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The Importance of Sectoral and Regional Cooperation Network Coverage for Sustainable Tourism Development in Latvia

Abstract. Sustainable tourism development concept defined by World Tourism Organization reveals a need for common network formation as a platform for cooperation between different tourism sectors and stakeholders. Additional reason for the growing interest in cooperation in tourism is the belief that organisations and destinations may be able to gain competitive advantage by bringing together and sharing their combined knowledge, expertise, financial capital and other resources for common goal. Cooperation networks can gain collaborative advantage not only for separate organisation, but the whole destination. Topicality of the problem is based on the global competition, heterogeneous nature of tourism industry, rapidly developing technological innovation, need for sustainable development set additional importance for cooperation in order to keep pace with the latest developments and new possibilities for cooperation networks. The aim of paper will discuss tourism industry sectorial and regional coverage of tourism associations and other formal networks in Latvia from the perspective of sustainable tourism destination development. Conclusions and suggestions are drawn for overall tourism industry as system development, cooperation network gap reduction by sectors as well as by regions and tourism organisation cooperation improvement in Latvia.

Keywords: tourism, sustainability, sustainable development, networking, cooperation, cooperation networks, regional coverage, sectoral coverage

1. Introduction

United Nations have recognised importance of partnerships in the Millennium Development Goals as well as recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2016-2030 thus stressing topicality of networking phenomena for sustainability securing. The 17th SDG goal comprises mechanisms and partnerships to reach

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the sustainability as all SDGs are linked, for all the rest 16 SDGs linkage strengthening is via partnerships. Additionally topicality of networking from enterprise and organisation perspective – 21st century can be characterised as cooperation, network and alliance period in enterprise and organisation interactions. Even though the Porter's concept of competitive advantage [Porter 1985] has not lost the crucial importance, the additional type of advantage that is more and more frequently mentioned, is collaborative advantage – production of something unusually creative, meeting an objective, which no organization could have produced on its own and when each organization, through the collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone [Vangen & Huxham 2013].

Collaborative advantage in case of tourism enterprises can be achieved either by two party cooperation activities or by several tourism enterprise networking actions. Large number of tourism enterprises involved in cooperation networks allows achieve goals that can not be achieved separately therefor coverage as indicator of number of enterprises involved in networking can be used as one of indicators for sustainable tourism development characterisation. The aim of paper will discuss tourism industry sectorial and regional coverage of tourism associations and other formal networks in Latvia from the perspective of sustainable tourism destination development.

2. Sustainability concept in tourism

A traditional visualization of sustainable development dimensions is Venn diagram in which social, economic, and environmental factors overlap so as to produce system that is sustainable in that it is socially bearable, economically equitable, and environmentally viable. In sustainable tourism concept it is not possible to separate the three mentioned sustainability aspects as mainly private enterprise tourism industry, this is the economic aspect, is tourist movement and interaction with local people that is the social aspect, in ecological environment in destination as the environment aspect. In addition to having multi-stakeholder process for articulating goals and aspirations in sustainability approach, there has to be effective implementation of change on the ground [Logan 2015]. Multi-stakeholder influences as well as economic, social and ecological aspect impact on sustainable development create additional complexity for communities in destination development and risk of some of stakeholder exclusion.

Even though tourism is considered generally as unsustainable industry, tourists and tourism enterprises can play an active role to overcome the environmen-

tal issues because global environmental issues and adverse effect of these issues on nature has been increased. In addition, tourists and tourism enterprises need to be informed about natural surroundings. The concept of sustainability has been discussed for years and it is also adapted to tourism industry. Scientists have done considerable research about the issues of sustainability and evolution of sustainability in terms of tourism industry [Yuzbasioğlu, Topsakal & Celikc 2014], still us in many theories there is no universally accepted definition of sustainable tourism destinations [Lee 2001]. According to World Tourism Organization [UNWTO 2005] sustainable tourism can be defined as “tourism that takes full account of its future and current economic, environmental and social impacts, addressing the needs of the enterprises, visitors, local people and the environment”. Figure 1 shows scopes of sustainable tourism definitions.

