

## Tourism Development in the Municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija Region

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### Abstract

The authors of the article discuss tourism development conditions in the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija region. Scientific problem: tourism development trends at local, municipality, level have not been sufficiently studied in Lithuania, tourism has been developing without a clear, long-term development strategy and a consistent tourism development programme in districts. Scientific literature review, survey results, document, SWOT analysis are provided in the paper.

**Keywords:** tourism, tourism development, factors, conditions, region, municipality.

### Introduction

Tourism has become one of the leading industries in many countries due to economic, social, political, globalization processes. According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), tourism has a direct and indirect impact on the economy, it generates 9% of global GDP, accounts for 1 in 11 jobs in the planet, represents 6% of the world's export, it has been forecasted that in 2030 the number of international tourists will reach 1.8 billion. During the last decades tourism has become an important sector of Lithuania's economy, since 2009 the revenue from inbound tourism has been steadily increasing every year. According to Lithuanian tourism statistics for 2015, the expenditure of foreign tourists and same-day visitors amounted to 1.18 milliard EUR (40).

Many scientists have analysed tourism: Dwyer and Kim (2001), Gunn (2002), Dmitrijeva and Šeniavskij (2009) – tourism destination competitiveness and determinants, Dredge and Jenkins (2007), Sharpley and Telfer (2002), Hall (2007) – tourism planning and development, Go and Govers (2000) – integrated quality management of tourism destination, etc.; in Lithuania: Korneičiuk and Pi-

pirienė (2015) – trends and development of modern tourism, Stasiukynas (2014) – assessment of the sustainable development of recreational complexes, Žičkutė (2014) – the development of eco-tourism in Lithuania, Romikaitytė and Kisieliauskas (2012) – factors that affect the development of the tourism sector in Lithuania, Andriulienė, Armaitienė, Povilanskas, Janulienė and Dulskis (2011) – the assessment of Lithuania's tourism potential, Hopenienė (2009) – dynamics of the tourism business system, Žilinskas and Petravičienė (2007) – conceptualization and trends of tourism development in Lithuania, Li-geikienė (2003) – tourism development and management, Žilinskas and Skrodenienė (2003) – tourism development management in the regions, Žalienė and Sabaliauskaitė (2002) – the evolution of tourism across the world and in Lithuania, Paulauskienė (2013) – perspectives of tourism management development in Lithuania, Dapkus and Gaižauskienė (2009) – tourism development at municipality level. However, tourism development conditions at municipality level have not been researched, only sporadic research has been carried out. For these reasons, tourism in many municipalities has developed without a clear and long-term development strategy and a consistent implementation of the programme has been lacking.

One of the three main objectives set out in the Communication from the European Commission for EU tourism (2010) is tourism competitiveness. The National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020 has identified regions favourable for tourism development (29). Eastern Aukštaitija region, covering Anykščiai, Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena and Zarasai districts, is among them.

**Research object:** tourism development in the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija region.

**Research aim:** to explore tourism development in the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija region.

**Research objectives:**

1. To characterize the factors that affect tourism development.
2. To analyse the main factors that affect tourism development in Eastern Aukštaitija region.
3. To define the main preconditions for tourism development in the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija region.

**Research methods.** The authors of the article reviewed scientific literature and carried out quantitative research, performed a survey, document analysis, SWOT analysis and survey data generalization. A research instrument, a questionnaire, was designed, questions were grouped into blocks for qualitative analysis (SWOT), 6 tourism specialists responsible for tourism development in Eastern Aukštaitija region, in Anykščiai and Utena municipalities, Utena, Ignalina and Zarasai Tourism Information Centres and Molėtai Tourism and Business Information Centre were surveyed. In order to identify preconditions for tourism development in the region a survey was carried out. Taking into account research specificity, it was an important data collection method. The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Tourism, the National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020, the development plans of the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija region, other strategic documents were also analysed. Tourism development issues were discussed, research results were analysed.

