

**“You have probably heard about all this ...”**  
**Baltic Seaside Resorts as Soviet Tourist Destinations**

by Christian Noack

Towards the end of the Soviet period, tourism planners in Moscow commissioned a sociological survey to establish their compatriots' preferences for annual summer holidays. As it turned out, the Baltic republics of the USSR emerged as the third most popular destination after the Crimea and the Caucasian coast. About ten per cent of the respondents answered that they wished to spend their holidays in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. This was the highest rating for any region outside the Black Sea littoral and the Caucasus. The Soviet 'Mediterranean' would have attracted almost half of the respondents; and in fact this was the part of the Soviet Union with the best tourism infrastructure. In practice, however, Soviet citizens could not simply expect to see their wishes fulfilled due to the chronic shortages of *putevki*, or travel vouchers, in the state sponsored Soviet holiday facilities run by the trade unions. Of those interviewed, only every second respondent could realistically hope to spend the summer on the shores of either the Black or the Baltic Seas: If Black Sea and Caucasian destinations catered to less than a quarter of all "organised" Soviet vacationers, the Baltic resorts could accommodate only about five per cent.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Baltic republics were popular Soviet destinations, and why would they not be? They were reasonably close to the industrial centres of the northwest, including Leningrad or Belorussia. If the Baltic republics lacked the dramatic aspects of the Black Sea or Caucasus region, their oriental tinge or their sub-tropical climate, they had other attractions to offer, like the length of the coast line and its natural beauty, the calm of the hilly and forested hinterland. Beyond this, the rich cultural heritage of medieval towns shaped the Baltic republics' outlook as more European than any other part of the USSR.

My inquiry into Russian and, later, Soviet tourism in Baltic resorts will focus on the three most important seaside spas in each republic, Pärnu in Estonia, Jurmala in Latvia and Palanga in Lithuania. As the first section shows, the history of the Baltic resorts as a destination for Russian tourists dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While tourists, particularly from St Petersburg, frequented Baltic spas and resorts, the emergence of a major Imperial city within the region, Riga, was of even greater importance for tourist development. Riga developed into an industrial hub and a multi-ethnic town with significant Latvian, German, Russian and Jewish populations, and the city would remain the most important "provider" of tourists in numerical terms. The following section examines how Russian tourism was only shortly interrupted by revolution and civil war. Although war damage and the drawing

1 "Fakticheskaia organizatsiia ezhegodnogo otdykha zaniatnogo naseleniia i pozhelaniia na budushchee" [The Factual Organisation of the Working Population's Annual and Desires for the Future], internal report of the Tsentral'nyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii i proektnyi institut tipogo eksperimental'nogo proektirovaniia lechebno-ozdorovitel'nykh i sanatorno-kurortnykh zdani, Moscow, ca. 1986. Quoted from Monika Henningsen: *Der Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr in der ehemaligen Sowjetunion unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Baltischen Raumes*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 86 f.

of borders created obstacles for the development of tourism, Russians continued to visit the Baltic shores between 1920 and 1940.

In both 1940 and 1944–45, the Soviet occupants found the existing tourist infrastructure relatively well preserved, and section two of the article deals with the repeated Sovietisation of vacationing in the Baltics. While there was little development until the early 1960s, Soviet planners then aimed at establishing a “tourist industry” which would enable “mass tourism”. Section three will inquire into the changes that occurred in the wake of these decisions: to what extent were the Baltic resorts fully absorbed into the Soviet system of state sponsored tourism? How were natural and cultural resources exploited for tourism, and which development perspectives were pursued in the three Baltic republics? What role, in particular, did “unorganised” tourism, as opposed to planned vacationing, play in the region? Indeed, the number of “wild” tourists (as those who travelled individually were called) rose disproportionately, meaning that the “unorganised tourist” as a rule far outnumbered the organised and badly strained the rather inflexible Soviet supply chains in the resorts.

As will be discussed in section three, the decades between 1960 and 1990 saw not only a considerable extension of the state sponsored network of recreational and tourist facilities, but also serious attempts to cater to the needs of vacationers travelling without the holiday vouchers distributed by Soviet trade unions. I argue that achievements and failures in the accommodation of unplanned tourism amply illustrate both the scope and the limits of late Soviet modernisation policies.

The final part of the article returns to the initial question of supply and demand. While available written sources do not tell us much about choices and decisions of individual Soviet tourists travelling to the Baltic Sea, we can at least analyse how the Baltic destinations were represented in Soviet media. What kind of imagery was produced for the Baltic region as whole, for the individual republics and for the most important individual destinations? And in how far were these representations used to advertise vacations for a broader Soviet audience (basically outside the Baltic republics), thus turning them into genuinely Soviet destinations?

### **1. Baltic resorts between empire and national states, 1840–1940**

In the Russian Empire and in Central or Western Europe domestic travel and tourism developed ultimately along similar lines, if one allows for the usual delay with which impulses of modernisation penetrated the eastern great power. “Taking waters” had been one of the habits of the European nobility Peter the Great encountered and subsequently tried to have his Russian peers emulate. Due to the fact that a majority of Russia’s wealthy landowning class preferred to travel to European spas rather than staying in Russia for cures, it would take about another century after the Tsar’s death before a network of health resorts emerged within the Empire proper, basically in the recently annexed Caucasian foothills. Piatigorsk, for example, was founded only in 1830 and became a popular destination visited by officers and civil servants who could not afford to travel to Marienbad or Wiesbaden.<sup>2</sup>

2 Kurorty. Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ [Spas. Encyclopedia], Moscow 1983, pp. 19-21, 282 f.

In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, other forms of leisurely vacation developed on the littoral of the Black Sea, particularly on the Crimea. Catherine had symbolically taken possession of the peninsula with her famous 1787 journey, and the imperial household began to spend summers there more regularly after the acquisition of the Livadia estate and the erection of the famous palace of the same name. Soon afterwards mountaineering clubs emerged on the Crimea and in the Caucasus. At first affluent families began to travel south, latter middle classes joined them, firmly establishing the “Russian Riviera” and the “Russian Alps” on the mental maps of early Russian tourists. Still seasonal travelling from Petersburg to the Black Sea required substantial means, and a railway link, momentarily absent during the Crimean War, was not established until 1894.<sup>3</sup>

The geographical proximity of the Baltic region to St Petersburg, on the contrary, designated it to become a prime recreational area for the inhabitants of the imperial capital.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, St. Petersburg’s service class, among them numerous descendants from the Baltic German nobility, retreated to estates in the Baltic provinces during the summer seasons, as did their peers owing land in Russia or Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

A number of other factors facilitated the development of tourism in the north. Firstly, travellers began to appreciate, starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the sublime aspects of northern landscapes, earlier a preserve of the Mediterranean sites of antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, as in the case of Crimea, the Imperial family acted as a trendsetter. Their habit of yachting in Finland<sup>7</sup> was emulated by the nobility and later, the middle classes. For the latter, thirdly, railway construction rendered seasonal mobility more affordable. It began earlier in the north of the country, where the first stretches of the St. Petersburg – Helsingfors railway to Beloostrov were opened in 1870. Summer houses and boats in Finland rapidly became fashionable. Cheap railway fares helped to turn the Karelian Isthmus on both sides of the border with the Grand Duchy into a very popular area for the construction of dachas.<sup>8</sup> A similar development could be observed on Estonian soil near the town of Narva. Indeed, some of the stretches on Estonia’s northern coast resembled the Finish counterparts. St. Petersburg’s middle classes, among them many well know writers like Goncharov or Leskov,

3 See Andrei Mal’gin: *Russkaia Riv’era. Kurorty, turizm i otdykh v Krymu v epokhu Imperii konets XVIII nachalo XX v* [The Russian Riviera: Spas., Tourism and Recreation in Crimea during the Imperial Periods, 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries], Simferopol’ 2006. For mountaineering Gennadii P. Dolzhenko: *Istoriia turizma v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii and i SSSR* [A History of Tourism in Pre-Revolutionary Russia and in the USSR], Rostov-on-Don 1988, pp. 20-40; Eva Maurer: *Wege zum Pik Stalin. Sowjetische Alpinisten, 1928–1953*, Zurich 2010, pp. 51-71.

4 Louise McReynolds: *The Prerevolutionary Russian Tourist: Commercialization in the Nineteenth Century*, in: Ann E Gorsuch, Diane P. Koenker (eds.): *Turizm. The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, Ithaca 2006, pp. 7-42, here pp. 37-39.

5 Vgl. den einleitenden Artikel von Karsten Brüggemann in diesem Heft.

6 On the discovery of the sublimity of northern landscapes see Orvar Löfgren: *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing*, Berkeley 1999, pp. 16-21.

7 Jurma a. Pjavi Tumoi-Nikula: *Imperatory na otdyke v Finlandii* [The Tsars on Holidays in Finland], St. Petersburg 2003.