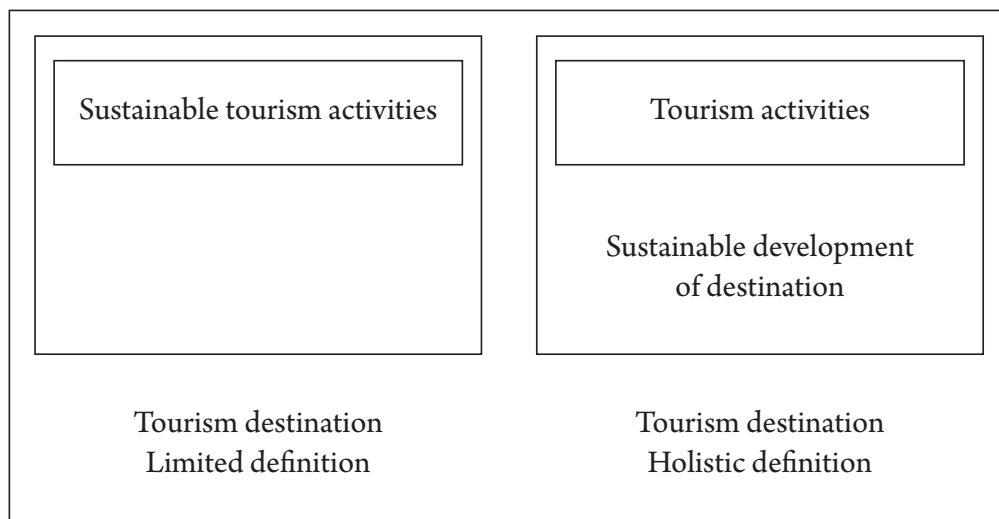


Figure 1. Definitions of sustainable tourism destination

Source: Lee 2001: 315.

Narrowed or limited definition includes the management of all sources that are devoted to tourism. On the other hand, holistic definition of sustainability has the potential to promote more synergistic understanding of the social, environmental, economic and cultural indicators of tourism destination and how each of these factors lead to more sustainable tourism destination [Lee 2001]. There are four indicators for implementing tourism strategies based on sustainability. These are local people; local authorities that responsible for the administration of destination; service-producing enterprises and finally visitors including excursionists and tourists [Buhalis 2000]. All the stakeholders – local people, local authorities, enterprises and visitors are responsible for the sustainability of tourism destinations. One of the more important models of sustainable development of tourism destination is DIT-ACHIEV Sustainable Tourism Model can be seen in

Figure 2. This model identifies the sustainable tourism indicators – administration, heritage, community, infrastructure, visitor and enterprises [Yuzbasioğlu, Topsakal & Celikc 2014], model describes influence of following elements as heritage include both archaeological, cultural and historical heritage as well as nature – flora, fauna, air. Infrastructure mainly comprises transport and amenities, that are enforced by tourism enterprise sustainable development practices. For community members the quality of there is very important in sustainable tourism perception. Destination visitors are seeking service quality, spending, still all stakeholders need to be managed by tourism administration policy management.

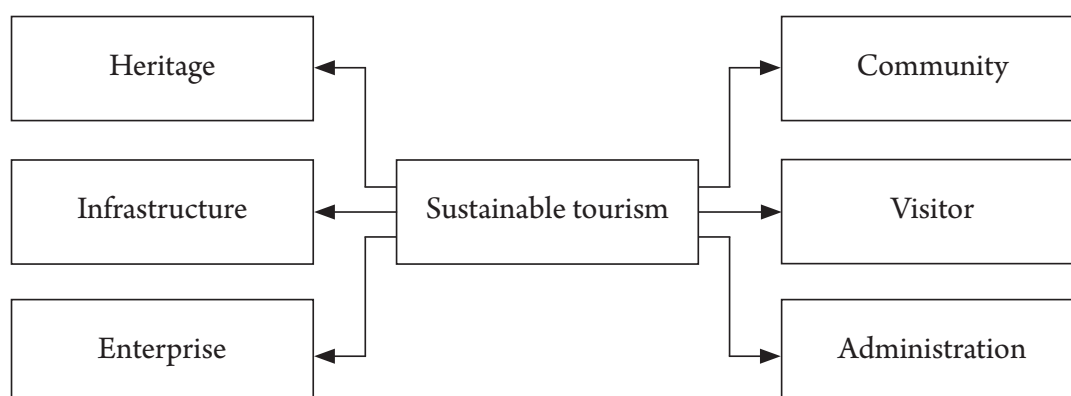


Figure 2. DIT-ACHIEV Sustainable Tourism Model

Source: Yuzbasioğlu, Topsakal & Celikc 2014.

