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## PERIPHERALITY OF THE KURIL ISLANDS – A DEVELOPMENT BARRIER OR A DEVELOPMENT FACTOR?

**Key words:** *peripherality, development, Kuril Islands*

**Abstract:** The paper discusses development barriers and development factors of one of Russia's key peripheral regions – the Kuril Islands, an archipelago with a small area but a strategic location in the Russian Far East. The geographical distance from the state's decision-making centres and the peripherality of the archipelago's location have been in the past and remain at present the main factors underpinning the Islands' development. The paper also points out future development opportunities for the archipelago in the context of the still unresolved territorial conflict between Russia and Japan.

### Introduction

The Asian part of Russia, both in the Tsarist and Soviet times, as well as today, is regarded as an exceptionally important strategic area, mainly on account of its raw material deposits due to which Russia has to be reckoned with on the international scene. As a rule, the uniqueness of a given area is determined by its extensive territory and the wealth of mineral resources. Much more seldom its characteristic peripheral location is considered an asset increasing its attractiveness.

In spite of their modest area (15,600 sq. km), the Kuril Islands remain one of Russia's most important peripheral territories due to their strategic location. Ample natural resources of this small stretch of land are equally significant. The main aim of the present study is to analyse factors both impeding and stimulating the development of the Kuril Islands and to answer the question whether their peripherality restrains or contributes to the growth of the Islands.

Another goal of the present study is to outline opportunities for the development of the archipelago within the context of the still unsolved territorial dispute between Russia and Japan. A discussion of several development programmes that were proposed in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union will be used to present the prospective paths of development of the Kuril Islands.

### Location

The Kuril Islands form an archipelago extending to ca 1200 km in length, separating the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean. The administrative division of the Kuril Islands consists of 3 regions which are a part of the Sakhalin district which, in turn, belongs to a higher administrative division of the Russian Far-Eastern Federal District. The Kuril Islands form an arc of islands bordering with the Kamchatka Peninsula in the North and with a Japanese island of Hokkaido in the South.

The archipelago consists of 56 islands, the so-called northern group and the southern one, separated by the so-called De Vries Strait. The northern group includes, among others, Paramushir and Uruppu, while the southern one includes the largest of the Kuril Islands – Iturup. A part of the archipelago called the southern islands by the Russian geographers is referred to as the Northern Territories by the Japanese who claim that they should be returned to them.

The Kuril-Kamchatka Trench extending 2170 km in the bottom of the Pacific Ocean runs parallel to the arc of the Kuril Islands. In the North, it joins the Aleutian Trench and, in the South, the Japanese Trench. The Kuril Islands often experience earthquakes, being situated in a seismic zone. Epicentres of earthquakes the foci of which are as deep as 150 km are located along the arc. Earthquakes trigger off tsunamis and, in 1737, a tsunami wave reached a record height of 64 m (Korsunskaa 1948). The location of the Islands within the "Ring of Fire" and above the subduction zone between the Pacific and Eurasian lithosphere plates is reflected in the relief.

Most of the islands feature upland mountainous terrains with ca 160 volcanoes, 40 of which are active. The highest of them – Alaid – is situated on the

island of Alaid in the northern part of the archipelago and rises to the height of 2339 m above the sea level, and the second tallest one – Tiatia (1822 m above sea level) is in the south on the Kunashir island. Both of them are cone shaped and belong to the Vesuvian type of volcanoes. Effects of the volcanic eruptions can be sometimes seen in the Kamchatka Peninsula. During the eruption of the Surichev volcano on the Matua island in 1946, its crater spewed fiery lava flows, ashes were sent as far as Petropavlovsk in Kamchatka and the glare from the eruption was seen at a distance of 150 km (Berg 1962).

The location of the archipelago and the unique character of physical and geographical processes taking place on the Islands indirectly affect the development opportunities of the Kuril Islands.

### Peripherality of the Kuril Islands

Peripherality means location at a considerable distance from the centre. It is hard to unequivocally define either the centre or the periphery. With respect to the former, it seems to be somewhat easier, provided we accept the centre to be a synonym of the middle. Yet in the case of territories constituting parts of larger countries, one can hardly agree with the claim that the area situated in the middle of state organisms constitutes its centre. Quite often, the capital is perceived as the country's centre, though quite frequently it is not centrally situated. A claim that all territories situated close to the border of a given state are peripheral from the perspective of its decision-making centre can also be contested. There is no doubt, however, that identifying the peripheries is definitely more difficult and it has been and still is a topic of interest for representatives of numerous academic disciplines.

