6
Daugavpils	1,4

Source: Developed by authors on [14].

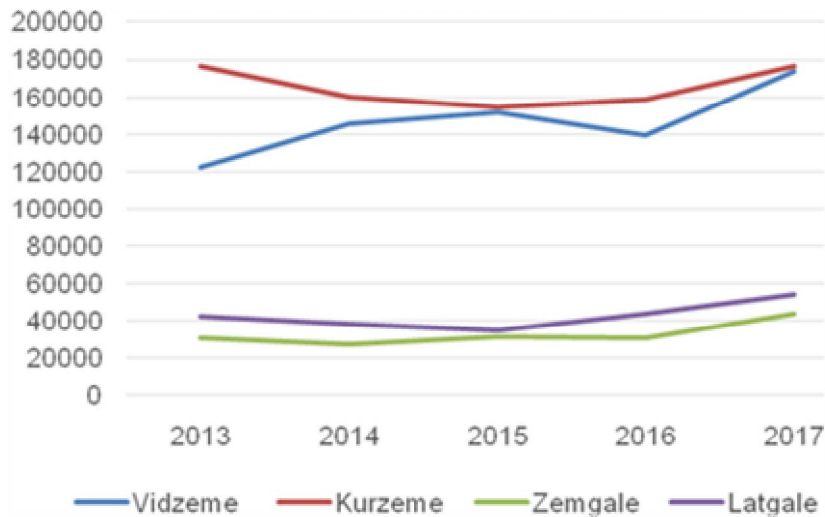
Current data present that the main flow of foreign tourists sent to the capital of Latvia - Riga, as second position with a significant margin is occupied by Jurmala, as resort city, associated by guests with cultural and recreational activities and beach holidays. The rest of the cities and regions of Latvia accept only less proportion of foreign visitors.

There is a pronounced gap between individual regions of Latvia in terms of attracting foreign tourists.

In 2018, tourist accommodation facilities served 883.4 thousand residents of Latvia, which is 10.7% more compared to 2017, while the number of nights spent by them increased by

5.3% and amounted to 1.63 million.

Data shows that Latvians, like foreign tourists, the most popular is Riga, while Latvians are the main consumers of regional tourism services. Statistics reflect the existing problem of attracting foreign tourists to the regions of Latvia. Development of regional tourism is important both on a national scale and for local governments. For local governments, tourism is a significant tool for promoting the development of their territory, contributing to population growth, development of entrepreneurship and attracting qualified personnel, as well as an increase number of tourists and their money expenses in the relevant region.



**Fig. 1. Number of served foreign guests in hotels and other locations in regions of Latvia**  
 Source: Developed by authors on [15].

**Table 2. TOP-6 cities and regions in Latvia by the number of served Latvian tourists in 2018**

City or Area Name	% of the total number of served foreign tourists
Rīga	26,3
Jurmala	9,2
Liepāja	7,4
Daugavpils	4,2
Venstpils	2,7
Sigulda and Area	2,6

Source: Developed by authors on [14].

Problems of regional development are relevant for almost any state. The National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020 envisages the task of “creating an export-oriented

tourism product using the unique natural resources and cultural and historical heritage of the regions, infrastructure created in the regions and the potential of resort services” [16].

Latvijas tūrisma reģioni, tūrisma eksportspēja\*



**Fig. 2. Export ability of tourism in Latvian regions**

Source: Developed by authors on [17].

Proportion of tourism exports in the regions in Latvia was determined by the average number of overnight stays of foreign tourists over the period 2009-2012.

The data show that Riga and Jurmala have the highest export capacity of tourism - 83%, followed by the western part of Vidzeme - 58%, Kurzeme - 36%, Latgale - 31% and Zemgale -

27%. The data testify to the existing problem of the export potential of the Latvian regions.

Important task of regional development is also the development of domestic tourism. It should be noted that the largely income level of the inhabitants of the regions of Latvia is a factor contributing to local tourism.