8 Vilho Hämalainen: *Die russische Sommerhausbesiedlung auf der karelischen Landenge am Ende des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas* 34 (1986), no. 4, pp. 518-538; see also Stephen Lovell: *Between Arcadia and Suburbia: Dachas in Late Imperial Russia*, in: *Slavic Review* 61 (2002), no. 1, pp. 66-87.

painters like Shishkin or the composer Chaikovskii acquired dachas on the mouth of the river Narva.<sup>9</sup>

Even if occasional visits by members of the Imperial family to coastal spas like Haapsalu, in Estonia, are also reported to have boosted tourism, a number of factors retarded the development in the Baltic provinces.<sup>10</sup> Basically the larger distances and the lack of convenient railway links to the littoral made these developments less sustainable. The St. Petersburg – Warsaw line, built in 1860, cut through Courland and linked Latvia's second biggest city, Daugavpils, to the capital. A branch to Riga came into service two years later. Yet it took another fifteen years before railway construction reached the seaside resorts in the Riga Bay: Dubulti and Kemerī became stops on the Riga-Tukums line only in 1877. By 1889 a direct line from St Petersburg via Pskov reached Riga.

Railway links to Estonia were constructed around the same time. One branch linked the capital with the port of Baltisk. Its construction served first and foremost the strategic demands of the Imperial fleet, but also served the economic interests of the Baltic German landholders and grain traders. Passenger services to the few existing Estonian seaside resorts were clearly of minor importance. Between 1876 and 1905, the year the railroad reached Haapsalu on the Western coast, guests had to take a diligence linking the *kurort* with the capital. Haapsalu's southern rival Pärnu, located further south on the coast, could be reached more easily starting in 1896, when the Mõisakalu station was opened on the Petersburg – Pskov – Riga line.

Against this backdrop guests from Petersburg or other Russian cities remained a minority among the vacationers in the Baltic resorts. Expanding facilities served tourists from the Baltic region itself, particularly from the region's largest city, Riga. Between the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup>, Riga changed from a medieval port into one of the most vibrant industrial hubs of the Empire. None of Russia's ports matched Riga's exports, and its population grew almost tenfold from some 57 000 in 1857 to 480 000 in 1913. Although other cities in the Baltic region like Revel or Vilno experienced significant growth, too, none compared to Riga.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, recreational facilities within easy reach of Riga's growing urban population expanded particularly dynamically around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The majority of emerging seaside resorts in today's Latvia and Estonia, including Kuresaare on the island of Saaremaa, were served regularly by boats from Riga from the 1840s on. This was also true for abovementioned Pärnu, which quickly overtook the older neighbour of Haapsalu. Still closer to Riga, a string of resorts developed along the coast which became known as "Jurmala" in Latvian or "Rizhskoe vzmor'e" in Russian, with both terms translating as "Beach". Again, development was furthered by regular boats to Riga from the 1840s.<sup>12</sup>

9 Louise McReynolds: *Russia at Play. Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era*, Ithaca 2003, pp. 177-182; Kurorty (see note 2), p. 250.

10 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), p. 213.

11 Michael F. Hamm: *Riga's 1913 City Election: A Study in Baltic Urban Politics*, in: *Russian Review* 39 (1980), no. 4, pp. 442-461, here pp. 442 f.

12 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), p. 180, pp. 213 f.

In Pärnu, a destination with modest bathing tourism since the 1840s, accelerated development started a few years before the railway reached the town. With the municipal takeover of the recreational facilities in 1889, the baths were rebuilt and extended, the letting of private rooms organised. Regular advertising in Russia began after the opening of the railway line. The number of long time sojourners remained fairly small before the revolution, reaching some 3 000 in 1910.<sup>13</sup>

Jurmala came into being as a municipality only in 1920, when the twelve formerly independent communities on a stretch of land between the river Lielupe and the Baltic Sea were administratively united and became a suburb of Riga.<sup>14</sup> By that time some of the former villages could already look back on almost a century of tourism history. The sandy beaches had become a popular destination for Riga's inhabitants with the opening of regular steamboat traffic in the 1840s, and public baths opened shortly afterwards. Initially, vacationers rented rooms from the local population, but soon they started to build their own summerhouses along the littoral. In contrast to the neighbouring villages, Dubulti won some recognition as a destination in Moscow and St Petersburg. The first sanatoria, "Marienbad" [sic] was opened in Majori in 1870.

The railway link of 1877 shortened travel times from Riga to one hour, about a third of what the boat trip had taken. Other sanatoria were opened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Bulduri and Majori. Whereas in 1873 about 18 000 guests had been counted in the Jurmala area, the numbers rose to 30 000 in 1880, and may have doubled again before the outbreak of the First World War. Still the area retained the character of a loose agglomeration of historical fishing villages and scattered villas among them.<sup>15</sup>

A few kilometres further down, Kemeris's transformation into a resort dates back to the 1840s as well. Again, the 1877 railway connection triggered a dynamic development. Day and weekend trips from Riga became popular as well-to-do urbanites purchased summerhouses in Kemeris, too. Like in Pärnu, the number of people frequenting the health resort remained fairly small, however, reaching about 3 000 annually in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Direct railway links to Moscow and Petersburg brought this figure up to over 8 000 on the eve of the First World War.<sup>16</sup>

Further down the coast, in contemporary Lithuania, seaside vacations were offered in Palanga and on the Courian Spit. Historically dominated by Polish rather than Baltic German nobility, the seaside resort of Palanga owed much to the activities of local magnates. The Tyszkiewicz family had acquired the village in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building of a pier by Józef Tyszkiewicz in the early 1890s allowed boats to land. The pier quickly silted up, yet this had the expedient side effect of broadening the beach. The Tyszkiewicz built a substantial park around their mansion in Palanga at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and about the same time the number of vacationers began to increase. As a spa, Palanga attracted fewer visitors than Pärnu or Jurmala, and many of them were foreigners. Due to the proximity

13 Ibidem, p. 216.

14 50 let tomu nazad SSSR sozdal gorod Jurmalu [Fifty Years ago the USSR Created the Town of Jūrmala], in: *Gazeta* 2.0 at <http://www.gazeta.lv/story/10776.html> [accessed 18 June, 2011].

15 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), pp. 178-184.

16 Ibidem, pp. 174 f.

of the border and the advanced development of tourism in Germany, the Lithuanian resorts saw a substantial influx of foreign tourists.<sup>17</sup>

The First World War brought tourism to a standstill, and much of the interwar development was characterised by the negative impact of the war and its political consequences. On the one hand, during the First World War and the ensuing Civil War, the majority of the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian seaside resorts were severely damaged. On the other, the political sovereignty of the Baltic States and the drawing of boundaries cut some resorts off from either their international public, like in the case of the Lithuanian coastal resorts, or it deprived others, mainly in Estonia, of visitors that would have come from Riga before the war. Fortunately, the closing of borders between the republics was only temporary, and inter-Baltic tourism resumed after some normalisation. Nonetheless, tourism and travel within the borders of the newly independent countries became more important, as the governments of the Baltic States regarded this as a means of nation and identity building. This is particularly true for Latvia, whose capital Riga, with its imperial heritage, still featured a comparatively cosmopolitan population. Latvian interwar tourism was coordinated by a state run tourism office which was effectively a branch of the ministry of the interior. Recreational holidays were of lesser interest to this institution, and vacationers were exhorted to travel actively and to acquaint themselves with the natural sights and the cultural heritage of their own countries.<sup>18</sup>

Due to destruction and political change, the number of vacationers in the selected seaside spas attained pre-revolutionary levels only in the mid-1920s. At the same time, data available for interwar Estonia as a whole suggests that the establishment of state borders did not necessarily mean the end of Russian travel to the country. The figure of 2 000 Russian visitors for 1926, for example, is not too impressive, yet it made the Russians the fourth largest foreign contingent to visit Estonia after Latvians, Finns and Germans. Numbers decreased during the 1930s, when in total more Swedes than Russians visited Estonia. The significant prevalence of travellers with Latvian passports, who stably represented about three quarters of the visitors to Estonia amply illustrates that Riga did not lose its role as the main urban centre in the region.<sup>19</sup> Of these travellers, however, only a minority were vacationers visiting the seaside resort. Statistics for Pärnu reflect a rise from modest 2 500 in 1927 to 6 600 in 1938, of which no fewer than 3 700 were foreigners, certainly in their majority holders of Latvian passports.<sup>20</sup>

Independent Latvia strove to further the development of domestic tourism, particularly in the proximity of Riga. As mentioned earlier, the string of small villages along the Riga Bay, except the health resort of Kemerī and the neighbouring industrial town of Sloka, were administratively united under the name of Jurmala in 1920 to facilitate a coordinated development. Due to economic problems, the development lost momentum in the course of

17 Ibidem, p. 120.

18 Aldis Purs: One Breath for Every Two Strides, in: Gorsuch, Koenker, *Turizm* (see note 4), pp. 97-115, here pp. 103-112.