### **Tourism development**

The WTO defines tourism as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than 12 months for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited (30). Tourism development is linked to a growing number of visitors interested in the area. According to Ligeikienė (2003), tourism

development draws on the assumption that the life of local community will improve. Tourism development has an impact on the economy, its strategy – on the strategy of other branches of the economy, actions and measures – on the development of the region, public sector, the environment, infrastructure, agriculture, small and medium businesses there. There is a close link between tourism development, regional development, state development (WTO, 1980). Sharpley and Telfer (2002) state that tourism has a direct positive impact on the national, regional and local economy and, in turn, is affected by the economic development of the region. Hall (2007) assumes that tourism is part of sustainable development.

Mostly tourists are attracted by a landscape, natural resources, the sea, beaches, climate, mountains, etc., they contribute to tourism development and bring economic benefit, they do not need to be built or created (Jenkins, 2007). Thus the availability of natural resources should be taken into account.

Tourism development depends on many factors: availability of services, natural, cultural, social, human resources, infrastructure, accommodation, catering, transportation, entertainment, information services, management as well as a status (e.g. a resort, a UNESCO world heritage site, etc.), image, location of a tourist destination, activities provided by tourism centres, tourism network (1).

Rapid tourism development has become one of the most popular leisure activities. According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (2010), globalization and socio-economic changes, rising incomes, living standards and life expectancy, faster and cheaper transportation, accessibility of tourist destinations, the Internet speeded up its development (25).

The factors that affect tourism development in Lithuania and across the world are provided in Table 1.

**Factors that affect tourism development**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Factors</b>
<b>Foreign authors</b>	
Dmitrijeva, Šeniavskij (2009)	Political stability, nature, environment, safety, health and hygiene, transportation, infrastructure, Internet, pricing policy, personnel, infrastructure, tourism destination management, natural, cultural resources
Dwyer, Kim (2003)	Natural, artificial resources, special events, state support, tourism destination management, demand, market performance
Wöber (2002)	Cultural, natural resources, tourism infrastructure, personnel competence, tourism market, geography, virtual environment
Sharpley, Telfer (2002)	New job places, economic diversification, state support, public services, recreational facilities
Go, Govers (2000)	Accessibility of tourism destinations, service quality, state support, pricing policy, image of tourism destinations, climate, environment, attractiveness
<b>Lithuanian authors</b>	
Indriūnas (2015)	Leisure, recreational facilities, transportation, infrastructure, organization of trips, tourism information, advertising
Andrulienė et al. (2011)	Resources, infrastructure, tourism industry, tourist flows, image of tourism destinations, activities, tourism network
Ligeikienė (2003)	Globalization, integration, IT, economic development, changes in consumer behaviour

As we can see, resources, developed infrastructure, a variety of tourism services, management quality, virtual environment, services quality, image of tourism destinations, facilities are those factors that positively affect tourism development.

According to Žilinskas and Skrodenienė (2008), seasonality, a small variety of recreational activities, insufficiently developed accommodation services, a lack of services, unskilled personnel are those factors that negatively affect tourism development in Lithuania. According to Pliustienė (2012), tourism development depends much on local government initiatives and decisions. Thus, a municipality should set priorities and make decisions favourable for tourism development, invest in planning, projects, marketing, information systems, etc., cooperate with the private sector.

Sharpley and Telfer (2002) note that the private and public sectors should cooperate, have a common opinion on tourism development and set goals, job creation, economic diversification, municipality support, other measures should be taken into account. Žilinskas et al. (2007) note that Lithuania's tourism development strategy should be developed at national, regional, institutional levels and be consistent.

In practice, tourism is being developed in accordance with plans and selected indicators. Gunn (2002) was one of the first scholars who described tourism planning as a tool for developing tourist destinations. According to him, incomes, new jobs, resources as well as protection measures,

supply of services that meet tourists' needs should be foreseen in a tourism development plan. It will help insufficiently or under-developed tourism destinations develop. In developed countries (regions), it helps develop the tourism sector and make it sustainable (WTO, 1994).