**Table 3. The proportion of residents who, due to lack of money could not each year allow yourself one week to rest outside the home,% (2016)**

Latvia itself	37,2
Latgale	50,6
Zemgale	43,1
Kurzeme	38,2
Vidzeme	44,5
Riga Area	41,7
Riga itself	23,8

Source: Developed by authors on [18].

In conditions of limited funds, part of the population of Latvia switches to domestic short-term tourism. Domestic short-term tourism is also promoted as vacation break divided into segments, as weekend.

Day travelers from other regions and cities provide significant turnover and income for entrepreneurs of a particular region. Local residents of the region also use tourism and hospitality services. In addition, they allow to reduce the influence of the seasonality factor, and in the off-season using the services of tourist organizations. State programs for the development in the tourism Latvian sector also provides measures to develop local infrastructure, entrepreneurship and consumption.

However, its necessary to take into account the facts that states are beginning to actively implement these measures, “when the task of moving to overseas markets achieved and accumulated funds for investment in domestic infrastructure. Other things being equal, export-oriented sectors remain more preferable for investment. Domestic tourism is often seen as a way to prevent the outflow of currency from the country, which is inevitable when importing tourism services, than the basis for the development of inbound tourism” [19].

In general, the following number of factors hindering successful development of

regional tourism, both external and internal, can be identified:

- in general, the offer of Latvian tourism can be assessed as diverse, but geographically unevenly represented;

- the tourism industry in regions of Latvia is mainly represented by micro and small enterprises with limited financing and development opportunities;

- insufficiently thought-out state financing of the tourism industry, which is scattered in nature, and the return on investments is not fully evaluated;

- necessary support and complicity on the part of the self-government bodies do not always take place;

- there is a lack of sufficiently large offer focused in tourists of various ages and interests, in particular, the services of SPA & Wellness tourism are poorly represented;

- there is not enough original, unique offers for tourists, which would favorably distinguish Latvia from other states;

There is a problem with the quality of tourist services provided;

- inexpressive positioning of the regions;

- lack of information from potential tourists about the tourist offers of the territories and regions of Latvia;

- Low transport infrastructure, the dominance of road transport, etc.

Current trends in the tourism management sector of economy confirm that the growth of the industry and regional development are easier to achieve by combining resources. A good initiative, according to the author, is the creation of tourism clusters at both the national and regional levels. It is important that clusters have a positive impact on the sector's economy [20].

This approach offers great opportunities for improving the competitiveness of local business, as well as enhances the effectiveness of the economic policy of regional authorities. Cluster in tourism is shown as a concentrated group of tourism service providers, supporting organizations, research and development institutes, which effectively and in a coordinated way cooperate in a specific geographic location, developing a comprehensive tourist offer.

The purpose of creating a tourism cluster is to increase the level of economic sustainability of the region, develop infrastructure through synergy, including improving the efficiency of enterprises and organizations in the tourist cluster, stimulating innovation and developing new areas of tourism business.

In 2012, Latvian Health Tourism Cluster has found, the purpose which was announced as offer quality medical services to foreign patients and local residents. Initially, it consisted from 22 participants, and in 2016 there were already 60 participants - merchants of a wide range of health tourism services: resort rehabilitation centers, public and private hospitals and clinics, surgical centers, dental and eye clinics, SPA hotels and SPA centers, manufacturers of eco-cosmetics, travel companies, research and educational institutions, self-government of a number of cities (Jurmala, Carnikava, Saulkrasti, Sigulda, etc.), non-governmental organizations.

Participation of cluster provides opportunity to improve cooperation between those working in the health tourism sector, implement joint marketing activities, create and offer an integrated, innovative tourism product to the market, while making it more accessible to both local and foreign tourists.