19 The absolute number of Latvian visitors to Estonia ranged between 50 000 in 1926 and 127 000 a decade later. See Jeff Jarvis a. Piret Kallas: Estonia – Switching Unions: Impacts of EU Membership on Tourism Development, in: Derek R. Hall (ed.): *Tourism in the New Europe: The Challenges and Opportunities of EU Enlargement*, Wallingford 2006, data p. 154.

20 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), p. 216.

1920. It was not before 1929 that the health resort of Kemeris was reopened, and in Jurmala the number of vacationers dropped somewhat in comparison to the years preceding the First World War.<sup>21</sup>

Overall the extension of tourist infrastructure within the three republics remained modest. In places like Pärnu private hotels, guest houses and cafés catered to the summer visitors. The municipality provided for entertainment like concerts or movie screenings, using money raised through a visitors' tax. On the eve of the Second World War, two larger and quite luxurious hotels, obviously built for Scandinavian and Finnish tourists in the first place, opened for business.

In Lithuania the situation was complicated by the fact that the new core area of the state disposed over no railway links to the coast; they had to be constructed. Palanga was never reached, though, and the closest railway station was 13 km further inland. Still, the Lithuanian littoral continued to cater to Germans coming either from the towns of Memel and Königsberg, or from the nearby German spas on the Courian Spit, particularly after a specific visa regime had been agreed between Germany and Lithuania. Yet the total number of vacationers does not seem to have exceeded 15 000.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. From Sovietisation to Mass Tourism

The Sovietisation of holiday resorts on the Baltic Sea coast actually happened twice, in 1940 and in 1945. Very little is known about the short period of Soviet administrations between June 1940 and June 1941. The existing tourist organisations were dissolved, and typically Soviet institutions like pioneer camps introduced. Those in Palanga became notorious later for their forced dissolution by Lithuanian militias and German troops, as echoed in the life stories of Holocaust survivors.<sup>23</sup> In Jurmala, the recently completed villa of entrepreneur Emilia Benjamin in Majori was sequestered to accommodate the regional commander of the Red Army, General Loktionov, in 1940. After German occupation in 1941, it was turned into the residency of the German *Gauleiter*, Hinrich Lohse.<sup>24</sup>

After the Red Army had reconquered the Baltics in 1944–45, tourism was certainly not among the priorities in the course of the second Sovietisation. That said, the fairly developed tourist infrastructure had suffered less destruction during the Second World War than it had during the first. This was a stark contrast to the Black Sea coast, where Soviet facilities had suffered extensive destructions. Still, the Baltic littoral, some 5 000 km of coastline if the Estonian islands are counted in, was a border zone: Across the sea, Finland and Sweden constituted neutral, but nevertheless capitalist countries. This was a factor that would hamper future developments under Soviet auspices.

21 Ibidem, p. 175.

22 Ibidem, p. 121. See also her discussion of accuracy of Soviet data in note 3.

23 See the memories of Naum Ryklansky at [http://leoryk.fatcow.com/Facts\\_Opinions\\_files/ForStory\\_B\\_1\\_eng.html](http://leoryk.fatcow.com/Facts_Opinions_files/ForStory_B_1_eng.html) [accessed 13 June, 2011] and the list of killing sites at [http://www.lithuanianjews.org.il/HTMLs/article\\_list4.aspx?C2014=14378&BSP=14330&BSS6=13971](http://www.lithuanianjews.org.il/HTMLs/article_list4.aspx?C2014=14378&BSP=14330&BSS6=13971) [accessed 13 June, 2011].

24 See the historical sketch by the current owner, available at <http://www.theemilijabenjaminhouse.com/en/history/> [accessed 13 June, 2011].

Across the Baltic States, vacation facilities had been run either privately or as municipal establishments. The Soviets basically re-executed nationalisation like it had first been exercised some 25 years earlier on the Crimea during the Civil War.<sup>25</sup> The formerly private enterprises were distributed among Soviet organs and enterprises and turned into sanatoria or guest houses, i.e. health resorts either with or without medical departments. Others were declared “recreational homes” [*dom otdykha*], the latter were designed to allow toilers to recover from exhaustion and to restore their ability to work. Larger facilities like the surviving baths or hotels were taken over by the Soviet trade unions. Indeed, the organisation of vacationing and tourism had become one of the most visible fields of activity of the Soviet trade unions after they had been stripped of their traditional role in the early 1920s. As of the 1940s, however, they had not yet achieved the monopoly position in the realm of vacationing they would acquire in the early 1960s. Republican ministries of public health, for example, were also running sanatoria and clinics in the health resorts, as did Soviet organisations and important enterprises. Finally, the municipalities retained a say as they were responsible for all kinds of public services in the resorts, including supplies and policing. The communes’ most important lever was the management of land plots, which they could make available to trade unions, ministries or branches of industry for the construction of new holiday facilities, in return for the latter’s participation in the building and maintenance of communal infrastructure.<sup>26</sup>

It also deserves mentioning that the Soviet trade unions distinguished between two forms of vacationing, “tourism” and “recreation”. The former notion stood for all forms of travel that implied a regular movement of vacationers from one place to another, be it by their own activity (hiking, biking, canoeing) or by means of public (and later also private) transport. All kinds of stationary vacations, including the summer holidays on the beach, were termed “recreation” [*otdykh*]. In the case of the seaside resorts this would possibly imply the existence of facilities run by Health Resort Councils [*kurortnye sovety*] and others under the auspices of Council for Tourism [*sovety po turizmu*]. Finally, with the Communist Party’s youth organisation Komsomol another player entered the scene: the Komsomol ran a substantial number of pioneer camps, usually in collaboration with Soviet schools or enterprises. Thus parallel administrations for tourism and for the resorts were set up on the republican level, and later also on the level of the larger resorts, including Jurmala, Pärnu and Palanga. As a rule, however, tourist infrastructure was scarce on the littoral; *turizm* was more developed in the hinterland where so called “local” and “republican” tourist routes [*turistskie marshruty*] criss-crossed the forests hill and lake lands. Given the unclear competences on the spot, the trade unions tried to establish their Councils for the Health Resorts [*kurortnye sovety*] as co-ordinating bodies. This strategy gained plausibility when in the early 1960s a number of state run vacation facilities were handed over to the trade unions.<sup>27</sup>

25 I.I. Kozlov: V.I. Lenin i razvitie sanatorno-kurortnogo dela v SSSR [Lenin and the Development of Health Resorts in the USSR], Moskva 1982, pp. 15-25, 27-30, 33-37.

26 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation, GARF], f. R 9520 (Tsentral’nyi sovet po turizmu [Central Council for Tourism]) op. 1, d. 751, l. 20.

27 GARF, f. R 9493 (Tsentral’nyj sovet po upravleniju kurortami professional’nykh sojuzov [Central Council for the Administration of the Trade Unions’ Health Resorts]), op. 8, d. 1, ll. 1-14.



How did resorts develop then, in the post war period until around 1960? In Jurmala, many private villas and summerhouses were nationalised and turned into “recreation homes” and later eventually enlarged and transformed into sanatoria. Besides Latvian organisations, institutions from the Soviet capital, like the famous Moscow Art Theatre or the Academy of Sciences were among the recipients. Due to the lack of financial resources, larger investments in new buildings were avoided, and for the time being Jurmala preserved much of its pre-war look.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of Pärnu, the unions transformed the former hotels “Vaza” and “Ranna” into sanatoria. As in many other resorts across the Soviet Union, enterprises, branches of state administration and party acquired ground and built holiday facilities as well, including pioneer camps run. Compared with other seaside resorts in the Soviet Union, the number of vacationers remained modest.<sup>29</sup>

In Palanga, the nationalised villas or dachas were basically turned into recreational homes [*dom otdykha*] which required much less investment than sanatoria as there was no need for medical equipment and medical personnel. A few of the recreational homes were later upgraded to sanatoria, for example “Jurite”, which was run by the Central Trade Unions (VTsSPS). The majority of Palanga’s recreational facilities opened during the summer season only, some ten per cent of the beds were available all-year. Whereas Palanga received some development, the Soviets were more reluctant to develop tourism on a larger scale on the Courian spit due to its proximity to the territory of the Kaliningrad oblast’; the former Eastern Prussia was off limits for rank and file travellers.