The DIT-ACHIEV Sustainable Tourism Model realizes that tourism is an important for investment, revenue, and employment, it's indirect and direct impacts on sites such as the transport, environment, business, regional planning and trade mean that plan and policies must be integrated and coordinated to avoid one area of policy hindering the success of another. According to the model there are three roles of enterprises in sustainable tourism: sustainable practices, communication and labour [Yuzbasioğlu, Topsakal & Celikc 2014]. All stakeholder involvement and coordination support the Sustainable Tourism Model functioning in particular destination.

Tourism enterprises, especially, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that are dominating in tourism industry and making even up over 90% of the EU tourism sector, are nowadays facing many difficulties and threats to their survival. The economy globalization, the proliferation of large commercial or industrial chains, the inconstancy and mutation of the environment, and the economic crisis, are some of the variables that threaten the businesses [Varajao & Oliveira 2015]. Tourism enterprises face many pressures from the ever changing external environment, including economic, technological, social and political influence. High

competition has led companies to look for new approaches to take advantage, adopting new strategies and models that allow them to be able to meet the current development requirements. The search for increased competitiveness and efficiency of the last decade resulted in several organizational approaches. Some of these approaches rely on dynamically reconfigurable partnerships in permanent alignment with the market, and strongly supported by information and communication technology. The need for organizations is to adopt new organizational models in order to ensure permanent adjustment to the market. These models should allow organizations to obtain enough wide dimension to act on global market and simultaneously ensure enough flexibility so that they can quickly adjust to new market requirements [Varajao & Oliveira 2015]. Innovative use of technological development allows faster organisational model adaptation.

Tourism is an activity that can have significantly big impact on sustainable development. Sustainability of tourism involves extensive cooperation between tourist companies, tourist destinations and national, regional and local authorities in order to cover wide group of challenges and at the same time to remain competitive [Angelkova, Koteski, Jakovlev & Mitrevska 2012]. Even though for innovative approach the global cooperation perspective has high priority, it is not possible to exclude regional development as base for further globalisation processes.

3. Regional aspects of sustainability in tourism destinations

The encouragement of sustainable tourism in the regions is important not only for tourists, but rather to locals and when they realize that the tourism development can take place in a sustainable way and they benefit of it and benefit, additional community support and local inhabitant attitude will create positive image of destination. Especially in the current condition of economic fluctuations and increasing unemployment, the possibility of the contribution of entrepreneurship to the reinforcement of employment renders it as an important parameter of destinations economic policy. The creation of new jobs and the reinforcement of employment of groups of the population, which are mostly affected such as youth, women, people with special needs, may attract additional positive contribution. This is where the cooperation networks can play significant role. By creating networks where local inhabitants cooperate for the common region development interest, destination can boost emotional attachment and relationship maintenance [Thipsingha 2015a, 2015b; Bitsani & Kavoura 2014]. Regional cooperation network development with local inhabitant involvement increase social capital of destination.

4. Interorganisational cooperation network concept

Broad cooperation definition comprises all forms of joint action by two or more individuals. More particular and narrowed definition describes cooperation as individual behaviour that incurs personal costs in order to engage in joint activity that grants benefits exceeding those costs to other members of one's group. Networking – one form of cooperation, it can be defined as set of enterprises and organizations in certain net with social, technologic, economic or other background. Networks comprise several enterprises have mutual objectives or common interests that serve as conjunctive link between these enterprises and organizations. Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups [OECD 2001].

In business cooperation networks inter-organisational relationships require several indications – at least three parties must have commercial relationship; that partners have some degree of independence, but at the same time depending on the type of network there is degree of restriction of the enterprise freedom, and finally that management of the network is organised according to the strategic interests of the partners. Enterprise or organisation can be part of more than one network at the same time.