Since 1998 the tourism sector of Lithuania is regulated by the Law on Tourism, the Law on Territorial Planning, other regulations. Tourism planning is one of tourism sector management and policy tools (39). A vision, goals, challenges, public involvement should be laid down in a tourism development plan. Tourism planning involves strategic planning, spatial planning and short-term planning. Strategic planning focuses on tourism development directions for a particular period. While drawing up a strategic plan external factors, innovations, technology, the media, socio-economic situation, communication, laws, regulations, domestic policy, political situation, etc. should be taken into account. According to Išoraitė (2009), strategic planning is a tourism sector development tool.

The goal of strategic planning is to increase the competitiveness of the tourism sector since this economic activity contributes to the country's economic growth (39). Socio-cultural impacts of tourism are evident, services, events, sites attract visitors who bring life into the region, provide its residents with self-expression opportunities, promote cultural identity.

The European Commission (10) has identified the following as promoting tourism development:

a variety of services, innovations, IT, skilled personnel, all-season tourism, cross-border trips, tourism infrastructure (cycle routes, cycle hire, etc.). The tourism sector should organise day trips, coach tours, encourage Lithuanians to visit protected cultural, natural resources since that contributes to the economic development of the region.

The National Tourism Development Programmes for 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, their goals and objectives are provided in Table 2. The new Programme highlights the following seeking to increase the share of tourism in the country's economy: competitive products and services, tourism infrastructure and services, a favourable environment for tourism business, effective marketing and communication, competitiveness and visibility of Lithuania in the domestic and international market, domestic tourism, inbound tourism, sustainable tourism. International and domestic marketing of

tourist attractions, high quality and competitive products and services will increase the incomes of local residents, new businesses will be created, private investment will be attracted, the GDP will grow, regional economic and social development issues will be addressed. It is important to protect and effectively manage the country's natural and cultural heritage and resources. The National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020 was developed referring to studies, research, the provisions of the national progress strategy *Lithuania 2030*, the Communication from the European Commission COM (2010) 352 of 30 June 2010 *Europe, the World's No 1 Tourist Destination – a New Political Framework for Tourism in Europe, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Comprehensive Plan of the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania*.

Table 2

**National Tourism Development Programmes for 2007-2013 and 2014-2020**

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>National Tourism Development Programme for 2007-2013</b>	<b>National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020</b>
Priority	Cultural, active leisure, conference management, wellness tourism.	Cultural, business, health, green (eco) tourism
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To create a competitive environment, develop tourism services.</li> <li>2. To ensure a continuous growth of tourist flows.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To develop tourism infrastructure, improve the quality of services.</li> <li>2. To increase the visibility of Lithuania, improve its image.</li> <li>3. To reduce tourism seasonality.</li> </ol>
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To develop marketable tourism services, tourism infrastructure.</li> <li>2. To develop wellness tourism in resorts and resort areas.</li> <li>3. To promote private-public sector cooperation.</li> <li>4. To develop tourism sector regulations.</li> <li>5. To improve tourism specialists' skills.</li> <li>6. To promote domestic tourism.</li> <li>7. To promote inbound tourism.</li> <li>8. To monitor tourism sector development.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Of goal No. 1:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To develop cultural, business, wellness, ecotourism using private infrastructure in the priority regions.</li> <li>2. To develop attractive tourist routes.</li> <li>3. To improve access to Lithuania.</li> <li>4. To improve tourism specialists' entrepreneurial skills.</li> <li>5. To promote accreditation and (or) certification of tourism service providers, institutions, tourist destinations.</li> </ol> <p><b>Of goal No. 2:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To create and employ e-marketing.</li> <li>2. To employ integrated marketing in priority markets.</li> <li>3. To develop a signs and symbols system to be used on maps, in information systems.</li> <li>4. To develop and implement cross-border projects.</li> <li>5. To set up tourism clusters, to initiate public-private sector tourism projects.</li> </ol> <p><b>Of goal No. 3:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To organise a wide variety of culturally diverse events and entertainments in the off-peak season.</li> <li>2. To develop rural tourism in the off-peak season.</li> <li>3. To provide a wide range of recreational, outdoor activities in winter.</li> </ol>