It was only around 1960 that Soviet central planners began to devote more attention to tourism and recreation. With Khrushchev’s attempts to build political loyalty on incentives rather than on coercion, both were increasingly seen as substantial elements of Soviet welfare and consumption policies. Some odd manipulation of statistics allowed “proving” that proportionally more workers enjoyed “organised” tourism or recreation before the Second World War, as compared to the 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

Against this backdrop an ambitious programme for the extension of existing facilities was announced in 1963/64, with a strong emphasis on local recreation facilities within a radius of 100 km around the major cities of Moscow, St Petersburg and Kiev with at least 50 000 new beds until 1970. A twofold strategy was at least partially realised during the eighth and ninth Five Year Plan periods (1966–1975): While new destinations were to be opened up particularly in the Asian parts of the country, administrative reforms and a concentration of larger facilities in existing resorts in the Black Sea and Caucasian regions, as well as in the Baltic republics was thought to permit a relatively cheap extension of capacities. Initially, at least 78 000 additional beds should have been made available between 1963 and 1970. According to the trade unions, this would have made it possible to offer organised vacations to 4.5 million citizens annually, as opposed to 735 000 at the time of decision taking.<sup>31</sup>

28 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), pp. 184 f.

29 Ibidem, pp. 217 f.

30 GARF, f. R 9493, op. 8, d. 699, ll. 25 f.; GARF, f. R 9520, op. 1, d. 751, l. 12. See also Igor Orlov a. Elena Iurchikova: *Massovyi turizm v stalinskoi povsedennosti* [Mass Tourism and Everyday Life in the Stalin Period], Moscow 2010, pp. 152-159.

31 GARF, f. 5451 [VTsSPS Prezidium i Sekretariat [All-Union Central Council of the Trade Unions, Executive Committee and Secretariat]], op. 68, ll. 100 f.

Only two years later, the head of the trade unions reported numbers for the development in the Baltic republics to the Central Committee of the CPSU. According to this report, the number of beds in recreational facilities there increased by 5 000 between 1960 and 1965. Expansion plans for 1970 were adjusted to some 10 000 additional beds, 5 200 in Latvia, 3 200 in Lithuania and only 1 400 in Estonia.<sup>32</sup>

Among the resorts singled out for accelerated extension were the three Baltic spas of Palanga, Jurmala and Pärnu. The three of them were recognised as resorts of union-wide significance [*Kurort vsesoiuznogo znacheniiia*] in 1971. This meant that the local Health Resort Councils were directly subordinated to Moscow.<sup>33</sup> In general, however, the amount and character of investment in the cases of Jurmala and even more so of Pärnu and Palanga, continued to reflect the demands as calculated by the republican trade union councils. More importantly, the pace of development in each case displayed an increasing disproportion between the planning euphoria harboured in Moscow's central administrations and the de-facto implementation of these plans on the spot.

Jurmala, to begin with, had seen another administrative re-organisation in 1959 which made it include the formally unaffiliated resort of Kemeru with its coastal satellite of Jaunkemeru.<sup>34</sup> This boosted Jurmala's rank among the Soviet resorts, as the incorporation of Kemeru increased its capacity by 30 per cent in one stroke. In the 1980s Kemeru counted at least seven sanatoria run by the trade unions. Among them was the giant "Latvia" with a capacity of 1 200. Beyond that, the administrative reforms facilitated the further development of vacation homes on the eastern and western peripheries of Jurmala. In actual fact development of existing sanatoria, *pensionates* [guest houses] or recreation homes in Jurmala after the Second World War had basically meant their extension over more and more of the traditional wooden dwellings, to the point where some guest houses like "Draudziba" in Majori spread over no less than 22 buildings. Many of these outbuildings had been used as tenements for the local population. Therefore some resettlement of the local population was required, too. As a rule, locals were offered new apartments on Jurmala's landside, behind the railway line. Beginning with the 1960s, large contemporary facilities were built on the eastern and western fringes of the resort. Such facilities resembled those of other resorts across the Union as they were constructed according to Soviet standards rather than to local traditions. Lielupe, Jurmala's new suburb across the river, incorporated in 1949, and Jaunkemeru saw particularly active Soviet construction.<sup>35</sup>

Jurmala was probably the only Baltic resort growing more or less according to the pace envisioned by the planners. Its capacity in the 1980s clearly exceeded that of any other Baltic resort. During the summer months, Jurmala offered about 95 000 beds in recreational facilities, i.e. in 17 sanatoria for adults and 8 for children, 18 guest houses, 4 camping sites, 3 tourist bases and some 50 recreational homes and so-called dachas owned by the municipality and rented out as recreational homes to Soviet organisations and enterprises. Places were also available in nine seasonal "Tent-towns" [*palatochnye gorodki*]. Apart from the aforementioned giant "Latvia", sanatoria and guest houses accommodated between 500

32 GARF, f. 5451, op. 68, d. 392, ll. 125 f.

33 GARF, f. 5451, op. 68, d. 454, l. 14.

34 50 let nazad SSSR sozdal gorod Jurmalu (see note 14).

35 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), pp. 175 f., 185-196.

and 700 guests at the time, which was not exceedingly large by Soviet standards. Most of the guest houses and recreational homes opened only during the summer months, and there were just 20 000 beds that were available year round. During the season, 60 cafes, 25 canteens and 14 restaurants opened their doors for vacationers. Facilities for tourism in the narrower sense of the term, by contrast, were almost absent. Out of the two tourist bases with 500 places each, one was off limits as it was run by the Baltic fleet for armed forces personnel only. Motorised tourists could make use of a large camping site in Pumpuri which offered a capacity of 800 places in summer. Compared to the overall capacity, the 24 pioneer camps played a minor role in Jurmala. Towards the end of the 1980s, they offered some five to seven hundred places for children.<sup>36</sup>

Taking seasonality into account, this meant that Jurmala accommodated around 130 000 “organised” visitors in recreational facilities, and perhaps some 50 000 in those of the tourist administration. During high season, the number of long term vacationers staying in Jurmala simultaneously has been estimated at 90 000. In the worst case, some 150 000 to 200 000 weekend visitors from Riga added to that number and put considerable strain on the infrastructure of a town with some 60 000 permanent inhabitants.<sup>37</sup>

The situation in Pärnu differed starkly. Due to its remoteness, Pärnu received the least attention of the three aforementioned resorts from Soviet planners. By the 1980s, there were just four sanatoria. Three of them were owned by the trade unions and accommodated between 350 and 725 vacationers, and one was run by a cooperative of collective farms. Vouchers were offered also to councils in other republics, sometimes on the basis of exchange, as it happened with the Voronezh council, for example.<sup>38</sup> Beyond this, Pärnu operated a number of recreational homes, many of them owned by enterprises from other parts of Estonia, and a tourist base. The number of organised tourists reached about 25 000–30 000 in the 1980s. Obviously, the comparatively remote geographical situation halfway between Tallinn and Riga was impeding more dynamic development.<sup>39</sup>

Palanga displayed the most blatant difference between planning and reality during the Brezhnev period. Five new recreational agglomerations for between eight and fifteen thousand vacationers each were planned here, stretching over some 25 kilometres along the coast. Indeed, the territory under communal administration was enlarged accordingly and a municipality called “Great Palanga” was created. Until the end of the Soviet period, however, the creation of the envisioned 45 000 new beds never fully materialised. Only one of the planned agglomerations, Vanagupe, saw the emergence of some new recreational homes, but their capacities were far smaller than the planned 15 000 beds for this part of “Great Palanga” alone. Palanga offered treatment in some fairly big sanatoria though: “Gintaras” and “Neringa”, both run by the trade unions, accommodated 830 and 930 vacationers at a time. Besides those large facilities, a number of guest houses and recreational homes were

36 See the very detailed list in Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), p. 196 and compare the slightly differing data in *Kurorty* (see note 2), p. 397.

37 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), pp. 197 f., 203.

38 Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voronezhskoi oblasti [State Archive of the Voronezh District, GAVO], f. R 2329 (Voronezhskii territorial'nyi Sovet po upravleniiu kurortami Tsentral'nogo Soveta prof-sojuzov [Voronezh Territorial Council for the Administration of the Health Resorts Run by the Central Council of Trade Unions]), d. 1029, ll. 168 f.

39 Henningsen, *Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr* (see note 1), p. 218; *Kurorty* (see note 2), pp. 280 f.

available. About half of the recreational homes were run by the central trade unions, the other half by the enterprises to which they were attached. Tourists in the narrow sense of the term could avail themselves of a tourist base opened in 1964 and a camping facility for car owners. In total, the capacities of the resort rose to 19 000 beds in 1987, some 5 000 more than in the 1960s. By the 1980s a total of some 70 000 “organised” vacationers seem to have frequented Palanga every year. There is very little published information about the number and size of other facilities like pioneer camps which were concentrated in the village of Monciškės.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Palanga, possibly more than the other resorts discussed here, changed its look, featuring more and bigger signs of Soviet modernism.

To what extent, then, did Soviet policies, particularly those pursued after the 1960s, alter the established preponderance of regional visitors and tip the balance in favour of vacationers from other parts of the Soviet Union? In order to provide a balanced picture it is necessary to include a discussion of non-organised travellers, the category of vacationers that grew most dynamically in the last decades of the Soviet Union.