The establishment of cooperation networks between organizations appear to be strategy for organizations to be able to develop common strategies that allow obtaining and maintaining competitive advantage. Engaging in new forms of collaboration and maintaining relationships within business networks have become natural way for organizations to meet performance requirements in competitive markets. In this way, cooperation network is an aggregator competence centre of the cooperation firms. Some of the most important criteria for competitiveness include responsiveness, agility, adaptability to environmental change, and high flexibility. The goal of the enterprise is to fulfil the customer requirements, but, traditionally, using the limited set of resources available within the walls of the organization. The interorganisational cooperation networks favours the competitiveness of the cooperating enterprises, as they become more flexible, minimize costs, share resources, skills and knowledge, define common strategies and still gain scale. Information Technology (IT) plays an important role as facilitator of setting up cooperation networks, supporting the development of alliances, allowing the creation of virtual organizations with other business partners and developing inter-organizational information systems that support strategic business relationships, with clients, suppliers, subcontractors and others. In the Information and Knowledge Era, the role of IT is fundamental to establish communi-

cating channels between cooperating networks. The correct adoption of IT in companies is key factor for achieving superior business results and competitive advantages, being IT one of the main drivers of changes and innovations in corporations sharing information and knowledge about clients and potential business opportunities that each client could represent for the various members of the network. Companies can gain competitive advantage by using this information the various economic agents which cooperate on the network will be able to share information about the clients and business opportunities that each identify, in order to retain those same clients in the cooperation network. Consider, for example, business opportunity generated by the fact that client looks to stay for holidays in rural tourism house. This client is, or may represent, not only an opportunity for the network member who owns the house, but can also help to identify business opportunities for other members of the network, relating to guided tours, tasting of products, selling local crafts, among others. The system, beyond sharing information between cooperating agents, also allows clients to publish their own needs independently, i.e. without intermediation, which are real business opportunities for the cooperation network. The purpose of this kind of information sharing is to reduce the funding costs of new clients and offer complementary products and/or services. It should be noted that, in tourism sector, the demand tends to be cyclical, and as such, the model includes feedback, that is, the information shared by any of the cooperative agents may give rise to new business opportunity later [Varajao & Oliveira 2015], that means the loyalty of local and international tourists can be managed also at the cooperation network level.

Taking as basis for analysis the actors involved, cooperation networks can involve such sectors as partners: Private sector enterprises, Public sector organisations, Academic sector institutions. Researchers have applied the terms “network,” “networking” and “clusters” to describe intangible linkages social structure and cooperation between entities, such as individuals, government organizations, non-government organizations and businesses [Tolkach & King 2014]. The two main grouping systems of network partners are based on Professional goal achievement or Regional gains.

An expanding regional coverage provides real opportunities for firstly targeted membership acquisition in the region, secondly for interlinking worldwide, region to region as well as within regions. Regional integration and cooperation arrangements vary widely in their structure, objectives, sectoral coverage, and membership. Cooperation is aimed less directly at trade and factors of production, and involves working together towards common end or purpose. Cooperation initiatives tend to be more selective in their regional coverage and require less long-term commitment than integration [Radelet 1996]. Similarly, the broader is the sectoral coverage, the greater is the possibility that all members will en-

joy comparative advantage in some products. In more limited arrangements it is possible that countries with comparative advantage in excluded sectors such as agriculture will gain little, and may in fact lose from the RIA [Radelet 1996], therefore interorganisational cooperation needs to comprise different sectors of different industries.

5. Interorganisational cooperation specifics in tourism industry

Nowadays additional interest in collaboration in tourism has arisen at time of increasing environmental turbulence and operational complexity for organisations of all kinds and the transition to alternative forms of collaboration. Service, perishable good, global competition, increase of tourist experience – increase in requirements, tourism product – selling dream, heterogeneous industry.

Tourism's multi-sectoral nature is marked by the fragmented or heterogeneous character of the industry. The heterogeneity of different tourism enterprises in the industry creates its specific system of interactions in the tourism-product chain of distribution. The operations of the intermediate-sector enterprises in the tourism industry are so active and multi channelled that they create additional challenges for the functioning of the industry. There are cases where several intermediaries are involved between supplier of tourism products and the tourist himself. Good example is the renting of hotel room. Hotel in Riga has contract of sale with travel agency in Riga; the room is further distributed via the travel agency to its partners in Stockholm, for example, who are Baltic tour operators, and these bigger agencies in Stockholm can work with other partners in Sweden that become the final sellers of this accommodation to the tourist.