When the aims and objectives of the National Tourism Development Programme for 2007-2013 were implemented, a new Programme for 2014-2020 was developed to respond to changing conditions. The Programme sets tourism development priorities, goals and objectives until 2020. It emphasises sustainable tourism, continuous flows of tourists, competitive services, tourism infrastructure, marketing. The following tourism development trends have been identified: cultural, business, wellness and ecotourism. The both Programs focus on cultural and wellness tourism, the new Programme – on business and ecotourism, the 2007-2013 Programme – on a favourable environment and a continuous growth of tourist flows, the 2014-2020 Programme – on tourism infrastructure,

services quality, visibility/image of the country, all-season tourism, accreditation and(or) certification of tourism service providers, tourist destinations, integrated marketing of inbound tourism in priority markets, a system of tourism signs and symbols, tourism clusters, all-season tourism, etc. The 2007-2013 Programme sets out 8 objectives, the 2014-2020 Programme – 13 (see Table 1).

In accordance with the Law on Tourism, tourism policy implemented at national, regional and local level is a means of achieving strategic goals. The object of this article is tourism development at municipality level. The competence of local government institutions within the tourism area is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

### Competence of local government within the tourism area

<b>Local government</b>
<b><i>Tourism development, establishment of tourist information centres:</i></b>
1. Promote tourism development as a measure for creating jobs.
2. Establish tourist information centres.
<b><i>Preparation and implementation of strategic plans and projects:</i></b>
3. In accordance with the National Tourism Development Programme, prepare, approve and implement tourism and recreation development plans, projects, charts.
4. Develop and implement tourism and recreational infrastructure development projects.
<b><i>Planning and implementation of recreational activities:</i></b>
5. Plan and implement measures to protect recreational areas, develop leisure and tourist activity there, manage the records on these areas, approve regulations for use of recreational resources.
6. Plan and organize children's and youth camp activities, establish general requirements for these camps and supervise implementation thereof.
7. Restrict (re)construction, repair, installation works in resort areas during the tourism season in accordance with regulations.
8. Analyse tourism resources and services in the municipality area.
9. Sign contracts with tourism service providers, legal and natural persons, regarding the use (lease) of recreational resources for tourism and leisure in accordance with law, supervise their implementation.

Source: authors' compilation (in accordance with the Law on Tourism, 2015)

Municipalities, in accordance with the Programme and the Law on Tourism, prepare, approve and implement a tourism development strategy, plans, projects, charts in the municipality area, plan and implement protective measures, develop leisure and tourism activity, approve regulations on the use of recreational resources, plan and organize children's and youth camp activities in the municipality area, also promote cross-border cooperation, participation in international programmes and projects.

At municipality level, tourism development is set out in a strategic development plan of a municipality, tourism activity management is not mandatory. According to Bryson (2004), a

strategic plan of a municipality focuses on those factors that ensure sustainable and competitive tourism, promote change, make decisions that have a positive impact. According to Gražulis (2008), a properly chosen strategy helps take the desired position in a competitive market, promotes values and norms, contributes to the achievement of strategic objectives. According to Sudnickas (2011), a quick reaction to change, an effective use of available resources, strategic management help gain competitive advantage. Success of a strategic plan depends on how models, principles, procedures are adapted to existing conditions. Unfortunately, very often a strategic plan of a municipality is only an opportunity to apply for EU funding, meanwhile it

should be a document which clearly sets priorities and directions, helps choose and develop the most effective and efficient activities (38).

### Tourism sector development in Eastern Aukštaitija region

Eastern Aukštaitija region includes Anykščiai, Molėtai, Utena, Ignalina and Zarasai districts, the concentration of rural tourism homesteads is highest there. According to statistics for 2015, there are 176 rural tourism homesteads or 28.9% of all rural tourism homesteads in Lithuania. There are 3 resort areas (Anykščiai, Zarasai and Ignalina), 1002 lakes in the region. Molėtai, Ignalina and Zarasai districts have the largest number of lakes in Lithuania. There are five regional parks and one national park in the region, protected areas cover 20.46% of the land area. For these reasons Eastern Aukštaitija has been identified as one of the most promising

tourism development areas in the National Tourism Development Programme for 2014-2020. It should be noted that all municipalities in the region have strategic plans, four municipalities (80%) – short-term plans (for 3 years), one municipality (20%) – a medium-term plan (for 5 years), Utena and Zarasai districts – a medium-term tourism marketing development strategy (for 5 years). In 2010 Molėtai district carried out feasibility study *Targeted investment attraction and tourism infrastructure development*, in 2013 Ignalina district – *Tourism development – the region's priority*.