### 3. Against All Odds: Independent Tourism

Creating mass tourism and a “tourist industry” was the declared will of Soviet planners in the 1960s.<sup>41</sup> In the course of the following two decades mass tourism did indeed emerge, yet ironically it emerged largely *outside* the structures of state planned Soviet social tourism. During the 1960s and 1970s the number of “wild tourists” travelling outside the state sponsored structures of tourism and recreation across the Soviet Union grew faster than the number of organised vacationers. Among the obvious reasons were “negative” factors like the insufficient capacity of state sponsored vacation facilities or the inflexibility in planned tourism ignoring the quest for individualisation and family holidays. Among “positive” factors one could mention the increase in leisure time and income, or the slow but steady proliferation of automobiles. In the USSR, private cars were primarily used for leisure trips.<sup>42</sup>

Jurmala and Palanga, less so Pärnu, provide ample opportunity to study the dynamics of unplanned, individual tourism in the late Soviet period in its two main forms, weekend getaways and tourists who travelled individually during their annual holidays. The label “wild tourists” was commonly attached to the latter group which frequented the most popular Soviet destinations during the peak seasons without any vouchers entitling them to accommodation or the provision of food.

40 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), pp. 121 f.; Kurorty (see note 2), pp. 266 f.

41 Cf. the retrospective editorial in: *Turist* 6 (1979), pp. 2 f.

42 For “wild tourism” see Christian Noack: Coping with the Tourist. Planned and “Wild” Mass Tourism on the Soviet Black Sea Coast, in: Gorsuch, Koenker, *Turizm* (see note 4), pp. 281-304. For family holidays Christian Noack: “Entbehrt jeder Grundlage”. Theorie und Praxis des spät-sowjetischen Familienurlaubs, in: Wiebke Kolbe, Christian Noack, Hasso Spode (eds.): *Tourismusgeschichte(n): Voyage – Jahrbuch für Reise und Tourismusforschung* 8 (2009), pp. 57-70; *Automobiles*: Lewis Siegelbaum: *Cars for Comrades. The Life of the Soviet Automobile*, Ithaca 2008, pp. 235-251.

In Jurmala, weekend visitors from nearby Riga had been a customary phenomenon since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, excellent links by boat, bus and train attracted not only ever increasing numbers of weekenders, but also long “wild tourists” from further away. As a matter of fact, the suburban rail link between Riga and Jurmala accounted for no less the 60 per cent of the total passenger traffic on Latvian railroads during the summer months. Many individual travellers came in the expectation of renting rooms from local residents. Others simply put up tents somewhere in the forests, or slept in the great outdoors. These “wild tourists” were a concern to the municipal authorities as they dodged attempts to extract a visitor’s levy, raised in Jurmala since the interwar years and which was an important contribution to the municipal administration’s budget.

By the 1960s, the municipality had set up an accommodation office which registered available rooms with the local population and organised their letting to unorganised tourists at a fixed rate of one rouble per person per night. Incidentally, the local councils for tourism or recreation had also rented rooms through the municipal office and offered them to “organised” travellers who had received vouchers for outpatient treatment in sanatoria and clinics.<sup>43</sup>

The disproportionate growth of unorganised tourism and the strains it exerted on the inflexible Soviet system of distribution raised concerns at the highest level; even the USSR’s Council of Ministers debated the issue. As a matter of fact, the responsible administrations had to acknowledge that shortages and congestion in the resorts, exacerbated by the uncontrolled influx of “wild tourists”, affected organised and unorganised tourists alike. To take the example of food supplies, many “wild tourists” frequented restaurants, cafes and canteens, as their accommodations seldom provided them with facilities to prepare food themselves. And, probably more noticeable, both groups competed for space on the same overcrowded beaches.

A 1973 report for Council of Ministers of the USSR singled out Jurmala to illustrate the dimensions of the problem. According to this report, Jurmala, a town with some 54 000 permanent residents, would annually accommodate 265 000 organised visitors in health resorts or recreational homes (the report did not specify the number of children in some 53 sanatoria or holiday camps). During the summer months, some additional 100 000 vacationers would come from nearby Riga. 60 000 of them were accommodated in dachas, i.e. facilities temporarily rented by their Soviet employers, while 40 000 would rent rooms from local residents. The number of summer guests “from other republics” was estimated to add up to 50 000–60 000, of which 10 000 came with private cars. Only a quarter or a third of the unorganised visitors availed themselves of services from the communal accommodation office, a majority renting directly from locals. Allegedly they were offered unsuitable rooms at much higher prices than those officially permitted.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore a directive by the Central Council for Health Resorts in Moscow, issued on 30 October 1974, instructed subordinated councils in the Union republics and the districts of the RSFSR to create self-financing [*khozraschetnye*] organisations in the most popular summer destinations on the Black and Baltic Seas. These organisations were instructed

43 GARF, f. R 5451, op. 68, d. 499, ll. 74 f., 86.

44 GARF, f. R 5451, op. 68, d. 499, ll. 85 f. For railway data see Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), pp. 202 f.

to take over some of the tasks formerly fulfilled by the municipal offices, like the accommodation and boarding of 'tourists without vouchers' or the managing of communal resources, e.g. beaches. Beyond that, these new organisations were entrusted with the provision of other services that would provide for the "rational recreation" of unorganised vacationers. Remarkably, Moscow reminded those locally responsible that "Soviet citizens who could not use a voucher also have full rights to healthy vacations, vacations which restore their capacity for productive work. And they are *the majority*, as you know, and it is the basic mission of the state and the trade unions to provide them with good quality recreation."<sup>45</sup>

Even if they were quite unhappy to witness the emergence of rental markets, Soviet authorities had already depended for a long time on the exploration of private accommodation for both organised and unorganised vacationers. Indeed, Soviet law forbade "income from non-productive work", and the work of the communal accommodation office had been organised in a legal twilight zone. Basically, it had been based on a compromise which allowed the local population a tax free additional income of up to 300 roubles annually.<sup>46</sup>

In all Baltic seaside resorts discussed here such self-financing "associations" [*kurortnye ob"edineniia*] or "departments" [*otdelenie*] were set up in 1975. Where possible, they took over staff and equipment from their municipal predecessors.<sup>47</sup> In the first five years of their existence these organisations proved that the basic idea was viable: By providing direct services to those tourists who would otherwise have "escaped" official tutelage, the *kurort* associations earned enough money to finance themselves and to gradually expand their services. The accommodation office remained the core business and the most profitable activity. In order to subvert unofficial letting and to offer their assistance more efficiently, in Jurmala the staff was located at the points of arrival, usually the railway stations, and in the major districts of the resort. On the beaches, the associations took over the letting of sunbeds, deckchairs, parasols or boats.<sup>48</sup>

Another field of activity was the accommodation of motor tourists, an area where the tourist councils had failed to perform convincingly. Fitting out a campsite was comparatively cheap, and although the income from the temporary lettings of emplacements was low, such investments could potentially produce a return after some five years. The main obstacle for the provision of car parks had been allotment practices by the local councils who were looking for more "prestigious" customers in the expectation of returns in the form of contributions to maintenance of communal services. As a result, in 1973, in the most

45 GARF, f. R 9393, op. 8, d. 1981, l. 69.

46 1 600 out of some 2 000 locals had indeed declared taxable incomes of over 300 roubles. GARF, f. R 5451, op. 68, d. 499, l. 86.

47 On resistance by the municipalities see V.F. Bogatykh: *Organizatsiia i obsluzhivaniia otdykhaiushchikh bez putevok* [Organisation and Accommodation of Vacationers without Vouchers], in *Voprosy neorganizatsionnogo otdykha. Tezisy k pervoi mezhkurortnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii g. Anapa, 1981 g.* [Problems of Non-Organised Recreation: Theses for the First Scientific and Practical Conference of Health Resorts] Anapa: 1981, pp. 18-24, here p. 20.