6. Importance of regional coverage in tourism

Tourism network regional coverage provides set of different possibilities for tourism destination stakeholders, like:

- attraction of tourists to the region using less investment per organisation,
- closer cooperation of tourism enterprises of one destination,
- specific problem solving in particular region,
- formation of the regional products involving different tourism enterprise products, f.e. New route development,
- cooperation of public and private sector organisations,

- possibility to access external funding,
- regionalism at the time of the global economy and integration processes that are conditioned by it, becomes an inevitable factor of sustainable development of countries and wider regions [Milenkovic 2012].

On contrary consequences for partnership gaps in regional development are less information about the enterprises in more distant regions, secondly low tourism product diversity as well as decrease in tourist number.

Tourism enterprise and organisation network sectoral coverage provides possibility for:

- common particular industry sector problem solving,
- common industry sector problem lobbying,
- fast information exchange,
- best practices and experiences,
- possibility to access external funding,
- consequences for partnership gaps in tourism industry sectors can cause slow sector development as well as increase of expenses.

7. Study on tourism interorganisational cooperation networks in Latvia

Tourism development in Latvia is quite stable and even growing. In 2014, as compared to 2013, the number of foreign travellers has increased by more than 7%, 6.2 million travellers spent EUR 668.5 million in Latvia [CSB 2015]. What kind of companies generate these millions of euro? Tourism industry is very heterogeneous, that can be seen in Figure 3.

The tourism industry supply sector in Latvia mainly consists of SMEs – more than 500 accommodation establishments and 300 small country side guesthouses. Travel organiser sector contains at least 169 tourism companies according to the data of Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) of Latvia and even several times higher number according to the data of the Latvia Tourism Development Agency. Such big number of enterprises for destination with only 2 million local inhabitants are quite high.

Comprising the data of Tourism Development Agency of Latvia (TDAL) as well as adding couple of networks that were not included in Agency data, author analysed the information on tourism networks in Latvia using secondary data (available data gathering) and primary data via expert interviews.

The range of cooperation networks during the last years is quite stable, even though previously some integration processes took place and some regional networks joined together forming bigger network system.