Tourism specialists were surveyed and asked to rate the factors that affect tourism development: planning, management, resources, public-private sector cooperation, legal base, project development and implementation, tourism development strategy, tourism research. The following was found (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### Factors that affect tourism development

Factor	Rating (1-5 points)
Quality of tourism services; tourist destination management; image/visibility of a tourism destination	5
Virtual environment; resources (cultural, natural, human, financial)	4.8
Tourism infrastructure	4.2
Events	4.1
Variety of tourism services	4

The image of a tourist destination, virtual environment and resources got the highest rating (see Table 4). A good image, representation and popularity of a tourist destination affect the socio-economic situation in the region and regional wellbeing. Among resources, cultural resources got 4.6 points, natural – 4.5 points, human and financial – 5 points each. Human resources in the tourism sector are very important, the image of a tourist destination depends on staff skills, they should speak foreign languages, be able to handle intercultural encounters (29). Effectively used natural and cultural resources help gain a competitive advantage, attract tourist flows, generate incomes; cultural, educational, ethnic, rural, ecotourism should focus on respective market segments.

While rating tourist attractions in the region, 5 points were given to homestead museums, 4.7 points – folk crafts, 4.3 points – urban heritage and folk traditions each, 4 points – arts and archaeological assets each.

The research results show that cultural, recreational, leisure, rural, wellness, ecotourism are provided in Eastern Aukštaitija, its natural resources are a precondition for developing those types of tourism in its resort areas.

A great variety of tourism services such as conference management, catering, entertainment, camping, water sports, accommodation, transportation, local guide, etc. are provided permanently or under an individual contract (see Table 5).

Table 5

### Tourism services provided in the districts

Service	Permanently	Under a contract	Not provided
Travel	Anykščiai district	Utena, Zarasai districts	Minimally in Ignalina, Molėtai districts
Tourist information	Anykščiai, Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-	-
Accommodation	Anykščiai district	Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Recreation	Anykščiai, Ignalina districts	Zarasai district	Minimally in Molėtai, Utena districts
Transportation	Ignalina district	Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Catering	Anykščiai district	Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Entertainment	Anykščiai district	Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Conference management	-	Anykščiai, Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Water sport	Anykščiai district	Ignalina, Molėtai, Utena, Zarasai districts	-
Other	Anykščiai district	Ignalina, Molėtai, Zarasai districts	-

SWOT analysis (opportunities, threats, strengths, weaknesses) helps make the best decisions. The SWOT analysis of Eastern Aukštaitija regarding tourism development was performed on the basis of the survey results and the region's development plan (see Table 6).

Table 6

### SWOT analysis of Eastern Aukštaitija regarding tourism development

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural resources (rivers, lakes, forests)</li> <li>Unique culture (traditions, holidays, customs, culinary heritage, folk crafts)</li> <li>Skills of human resources</li> <li>Tourist attractions (museums, galleries, botanical gardens, historical sites, natural parks, protected areas, etc.)</li> <li>Recreational activities (indoor/outdoor activities, e.g. skiing, golf, diving, bowling, etc.)</li> <li>Virtual environment (Facebook, Instagram, websites)</li> <li>Image/visibility of tourism destinations</li> <li>Tourism destination management (at municipality level)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of parking spaces, walking routes</li> <li>Underdeveloped network of cycling routes</li> <li>Poor quality of district roads</li> <li>Insufficiently developed waterways</li> <li>Lack of tourist attractions relating to agriculture, industry, no theme, amusement parks, fairgrounds</li> <li>No region travel guide mobile apps</li> <li>Tourism seasonality</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of EU funding</li> <li>Response to a rising demand for recreational, wellness tourism in the local and foreign market</li> <li>Focus on the quality of hospitality services, establishment of international standards</li> <li>Entrepreneurship development</li> <li>Response to rising flows of tourists, market differentiation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unplanned change in the economic development priorities of the state</li> <li>Shortage of human resources and clients</li> <li>Worsening demographic situation in the region (aging population)</li> </ul>