48 P.K. Kukel': *O rabote otдела po obsluzhivaniiu otdykhaiushchikh bez putevok latviiskogo respublikanskogo Soveta po upravleniiu kurortami profsojuzov* [On Activities by the Department for the Accommodation of Vacationers without Vouchers at the Latvian Republican Council for the Administration of Trade Unions' Health Resorts], in: *Voprosy neorganizatsionnogo otdykha* (see note 47), pp. 59-61.

attractive Soviet destinations, Lithuania, Latvia and the Crimea, there seem to have been no more than a total of seven camping sites or tourist bases for motorists, accommodating 1 220 people at a time. Besides that, hardly any of the resorts maintained even simple guarded parking facilities, a sheer necessity under Soviet conditions. Indeed, most of the resorts simply banned individual traffic from those quarters in which recreational facilities were located. The exponential growth of motor tourism rendered investments in camping facilities more than necessary, but the new structures were also slow to react. In the fifth year of its existence, Jurmala's "Department for Tourists without Vouchers" offered guarded parking spaces only in Kemeris, and was planning to open another parking in Priedajne, closer to Riga.<sup>49</sup>

If the planners had expected a significantly better coordination and higher efficiency by the new structures, the results were not breathtaking. In the case of Jurmala, the number of beds contracted with the local population was raised to 10 000 annually. This, however, was still a drop in the ocean when compared with rapidly growing demand.<sup>50</sup>

A similar, if somewhat less drastic picture emerges for the Lithuanian spa of Palanga. Here the influx of weekenders was significantly lower than in Jurmala. The next larger city was Klaipėda, which was comparatively small if rapidly growing. Other large cities like Vilnius were beyond the 100 km radius which, according to a survey conducted in the 1980s, a majority of Lithuanians considered acceptable for weekend trips. In fact, many Lithuanians responded that they preferred to travel to the beaches during their main summer holidays, thus adding to the number of organised travellers who frequented the seaside for longer periods of time.<sup>51</sup>

Already prior to the takeover by the Council for the Health Resort, Palanga's accommodation bureau seems to have worked reasonably well. Compared to the size of the town, contracts with 1 800 inhabitants over a non-specified number of beds in 1973 means a quite impressive quota, and the number of tax evaders seems to have been much lower than in Jurmala. By the end of the 1970s, private accommodation accounted for no fewer than 20 000-25 000 beds in Palanga, and the number of unorganised tourists was estimated to be in the region of 130 000 annually.<sup>52</sup>

If this was an impressive success, it could not help but turn the spiral and attract even more vacationers to the seaside. On some summer weekends, the congestion in Palanga and on its beaches was considerable. The seasonal influx of tourist created long queues in front of restaurants and canteens, i.e. structures which were much more difficult to substitute by the new organisations for "tourists without vouchers". According to an official source, vacationers had to wait between 90 and 120 minutes before they were served in 1973.<sup>53</sup>

49 GARF, f. R 5451, op. 68, d. 499, l. 76.

50 Kukel', O rabote (see note 48), p. 60; Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), p. 197, lists 8 000 places administered by the accommodation office and a further 30 000 rented directly by vacationers from locals.

51 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), p. 143.

52 Ibidem, p. 123.

53 GARF, f. R 5451, op. 68, d. 499, l. 87 f. At least by the mid 1960s, none of the Baltic resorts had its own retail organisation (kurorttorg). The latter were usually set up to guarantee a privileged supply. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Ekonomiki [Russian State Archive of Economy, RGAE], f. 465 [Ministerstvo torgovli SSSR], op. 1, d. 202, l. 59.

In the mid 1980s some 120 000 visitors were frequenting the beaches on peak days, to the point that access was actually restricted.<sup>54</sup>

In fact, the possible capping of numbers of unorganised travellers in the Soviet Union had been in discussion since the early 1970s. Yet it had never been enforced consistently, except in some cases, when for example cholera epidemics ravaged Crimea in 1970. In the light of the above quoted call for a basically balanced treatment of planned and unplanned tourism, this would all too obviously have been an unpopular measure in the first place, and one that was very difficult to enforce beyond that.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the remarkable dynamics of “unorganised” tourism challenged the Soviet planning system in many respects; and even though the authorities in Jurmala and Palanga showed a remarkable degree of flexibility in their efforts to cope with mass tourism in the last years of the Soviet Union, they fought an uphill battle.

Compared to both Jurmala and Palanga, the problem of unorganised tourism was insignificant in Pärnu. Due to its remoteness from bigger urban centres – both Tallinn and Riga were more than 100km away – the number of unorganised tourists and weekenders never exceeded that of organised tourists here, and taken together the quantity of visitors just equalled that of the some 50 000 permanent inhabitants.<sup>56</sup> Probably due to this reason, the performance of the local organisation for “tourists without vouchers” has left fewer traces in Soviet sources.

How far, then, did the extension of facilities and the dynamic development of “wild” or individual tourism change the geography of tourism in the sense of an opening up of the Baltic resorts to an all-Union rather than a regional Baltic clientele?

In the first place, the Soviet “tourist industry” obviously failed to realise its ambitious plans and therefore fewer additional capacities could be offered to vacationers from outside the Baltic region than planned. Still, because enterprises or administrations elsewhere owned holiday facilities, and because holiday vouchers [*putevki*] were distributed by the central bodies of the trade units, and finally because many republican or territorial councils bartered vouchers, a significant minority of organised vacationers came from other republics of the USSR. Unfortunately, comprehensive statistics beyond the fairly approximate estimates quoted above are not available.<sup>57</sup> Yet it emerges that the percentage of non-Baltic vacationers was considerably higher than Russian tourists during the Tsarist period or during the years of independence. Nonetheless, the majority of “organised” vacationers during the Soviet period continued to reside permanently in one of the three republics.

As to the places of origin of unorganised tourists from other parts of the USSR, we can only speculate that the increasing availability of free time, financial means and, decisively, individual transport, enabled an increasing number of urbanites, above all from the industrial centres, to undertake long distance journeys outside the Soviet system of social tourism. That said, the influx of “wild tourist” from other parts of the USSR hardly tipped the

54 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), p. 123.

55 GARF, f. R 9493, d. 1521, ll. 29 f. Cf. the interesting discussion on the Issyk-Kul region in Kyrgyz SSR which had been cordoned off for individual visitors in 1978, see *Turist* 2 (1979), p. 25.

56 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), p. 218.

57 Cf. Maija Rozite: *Tourism in Riga and the development of urban tourism* [Abstract of the authors PhD thesis] at <http://www.geo.ut.ee/nbc/paper/rozite.htm> [accessed 29 May 2011].



balance. In all likelihood tourists from outside the Baltic republics remained a minority on Baltic Sea shores, albeit a significant and perhaps growing one.

#### 4. Soviet Promotion of Baltic Sea Vacations

Against the backdrop of a chronic shortage of supply and consequently the lack of consumers' choice, advertisement of tourism and destinations made limited sense in the Soviet Union. Still there *was* advertisement for tourism in general, and for individual destinations in particular. It might have influenced the choice of independent travellers to a degree, even if we should realistically assume that word of mouth and accessibility were probably more important elements in decision making.

Nonetheless, a closer look at the media discourse may be rewarding for at least three reasons. Firstly, as we will see, in the case of territories like the Baltic republic, Soviet journalists could make use of different, sometimes conflicting sets of established clichés, or occasionally even go beyond them. For example, they could, for obvious reasons, stress the communalities between the region and the rest of the Soviet Union. This could be done by appealing to a common history, or emphasising the activities of one and the same Soviet institution, like the *turbaza* or the recreational home across the Union. At times, however, it was also safe to dwell on differences, be they linked to the natural environment, to the historical setting, to the remarkable economic performance of the Baltic republics or cultural peculiarities. Secondly, therefore, the distribution of information through official media was not necessarily free of contradictions even under the conditions of censorship. These contradictions created ambiguities beyond blatant propaganda. Finally, given the popularity of the Baltic republics as tourist destinations, it seems not uninteresting to examine whether or not the medial images of the Baltic republics and their holiday facilities related to the little we know about the actual preferences of Soviet tourists themselves.

There were various channels of advertisement, starting with the “packaging” of Baltic destinations in the context of tours transgressing the borders of the Baltic republics. This is particularly relevant for the sightseeing variants of travelling which was offered within the framework of Soviet tourism. In this respect, we can observe two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, tourist routes, particularly those linked to the active movement of tourists by foot, bike or boat, were more often than not confined within the borders of the individual republics, even if tourist sights of similar character were located close across the border in another neighbouring republic. Perhaps this can be explained by the administrative structure of Soviet tourism, which tended to replicate the political-administrative delineation of territories. One cannot help but see the continuity between interwar projects and their use of tourism as a tool to reinforce identity building, even if the explanatory subtext of Soviet tourism was less obviously national.<sup>58</sup> At the same time the fact that these

58 Henningsen, Freizeit- und Fremdenverkehr (see note 1), pp. 130, 133, 139-141, 154 f., 163 f., 222-228; Purs, One breath (see note 18); Anne. E. Gorsuch: All This Is Your World. Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad After Stalin, Oxford 2011, pp. 51 f. The illustrated journal *Turist* also featured maps corresponding to the administrative borders, cf. Latvia, in: *Turist* 9 (1968), pp. 18 f.; Litva, in: *Turist* 10 (1968), pp. 20 f.; Estoniia, in: *Turist* 11 (1968), pp. 22 f.

sightseeing tours more often than not bypassed coastal resorts, the administrative difference between “tourism” and “recreation” was reinforced in practice.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, the republican capitals of Riga, Vilnius or Tallinn were integrated into tour packages that comprised several Soviet republics, often including Leningrad and Moscow.<sup>60</sup> From the 1960s, such tours were frequently offered on board so-called tourist trains. Such train journeys were comparatively easy to organise, since trains provided both transport and accommodation and tourism councils did not have to bother about the maintenance of the rolling stock. Such tourist trains<sup>61</sup> pursued clearly educational, if not manifestly propagandistic aims. Tourism officials targeted either the population of the Asian parts of the Soviet Union or, in the case of the district council for tourism of the Krasnodar region collective, farmers or pupils. The purpose was twofold: first of all, the distribution of vouchers was meant (and understood) as a reward for good work and conformist behaviour.<sup>62</sup> Secondly, the inclusion of Moscow and capitals of comparatively highly developed union republics (besides Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius also Kiev and Minsk) were designed to impress citizens from the less developed social and geographical peripheries.<sup>63</sup> Sightseeing in those cities, with flying visits to their cultural institutions and technologically advanced factories, was meant to instil provincials, Siberians or Central Asians, with a desire to overcome a real or imagined backwardness.