In 2011, the tourism cluster of National Park of Gauja was established, bringing together 50 participants, mainly businessmen were from the tourism sector, six local governments,

Vidzeme High School and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Six Latvian territories (Ķekava, Salaspils, Stopiņi, Ikšķile, Ogre un Baldone) formed cluster of tourism in the lower reaches of the Daugava to jointly promote tourism development in the region, strengthen the image of the proposed tourism products, develop industry development projects and create a competitive tourism region in the future [21]. The incentive for creating clusters is, in particular, the Cluster Support Program developed by the Ministry of Economy of Latvia [22]. This tendency to unite the efforts of individual republican territories is reflected in the development of a common strategy for the development of tourism. In particular, the municipalities of the six territories (Babite, Jelgava, Kekava, Marupe, Olaine and Ozolnieki), the society Rīgas area Government, rural partnership Lielupe and the society Partnership of Daugavkrasts in January 2018 signed cooperation agreement. This project provides unified marketing activities, organization of seminars of the exchange of experience and cooperation of entrepreneurs, the improvement of environmental facilities and infrastructure, training guides. Initiatives under this project represent a significant impetus for the development of tourism in Rīgas area region.

This initiative shows the important role of local government bodies in the development of regional tourism.

Desire to unite efforts to develop regional tourism is also reflected in the cooperation of the border areas of Latvia and neighboring states. As example of such cooperation is the Balt's Road International Cultural Route project. The project brings together six partners - two from Lithuania (Siauliai region) and four from Latvia (Kurzeme and Zemgale regions).

This partnership carried out the framework of joint activities for the preservation of cultural and natural populations, promotion and development of tourism products. From April 1, 2017 to December 31, 2018 in the framework of the Latvian-Lithuanian cross-border cooperation program for 2014-2020. The project "Development of Long-Term Travel Services and Improving Accessibility of Tourist Infrastructure (AttractiveFORyou) No. LLI-211 was implemented.

The goal of this project is to develop the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities in Latvia and Lithuania by improving the availability of available tourism services and infrastructure, increasing interest among potential tourists and promoting the combined routes of cross-border thematic tourism. The above projects were financed by European Regional Development Fund. Latvia has experience of cooperation in the field of tourism also with neighboring Belarus, in particular, in the framework of the Bella Dvina project. As part of its implementation, cross-border routes have been developed on various topics, tourism infrastructure in border areas has been significantly improved, a marketing campaign has been carried out on radio stations and television channels in Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus, and major cultural events have been organized and successfully conducted. Project partners participated in eight international tourism exhibitions in Riga, Vilnius, Minsk, Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Challenge for tourism sector in EU increasing competition with other regions of the world. As a result, by 2030, EU may lose the status of the most visited area. This situation require unite the efforts of the regions of individual European Union countries to increase the competitiveness in the tourism sector. Within this framework of implementation of the Interreg Europe program “Support in development of tourism in the regions – BRAND tour”, aimed at improving the competitiveness of the tourism industry, six EU regions join forces - Tuscany (Italy), East Flanders (Belgium), South Limburg (Netherlands), the region of Crete (Greece ), Balearic Islands (Spain) and Latvia [23].

Regional cooperation at various levels requires funds, therefore it's important to assess the effectiveness of the activities carried out under the projects, to the extent that they have achieved the goals of a specific project.

One of the directions of development of regional tourism in Latvia is the revival of the resort industry. In this direction, the Latvian Association of Resort Cities carries out its activities, a purpose of which is to promote the development and adoption of regulations governing the activities of resorts, promoting the development and expansion of the activities

of resort towns in Latvia. One of the main points of this Association is to obtain state support in the development of the infrastructure of cities and resorts, which helps to attract tourists and vacationers, as well as expanding the range of territories in Latvia that have received resort status. Nine local governments and 50 entrepreneurs are currently members of the Latvian Association of Resort Cities. Interest in the development of the resort by individual local governments – Cēsis, Liepaja, Rezekne, Ventspils and Līgatne – can serve as a positive signal for the development of the resort industry in the regions of Latvia. There is considerable potential in rural tourism in Latvia, in which interest tends to grow. At the same time, tourist interests also increases. However, the main consumers of rural tourism services are residents of Latvia, foreign guests as insignificant part of the tourist flow. For example, in Latgale and Kraslava Area in four farms in 2018 there were 2372 tourists from Latvia and only 45 - foreign tourists [24]. As a promising direction of rural tourism can be called the proposal for tourism well-being (well-being). Within this framework of “ProWell” project, with the cooperation of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Lithuania, Latvia) is carried out in the field of well-being tourism under the common brand of Nordic Wellbeing. At the core of the well-being tourism offer of the Nordic countries is beautiful and clean nature, temperate climate with four seasons, which promotes active pastime in nature. In the Baltic countries, more opportunities to enjoy bath and spirituals that use natural materials.