Tourism experts identified the following strengths of the region for tourism development: tourism destination management, services quality, the image/visibility of tourism destinations, virtual environment, human resources; weaknesses: insufficient variety of tourism services, insufficiently developed tourism infrastructure (lack of parking spaces, cycling, walking routes, waterways, poor quality of district roads); threats: unplanned change in the economic development priorities of the state, emigration, worsening demographic situation, etc.; opportunities: use of EU funding, a rising demand for recreational, wellness tourism, high quality hospitality services, establishment of international standards, etc.

## Conclusions

1. The factors that affect tourism development are: human, financial resources, tourism infrastructure, variety of tourism services, virtual environment, the image/visibility of tourism destinations, tourism destination management, service quality, variety of tourist attractions.
2. Tourism specialists identified the following strengths of Eastern Aukštaitija regarding tourism development: tourism destination management, the image/visibility of tourism destinations, service quality, etc.; weaknesses: a lack of tourist attractions and insufficiently developed infrastructure; tourism development in the region is threatened by such factors as unplanned change in the economic development priorities of the state, emigration, etc.; tourism development can benefit from EU funding, a growing demand for recreational, wellness tourism, hospitality services, etc.
3. Tourism development in the municipalities in Eastern Aukštaitija depends on tourism planning and management, skills of human resources, public-private sector cooperation, legal base, project development and implementation, tourism development strategy, tourism research.

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## Turizmo plėtros sąlygos Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono savivaldybėse

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje autoriai nagrinėja turizmo plėtros sąlygas Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono savivaldybėse. Mokslinė problema – turizmo plėtros tendencijos savivaldybių lygmeniu Lietuvoje plačiau netyrinėtos, o turizmas rajonuose plėtojamas neturint aiškios ir ilgalaikės plėtros strategijos, nuoseklios jos įgyvendinimo programos. Tyrimo tikslas – iširti turizmo plėtros sąlygas Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono savivaldybėse. Tyrimo uždaviniai: apibūdinti turizmo plėtrai įtakos turinčius veiksnius; atlikti pagrindinių Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono turizmo plėtros veiksnių analizę; apibrėžti Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono savivaldybėse turizmo vadybai svarbius veiksnius. Rengiant tyrimą pasitelkti šie metodai: mokslinės literatūros šaltinių analizė, kiekybinis tyrimas – anketinė apklausa, dokumentų analizė, SSGG analizė ir duomenų apibendrinimas. Iš viso apklausti 6 turizmo specialistai, atsakingi už turizmo plėtrą Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono Anykščių ir Utenos rajonų savivaldybėse, Utenos, Ignalinos ir Zarasų rajonų turizmo informacijos centrų (TIC), Molėtų turizmo ir verslo informacijos centro (TVIC) atstovai. Siekiant išsiaiškinti turizmo plėtros sąlygas ir prioritetus minėtame regione, atlikta dokumentų analizė. Informacijos šaltiniai: LR turizmo įstatymas, Nacionalinė turizmo 2014–2020 m. plėtros programa, Rytų Aukštaitijos regioną sudarančių savivaldybių plėtros planai ir kiti strateginiai dokumentai. Straipsnyje aptariami turizmo plėtros klausimai ir pristatomi tyrimo rezultatai, autorių manymu, laikytini bandomuoju tyrimu, atveriančiu galimybės tolimesnėms mokslinėms paieškoms. Turizmo specialistai aukščiausiu balu įvertino turistinės vietovės vadybą (turizmo valdymą savivaldybių lygmeniu) ir turizmo paslaugų kokybę, gana aukštu balu įvertino turistinės vietovės įvaizdį, virtualią aplinką ir išteklius. Vietovės įvaizdžio gerinimas ir jos turizmo galimybių populiarinimas prisideda prie vietos socialinių ir ekonominių klausimų sprendimo, gerovės kūrimo. Vertinant išteklius, maksimaliu balu buvo įvertinti žmogiškieji ir finansiniai ištekliai, šiek tiek žemesniu balu – gamtiniai ir kultūriniai. Žmogiškieji ištekliai turizmo sektoriuje yra labai svarbūs, nes šio sektoriaus darbuotojai kuria šalies turizmo ir jos svetingumo įvaizdį, o svetingumas – sudėtinė turizmo sektoriaus konkurencingumo dalis. Daugėja inovacijų, sparčiai modernizuojami procesai, atsiranda naujų turizmo plėtros iššūkių, todėl reikia aukštos kvalifikacijos specialistų. Siekiant stiprinti šį potencialą, svarbu nuolat ugdyti turizmo sektoriaus darbuotojų profesinę kompetenciją – tobulinti jų kvalifi-