Naturally, tourist routes for motor tourists differed, as they depended on infrastructure, like the (rare) filling stations, and the provision of accommodation on camping sites or specialised tourist bases. This certainly did not prevent the drivers from stopping anywhere *en route*, yet the generally high development level of the three Baltic republics seems to have attracted motor tourists in particular. Quite a number of automobile routes linked the republics, or included starting or finishing points in neighbouring Russian or Belorussian territories.<sup>64</sup>

Among the channels for the propaganda of tourism that Soviet media offered, films and television still await a thorough analysis. In the case of Tallinn, Anne Gorsuch has recently demonstrated how Estonia could be “portrayed in print and on movie screens as a space

59 Zhemaitia, in: *Turist* 9 (1983), pp. 26 f. mentions the beaches of Palanga in passing, paying more attention to the municipal park. Compare *Pesachnye berega Baltiki* [The Sandy Beaches of the Baltic Sea], in: *Turist* 6 (1979), p. 8.

60 12 dnei v Pribaltike [12 Days in the Baltics], in: *Turist* 1 (1968), p. 2.

61 Comparable tours were offered also by air travel from Central Asia or the Far East.

62 Dolzhenko, *Istoriia turizma* (see note 3), p. 132; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Krasnodarskogo kraia [State Archive of the Krasnodar Region, GAKK], f. R 1624, op. 1, d. 184, ll. 15; d. 186, l. 21. These tourist trains were still run during the 1970s, see GAKK, f. R 1624, op. 1, d. 549, ll. 84 f.; op. 2, d. 12, l. 2; *Puteshestviute na poezdakh* [Travel by Train], in: *Turist* 2 (1968), pp. 10-12; *V puti – romantik. Reportazh iz turistskogo poezda* [En Route – Romanticism], in: *Turist* 10 (1976), pp. 10 f.

63 *Po gorodam piati respublik* [Through the Towns of Five Republics], in: *Turist* 5 (1968), p. 15; *Turistskie marshruty* [Tourist Routes], Moscow 1970, pp. 9-12. For the 1982 list of package tours see *Kurorty* (see note 2), pp. 422 f. The majority included just the capital cities. Few tours like No. 156/158 included other sites than the capitals in two or more union republics.

64 *Routes 101-109*, see *Avtomobil'nye i motortsikletnye turistskie marshruty* [Tourist Routes for Cars and Motorcycles], Moscow 1990, pp. 17-72. Tellingly enough, a booklet with maps issued in 1968 begins with the description of the tour from Moscow to the Baltic republics. *Po piati respublikam na avtomobilie* [By Car Through Five Republics], Moscow 1971, no pagination.

of safely Sovietized Western difference". While travel and vacationing generally became a very popular backdrop for Soviet movies during the 1960s and 1970s, Baltic cityscapes like Tallinn's Old Town were celebrated in literature and films as sights of European urban cultural traditions on the one hand, and as a model for increasingly accepted socialist consumption on the other. Strolling through the narrow streets and gazing at bright shop windows, or enjoying coffee served by courteous waiters in one of the many cafés and restaurants, spiced Soviet tourist experience with a touch of Western flavour.<sup>65</sup>

Among printed media, guidebooks and illustrated journals were important means for the propaganda of tourism. Guidebooks, however, were quite rare, as they were expensive to produce if they were sufficiently well-illustrated. In fact, printed matter on tourism and travel was generally produced in low print-runs that never came close to satisfying demand. Compared to their Western counterparts (and pre-revolutionary editions), guide books were particularly less entertaining. Many simply listed meagre facts like the number of vacation facilities in a given place, its geographical setting, meteorological data and some historical accounts, usually limited to the Soviet period.

If some guidebooks stood out, it was usually due to the way they were illustrated. Such illustrations could be limited to some fairly recent memorials dedicated to different forms of Soviet heroism, or to standardised Soviet building like those of the local executive committees (municipalities), movie theatres and sanatoria. Occasionally they could be illustrated with less politically readable images of landscape, of tourists hiking or sunbathing on the beach. Or else they could display the availability of amenities like cafés and restaurants. More often than not this was the case with booklets produced for foreign tourists. Similar imagery trickled piecemeal into publications produced for domestic consumption as well.

As for printed periodicals, illustrated journals with broad circulation like *Ogonek* or *Rabotnitsa* occasionally presented tourist destinations in word and image. *Ogonek*, for example, featured a four page black-and-white photo spread on Jurmala in 1975 which evoked many of the attractive features of that resort. Jurmala's natural environment was represented by two pictures showing an almost empty beach and a bridleway through the pine forests. Tourist amenities, either icons of Soviet modernity like the "House of Writers" and the Hotel in Dubulti, were depicted, too, along with incarnations of Nordic simplicity, like wooden cabins, cafés or a barbecue area. Playing children and a funfair symbolised Jurmala's suitability for family vacation. A picture from a canoe manufacturer was the sole allusion to the sphere of production, and one closely linked to leisure for that matter. A snapshot of the Yacht club, on the contrary, was reminiscent of representations of the *kurort* as a venue of the well-dressed new Stalinist 'middle classes'. A statue of St. George, taken on Dubulti's station forecourt, was the only reference to local history and culture, and it was not very specific as such.<sup>66</sup>

65 Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World* (see note 58), pp. 55-68, quote p. 55. Compare drawings and text in *Rasskazy Rizhskikh ulits* [Stories Told by Riga's Streets], in: *Turist* 1 (1970), p. 14 f. On a tourist route to Tallinn and Tartu Tallin – 10 dnei [10 Days in Tallin], in: *Turist* 1 (1970), p. 11.

66 *Ogonek* 39 [2516] (27.9.1975), pp. 30-33. Compare the comparable representation of Palanga in S.N. Krivitskas: *Palanga, Vilnius 1970*. Only one picture on page 23, displaying an overcrowded beach stands out with its "non-socialist" realism.

The accompanying text provided a comparable collage of impressions and allusions, not without a hint of contemporary lifestyle advertisement:

“[...] after descending from a plane or arriving by rail at Riga’s main station, you can hardly imagine what ‘Riga beach’ is, unless you have been here before. *You have probably heard about it*, about the wonderful air, the pines, the broad beaches stretching for more than thirty kilometers; [a beach where] no sections are fenced off. Probably you have heard all this. But it is always better so see it with your own eyes. And therefore you should, whenever you are in Riga, take a trip to Jurmala, into the quarters of this Latvian spa town, to Maiori, Dzintari, Dubulti and others [...] The proximity of the Latvian capital, the ancient town of Riga, where in the evenings you can hear concerts of the best symphonic ensembles and choirs of our country in the Cathedral; all of this you will find enchanting, and you will be thankful to yourself that you have chosen Riga beach as a holiday destination.”<sup>67</sup>

Besides these widely read periodicals, a number of specialised journals existed. For the late Soviet period, the monthly illustrated *Turist* had almost a monopoly position. Due to the declared aims of Soviet tourism planners to channel streams of tourists to newly developed destinations, or to propagate tourism during low seasons, famous resorts like Jurmala received relatively little attention. Instead, sights or tours in the hinterland were promoted, sometimes including well known sights like the Trakaj castle in Lithuania (compared to *Notre Dame* and *Ostankino* in the article!). Suggestions for a tour through southern Lithuania or northern Latvia, for example, described the natural beauty and selected historical monuments, but were likewise all dotted with references to the odd Lenin memorial or sights of battles during the civil war, or partisan activities in World War II.<sup>68</sup> Others catered for canoeists and added technical explanations of obstacles to the description of nature and sights. The summary of a route through the north-eastern, industrialised part of Estonia, on the contrary, makes for dull reading.<sup>69</sup>

Other articles featured local history museums. Indeed, the promotion of indigenous folk culture was fully in line with the principle of “nationalist in form, socialist in content”, and heritage sights, folk costumes, music or dance were both advertised and a constituent part of the cultural programme offered to Soviet and international tourists.<sup>70</sup>

67 Ogonek 39 [2516] (27.9.1975), p. 32.

68 Trakai, in: *Turist* 8 (1968), p. 22 f.; Strelnieki, in: *Turist* 4 (1968), pp. 22 f.; Pribaltiiskie Karparty, in: *Turist* 10 (1968), p. 4; Peshkom po dzukii [The Dzukija (National Park) by Foot], *Turist* 3 (1976), p. 8; Po Vidzeme [Through Vidzeme], in: *Turist* 4 (1976), pp. 10 f.