However, offers in Latvia is more attractive for local tourists than for foreigners who place higher demands on the range and quality of this tourist product. This sets the task of improving the range and quality of SPA & Wellness services, including the search for unique offers. This direction is one of the priority directions of tourism in Latvia and should be developed not only in Riga and Jurmala, but also in the regions of Latvia that have the necessary natural resources.

Ensuring the quality of tourist services provided to Latvian regions, especially in rural areas, is hampered by a shortage of labor resources.



Research of Citadele Bank (Latvia), conducted in 2018, included a survey of 750 Latvian entrepreneurs. It showed that 93% of large enterprises (number of employees from 250 people), 75% of medium-sized enterprises (number of employees from 50 to 249 people), 55% of medium-small enterprises (10-49 employees) and 41% of small enterprises (up to 9 employees). Also, entrepreneurs are not optimistic about the future - 41% of entrepreneurs believe that the situation will worsen in the near future, 48% of entrepreneurs believe that the situation will not change, and only 5% expect to improve the situation [23].

For the regions of Latvia, this situation is particularly relevant, including because of the departure of the able-bodied population to work abroad, as well as to the capital, Riga. In this regard, some enterprises in the tourism industry see a way out in attracting workers from abroad - Ukraine, Belarus, Russia. Along with the labor shortage, there is another problem - a significant part of the workers do not have work experience in the area in which they are employed. Therefore, enterprises, including the tourism industry, need to solve the problem of personnel training [24-25].

Those needs to align information technology with business needs requires an increase in knowledge and competencies of tourism industry personnel in terms of applying information technology [26].

As an important task is to strengthen the marketing activities to promote the tourist services of the regions of Latvia in foreign markets. According to experts, the marketing hierarchy will promote the promotion of tourism products: state → state cluster → regional cluster → self-government. Since 2016, Department of Tourism has been operating within Latvian Investment and Development Agency. The main task implementation of the state tourism policy, the promotion of Latvia's international recognition, popularization of Latvia as an attractive tourist destination and the promotion of tourism competitiveness. Within this department, there is a tourism marketing department, which develops and implements a marketing strategy for Latvian tourism, collects and analyzes information about the tourism market and its development trends, as well as

about the Latvian tourism environment and opportunities for its improvement. Particular importance is promotion of tourist products of the regions, which provides for the identification, creation and maintenance of competitive advantages in the rivalry of territories. Under the conditions of the modern information society, tourism can and should be developed through technology. Particular importance is a decision of the question, how and with the use of which technologies to ensure the promotion of the formed tourist routes and how to ensure sustainable demand in the segment of domestic tourism. In the light of current trends, the most promising is the use of Internet resources, including social networks. The Latvian marketing strategy for domestic tourism includes, in particular, the following marketing activity:

– Facebook social place „Atklāj Latviju no jauna” (OpenLatvija from beginning) (20 975 followers ) the current situation about Latvia;

– portalLatvija.travel, where you can find all map routes and current information about local activity's.

In order to attract foreign travelers to the Latvian regions, it is advisable to use the opportunities of participating in international tourism exhibitions, inviting foreign tour operators to study visits to Latvia, publications and other marketing activities abroad.

**Conclusion.** Latvia has a high potential for regional tourism, but there are a number of factors hindering in development. In the framework of promoting the development of regional tourism, it is necessary to combine the efforts of both the state and local governments, as well as entrepreneurs and other parties involved in the tourism sector. Strategically right direction is to cooperate and develop common strategy for the development of regional tourism at the level of cooperation of a number of regions of Latvia, and at the level of interstate cooperation in this direction. It's necessary to develop measures to improve the tourism management mechanism, while avoiding disproportionate regulation and inefficient use of resources. Motivation for cooperation is potential achievements in the field of regional tourism, which can not be achieved without combining efforts.

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