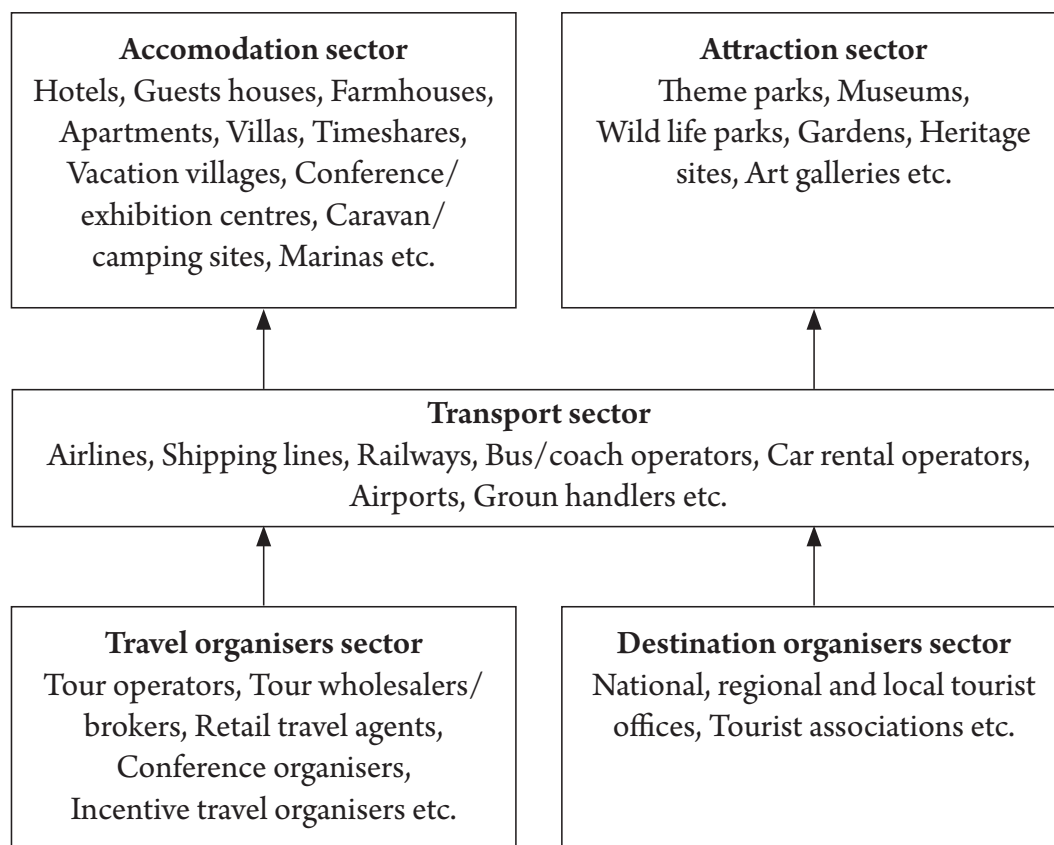


Figure 3. Basic tourism industry supply sectors

Source: UNWTO 2003.

Clustering the tourism enterprise cooperation networks we can see that the main dominating group are professional networks, so 2/3 from all cooperation groups, and the rest 1/3 are regional networks.

Professional networks in accommodation sector are formed between traditional hotels LVRA and other accommodation establishments – LC, LCA, HL. Every association represents specific accommodation types and do not overlap directly. So there is no direct competition between these sectors. Analysing Tourism industry cooperation network coverage in hotel industry sector Latvia, we can see the connection or positive correlation between the quality level and the participation in hotel network.

Networks in attraction sector – ALM, ALCMP were formed for museums, castles and manors. Transportation in tourism industry of Latvia is not separated from transportation in general, and there are no particular tourism related network groups. Destination information sector is supported by LATTURINFO gathering most of Tourism information bureaus.

Travel organisation sector is represented by one organisation ALTA. In travel organiser sector there is only one association. Calculating sectoral coverage rate

Table 1. List of tourism industry cooperation networks and their tourism industry represented sectors in Latvia 2015

Title of Tourism Industry Network in Latvia	Type of network	Tourism sector
Gauja National park Tourism Association	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Hostelling Latvija	professional	accommodation sector
Society "Kurzeme Tourism Association"	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Latgale Region Tourism Association "Ezerzeme"	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Latvian Ecotourism Society	professional	ecotourism
Latvian Camping Association	professional	accommodation sector
Latvian resorts association	professional	recreation
Latvian Rural Tourism Association "Lauku Ceļotājs"	professional	accommodation sector
Latvian Medical Export Association	professional	medical tourism
Latvian Museum Association	professional	attraction sector
Association of Latvian Castles, Palaces and Manors	professional	attraction sector
Association of Latvian Professional Guides	professional	tourism information sector
Latvian Association of Tourism Agents (ALTA)	professional	tourism organisation sector (intermediates)
Association of Latvian Tourism Guides	professional	tourism information sector
Association of Latvian Tourism Information Organisations LATTŪRINFO	professional	tourism information sector
Latvian Association of Tourism Education	professional	tourism education
Latvian Association of Hotels and Restaurants	professional	accommodation sector
LIVE Rīga Office	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Sigulda Region Tourism Society	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Society "Vidzeme Tourism Association"	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations
Zemgale Tourism Association	regional	complex of different tourism enterprises and organisations

Source: own elaboration.

based on data of CSB, the coverage percentage is average (Table 4), but adding the much bigger number by TDAL.

Tourism network regional coverage in Latvia, a small country, is very integrated – there are four basic associations (corresponding to geographical – his-

Table 2. Tourism industry cooperation network type share Latvia 2015

Tourism Industry Networks (associations, societies)	Number of networks	Share of networks (%)
Regional networks	7	33,3
Professional networks	13	66,7

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. Tourism industry cooperation network coverage in hotel industry sector in Latvia 2015

Tourism network sectoral coverage – hotels	5-star	4-star	3-star	1-2-star	Hotels
Latvia (together)	8	44	56	4	238
Latvian Association of Hotels and Restaurants	7	44	48	2	101
Hotel network sectoral coverage (%)	87,5	100,0	85,7	50,0	42,4

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4. Tourism industry cooperation network coverage in travel organiser sector in Latvia 2015

Tourism network sectoral coverage – travel organisers	Travel organisers
Latvia	169
ALTA	84
Travel organiser network sectoral coverage (%)	49,7

Source: own elaboration.