69 Tri imenii reki [Three River Names], in: *Turist* 5 (1970), p. 4; Kubiia, in: *Turist* 3 (1978), pp. 28 f.; Slantsevyyi bassein [The Salaca River Basin], in: *Turist* 11 (1976), p. 8. Compare Ot Narva do Tallina [From Narva to Tallin], in: *Turist* 2 (1979), p. 9.

70 Gorsuch, All This Is Your World (see note 58), pp. 53 f.

## Conclusion

My necessarily perfunctory overview of some 150 years of tourism history in Baltic seaside resorts suggests that while Soviet planners harboured ambitious plans for their transformation into major Soviet style resorts, this transformation, fortuitously, did not fully materialise. Neither could 45 years of Soviet power significantly change established geographies of travel and tourism. On the contrary, available data suggests that only some of the historically developed conditions changed slowly over the *longue durée*. Not much different from what could be observed in Late Imperial Russia, the Baltic resorts continued to play an important, if secondary role in Soviet tourism. As during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, much of the development in Jurmala and, later, Palanga, or the lack thereof in Pärnu, depended on the dynamic urban development of Riga as the regional centre. The emergence of mass tourism reflected the means and needs of Riga's growing population in the first place.

Against this backdrop, the drawing of boundaries in the interwar period had caused some temporary setbacks, particularly for resorts in neighbouring Estonia and, to a smaller degree, in Lithuania. Yet travellers with Latvian passports remained the largest group of visitors in interwar Estonia, whereas Germans remained an essential target group for Palanga as the only remaining resort on the Lithuanian coast. During the first fifteen years or so after Sovietisation in 1944/45, the development of tourism followed the paths trodden in the interwar USSR. While destruction had been insignificant compared to those in the aftermath of the First World War, the period until the end of 1950s was very much a period of reconstruction in Soviet tourism in general, and in the Baltic republics in particular. The numbers of vacationers reached pre-war levels only in the second half of the 1950s.

Interestingly, the role ascribed to the Baltic republics in the grandiose Soviet development plans of the early 1960s did not change the preponderance of regional over all-Union tourism significantly. Taking into account that the implementation lagged considerably behind the plans overall, the more significant extension took place in those resorts that were located close enough to dynamically growing urban centres. This is above all true for Jurmala and, to a somewhat lesser degree, for Palanga. Tellingly enough, Pärnu, halfway between Tallinn and Riga grew at a much slower pace. In the cases of Jurmala and Palanga, people from Riga and Klaipeda respectively, made up the lion's share of visitors during the seasons.

The number of "wild tourists" is obviously the dark horse in these calculations. Due to the nature of individual travel, it is difficult to measure the influx or to know the points of departure from whence these tourists originated. Against the backdrop of union-wide developments it seems safe to assume that they consisted mainly of young, educated, urban travellers from the industrial centres of the USSR. In other words, from the layers of Soviet society that profited most from the increase of leisure time, income and transport facilities. These factors allowed unorganised tourists to travel over considerable distances to spend their summer holidays elsewhere. Among both organised and unorganised vacationers, citizens from other Soviet republics thus constituted a minority, albeit not an insignificant and possibly a growing one.

Due to the lack of comprehensive sociological data, the question of why the Baltic Sea was among the most popular destinations for late Soviet tourism is even more difficult to answer. Some of the contributing factors have been discussed, however. Even if the

Baltic coast did not enjoy the standing of the Crimea or Finland in the Russian Empire, some Baltic resorts already enjoyed a good reputation in the Tsarist Empire, and they were obviously not completely forgotten during the interwar period. The Baltic resorts played a considerable role in the visions of Soviet planners beginning with the 1960s, even if they were of secondary importance compared to the Caucasus and Black Sea regions. It would overstretch the argument, however, to describe the Baltic republics as a laboratory or trailblazer for new trends in Soviet tourism. True, during the 1960s some innovation, like for example the short lived efforts organise hitchhiking by through the issue of booklets with vouchers for both drivers and hitchhikers,<sup>71</sup> were tested in the Baltic republics with their comparatively developed infrastructure. The housing offices were obviously a Baltic re-invention of interwar traditions as well. These innovations were either rapidly adapted elsewhere or given up altogether. It seems fair to say that at the end of the day the Baltic seaside resorts retained their attractiveness rather *because* many of the late Soviet trends, like the concentration of facilities in large complexes, were not entirely manifest.<sup>72</sup>

Be that as it may, developments in the Baltic republics found limited reverberation in Soviet media, as the journalists were urged to propagate less known or newly developed destinations. Word of mouth was probably a much better advertisement than any official press article. As the phenomenon of “wild tourism” amply illustrates, individual tourists in the Soviet Union were not scared away from the famous and already overcrowded resorts. On the contrary, these were the preferred destinations of the “tourist without vouchers”. Thus unorganised tourism followed its organised counterparts in the Soviet Union and challenged the system’s capacity “from within”. Overall, citizens of the late Soviet Union shared the preference for vacationing in the south with the inhabitants of other industrialised nations of Europe. And, as in Europe, a significant minority seems to have been aware of attractions of the north, too, with its fine sandy beaches (which were rare in the Soviet South) and reasonably warm and sunny summers.

The available sources do not allow for a detailed assessment of the relative importance of “push” and “pull” factors in Soviet tourism. Nevertheless it seems more than likely that factors like the comparably high standard of living, the versatile natural environment and the rich cultural heritage in the Baltic hinterland attracted travellers who decided upon destinations for themselves. Under Soviet conditions, this was largely a privilege of the underprivileged, the “wild” tourists. Beyond this, each of the Baltic Republics was less marked by Imperial Russian or Soviet influences than other parts of the USSR. Whether or not the traces of Finnish, Swedish, Polish or German culture particularly intrigued Soviet tourists is difficult to measure. Contemporary observers have indeed assumed that the Baltic republics formed some proxy of the “West” within the Soviet Union.<sup>73</sup> Measured by the level of incomes or the availability of consumer goods, living standards in the Baltic certainly

71 GARF, f. R-9520, op. 1, d. 1051, ll. 1-161.

72 *Kurorty* represents Palanga in the late Soviet style, with modern buildings above all, whereas the visual representation of Jurmala is dominated by nature (the beach) and historical buildings. Just one modern building is depicted. *Kurorty* (see note 2), pp. 265-267, 397 f.

73 See Stanley V. Vardys: *The Role of the Baltic Republics in Soviet Society*, in: Roman Szporluk (ed.): *The Influence of East European and Soviet West on the USSR*, New York 1976, pp. 147-179, here p. 159.

surpassed those of other European republics of the USSR, and that may have well been an additional incentive to travel: “[...] *probably you have heard about all this*”.

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### *Zusammenfassung*

Am Beispiel der drei baltischen Seebäder Pärnu, Jurmala und Palanga untersucht der Beitrag die Integration des Baltikums in den gesamtowjetischen Tourismusbetrieb. Der erste Teil rekonstruiert das Aufkommen von Bädertourismus im Zarenreich und die Weiterentwicklung in der Zwischenkriegszeit. Weitere Abschnitte verfolgen die Sowjetisierung, zunächst im Bereich des staatlich geförderten Sozialtourismus sowjetischer Prägung. Wie in der übrigen Sowjetunion erfuhr dieser auch im Baltikum einen massiven Ausbau in den 60er und 70er Jahren, ohne dass jedoch der gewachsene Charakter der baltischen Küstenorte völlig verändert wurde. Ein wachsender Zustrom sowjetischer Individualreisender begleitete diesen Ausbau. Er brachte die Infrastruktur der Urlaubsgebiete an den Rand des Zusammenbruchs und war auch durch begrenzte Flexibilisierung seitens der örtlichen Verwaltungen letztendlich nicht aufzufangen. Der abschließende Teil befasst sich mit der textlichen und bildlichen Repräsentation des Urlaubsziels Baltikum in sowjetischen Medien. Er zeigt, dass dieser Diskurs durchaus ambivalent war: Verweise auf kulturelle Identität und Modernität, die das Baltikum als den „Westen“ innerhalb der UdSSR auswiesen, standen neben Referenzen, die an das gemeinsame sowjetische Erbe erinnerten. Obgleich vor allem ersteres Touristen aus der gesamten Sowjetunion anzog, wurde die überwiegende Mehrheit der Kapazitäten doch von Touristen aus dem Baltikum selbst genutzt, vor allem aus der Metropole Riga.