kaciją, užsienio kalbų žinias, gerinti įvaizdį, ugdyti tarpkultūrinę kompetenciją. Šalies turizmo ištekliai – tai vienas iš svarbiausių konkurencinių pranašumų, padedančių pritraukti turistinius srautus ir padidinti ekonominę turizmo naudą. Lietuvos gamtinių ir kultūrinių turizmo išteklių gausa, jų įvairovė leidžia kurti ir vystyti aktyvaus poilsio, kultūrinio ir pažintinio turizmo, etninio, kaimo turizmo ir ekoturizmo produktus, orientuojantis į atitinkamus rinkos segmentus. Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais, regione plėtojamos šios turizmo rūšys: pažintinis kultūrinis, poilsio, laisvalaikio, kaimo, sveikatingumo turizmas, ekoturizmas. Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono gamtinių išteklių gausa sudaro prielaidas visų paminėtų rūšių turizmo plėtočiai, o sveikatingumo turizmo plėtojimas susijęs su kurortinių vietovių veikla regione. Atlikus teorinę mokslinių šaltinių nagrinėjama tema analizę ir apibendrinus tyrimo rezultatus, prieinama prie išvadų, kad labiausiai turizmo plėtrai įtakos turintys veiksniai yra žmogiškieji ir finansiniai ištekliai, turizmo infrastruktūra, turizmo paslaugų įvairovė, virtuali aplinka, turistinės vietovės įvaizdis / žinomumas, turistinės vietovės vadyba, turizmo paslaugų kokybė ir renginiai. Turizmo specialistai kaip turizmo plėtros privalumus Rytų Aukštaitijos regiono savivaldybėse įvardijo turistinės vietovės vadybą, turizmo paslaugų kokybę, turistinės vietovės įvaizdį / žinomumą, virtualios aplinkos poveikį turizmo plėtrai ir žmogiškuosius bei finansinius išteklius. Trūkumai – turizmo paslaugų įvairovė ir turizmo infrastruktūrą. Turizmo plėtrai regiono savivaldybėse kyla įvairių grėsmių: neplanuota valstybės ūkio plėtros prioritetų kaita, gyventojų migracija į kitas šalis, blogėjanti rajono demografinė situacija ir kita. Turizmui plėsti regiono savivaldybėse svarbios galimybės pasinaudoti ES lėšomis, vidaus ir užsienio rinkose augantis poreikis gauti aktyvaus poilsio ir sveikatingumo turizmo produktų, svetingumo sektoriaus paslaugų kokybės gerinimo ir tarptautinių standartų diegimo aspektai. Turizmo vadybai Rytų Aukštaitijos savivaldybėse yra svarbūs šie veiksniai: turizmo planavimo ir valdymo sistema; kvalifikuoti turizmo specialistai; veiklos organizavimas ir planavimas; turizmo projektų rengimas ir įgyvendinimas; viešojo ir privataus sektoriaus bendradarbiavimas; turizmo plėtros strategijos turėjimas; tyrimai turizmo srityje ir teisinė turizmo bazė.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** turizmas, turizmo plėtra, veiksniai, sąlygos, regionas, savivaldybė.