Table 5. Tourism industry cooperation network regional coverage in Latvia 2015

Tourism network sectoral coverage – regional coverage
Society „Kurzeme Tourism Association”
Latgale Region Tourism Association „Ererzeme”
LIVE Riga
Society „Vidzeme Tourism Association”
Zemgale Tourism Association

Source: own elaboration.

torical regions of Latvia) and the association of capital LIVE Rīga that’s aim is to attract tourists to Riga.

Additionally to those basic regional networks there is one smaller region cluster.

8. Conclusions

The regional and sectoral cooperation network coverage analysis shows that there are no striking network gaps – there are cooperation networks in all tourism sectors, except tourism transportation. Tourism transportation cooperation is based on the overall transportation company cooperation with no cooperation specialisation in tourism. So the cooperation network representation we can characterise as existing in main tourism sectors. Still for each type of tourism organisations there is only one choice – to participate or not, that means that there is no competition between networks.

Similarly with regional coverage – all four basic regions of Latvia have their cooperation networks as well as capital of Latvia. Additionally to the basic region networks there are just couple of additional cooperation groups or clusters. Additional research can be done to study the differences in situation when there is competition between networks.

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Znaczenie zasięgu sieci współpracy branżowej i regionalnej dla zrównoważonego rozwoju turystyki na Łotwie

Streszczenie. Odnosząc się do koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju turystyki, Światowa Organizacja Turystyki (UNWTO) charakteryzuje ją jako „turystykę, która w pełni uwzględnia jej bieżący i przyszły wpływ na gospodarke, społeczeństwo i środowisko, mając na uwadze potrzeby odwiedzających, branży turystycznej oraz środowiska i miejscowej ludności”. Dostrzec bowiem można, że interesy i wizje rozwoju różnych grup zainteresowanych bywają ze sobą sprzeczne. Stworzenie wspólnej sieci pozwala na współpracę między poszczególnymi gałęziami turystyki i interesariuszami. Ponadto poprzez skoncentrowanie się na wspólnym celu oraz łączenie i wspólne wykorzystywanie wiedzy, kapitału finansowego i innych zasobów zarówno organizacje turystyczne, jak i poszczególne destynacje mogą zyskać przewagę konkurencyjną. Sieci współpracy mogą przynosić korzyści nie tylko poszczególnym organizacjom, ale i całym miejscowościom i regionom turystycznym. Wobec szybkiego rozwoju innowacji technologicznych i stale przyspieszających procesów globalizacyjnych animozje pomiędzy organizacjami turystycznymi ustępują

miejsca trwałym formom współdziałania, dla których sieci turystyczne są nie tylko zaczątkiem, ale też platformą informacyjną funkcjonującą w ramach sieci społecznych. Tematyka artykułu obejmuje globalną konkurencję, niejednorodny charakter przemysłu turystycznego, szybki rozwój innowacji technologicznych oraz konieczność dbania o zrównoważony rozwój, które nadają szczególne znaczenie współdziałaniu, warunkującemu umiejętność nadążenia za postępem oraz wykorzystywaniu nowych szans tkwiących w tworzeniu sieci współpracy. Celem artykułu jest omówienie branżowego i regionalnego zasięgu stowarzyszeń turystycznych oraz podobnych sformalizowanych struktur w łotewskim przemyśle turystycznym z perspektywy zrównoważonego rozwoju destynacji turystycznych. Wnioski i zalecenia dotyczą całego przemysłu turystycznego Łotwy, a należą do nich systemowy rozwój sektora, dalsze rozszerzanie sieci współpracy w poszczególnych sektorach i regionach, a także poprawa funkcjonowania współpracy pomiędzy organizacjami turystycznymi.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, trwały rozwój, zrównoważony rozwój, networking, współpraca, sieci współpracy, zasięg regionalny, zasięg branżowy