For the purpose of the present study, it seems worthwhile to define several issues focal to the discussion in question. Since in geography peripheries mean the external parts of an area, we have assumed that the territory under analysis is a periphery and, hence, topological issues of what the centre and the periphery are will be disregarded here. On the other hand, the question to what extent the territory's location – which we refer to as 'peripheral' – is an impeding or stimulating factor of its development is highly interesting. Peripherality tends to hamper interpersonal contacts with institutions and social groups situated in the centre of a given state, as well as with the representatives of the global society.

What is crucial in perceiving the area as peripheral in the case of the Kuril Islands is its current and historical national status. In the period in which the Kuril Islands belonged to Japan, they constituted the northern, peripheral parts

of this insular country by nature of their very position. Since 1945, when the Soviet Union annexed the whole archipelago on the basis of the secret Yalta Agreement, defining the position of the Kuril Islands as peripheral seems to be fully justified, especially from the perspective of the Russian decision-making centres. Of equal significance seems to be the criterion of the size of the territory within which the centre and the periphery are designated.

This all comes down to the question which part of the Soviet Union and currently Russia is treated as the centre and which – as the periphery. In its broader sense, the centre of Russia is the area in the European section of the country extending between the current and the former capital – Moscow and Sankt Petersburg. In its narrower sense, the centre is Moscow which is the largest city in Russia, both in terms of demography and decision-making.

For many Russians, the Kuril Archipelago separating the Sea of Okhotsk from the Pacific Ocean seems to be a natural limit of perceiving what is still Russian, although situated far from the centre. At the time of the Russian conquest of the Far East, borderlands of the Asian continent proved to be just a transitional stage in the colonisation of that part of the world. It was the islands situated at a various distance from the eastern coast of Asia that became a true eastern border of the emerging Russian Empire.

Peripheries are identified as areas situated at a great distance from the centre; less frequently this category includes peripheral regions of the European part of Russia and nearly always – the areas east of the Urals. Thus, distance is a factor determining the separation of the peripheries from the centre, especially in a spatial sense. However, in the case of the Kuril Islands, one can hardly agree with a rule that, based on the criterion of significance, peripheral equals less important. In spite of its small area, the archipelago still remains one of the most strategic points in the Russian Far East.

To a great extent, the way of perceiving a given territory is not a result of the existing norms or lines of thought, but rather individual perception closely related to a place in which one stays. S. Czarnowski (1956) wrote that a subjective valuation of space is a vital factor in deciding about the peripheral status of an area. What appears as peripheral to some of us, may constitute an important centre of spiritual, religious or cultural life for others.

In case of some centres, one can speak of interchangeability of functions – at one time they may acquire a central significance and at another time – they may play a role of a minor provincial centre. In the case of the Kuril Islands, on account of their being situated along the eastern frontier of Russia, one may expect that the question of recognising the archipelago's location as peripheral does not seem to have changed much over the years, especially from the perspec-

tive of the Russians. On the other hand, in terms of the escalation of tension between Russia and Japan with respect to some of the islands, we witness a variability in the treatment of the Kuril Archipelago as peripheral islands of non-peripheral significance.

If we assume hypothetically that the Russians return a part of the Kuril Islands to Japan, this may have a considerable impact on the Islands' peripheral status. Peripheries belonging to one centre (the Russian one) are situated quite close to another centre (the Japanese one). In the case of the Asian part of Russia, it is worth noting that even disregarding its great distance from the decision-making centre of Russia, the area is situated at a small distance from other centres of the globalising world. But as we discuss this issue at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, under the circumstances of full Russian control of the Kuril Islands, the question should be asked to what extent their peripheral location is a barrier or stimulus in their development.

### Development factors of the Kuril Islands

Some of the determining factors of the development of the Kuril Islands are directly related to their peripheral character, although the very positioning of the islands in geographical terms, without considering their peripherality, carries serious consequences that may affect the prospective development of the area. Thus, combining the location of the islands (at a high latitude in the northern hemisphere) with their positioning in relation to the decision-making centre influencing their functioning (in the capital of Russia) provides a good starting point for our discussion of the prospective development of the archipelago.

Analysing physical and geographical factors appearing on the islands, one may assume *a priori* that they are the elements that hamper economic and demographic growth of the islands. The archipelago consisting of 56 islands is characterised by a small spatial density (the distance between the northernmost island and the southernmost one exceeds 1000 km) and its total area (15,600 sq. km) is smaller than that of the two Indonesian islands of Bangka and Belitung (16,500 sq. km), famous for their tin ore deposits.

The volcanic character of the islands that has been already described above in the section on *Location* may be considered as a factor raising the attractiveness of the archipelago. At the same time, it makes transport around it much more difficult and greatly impedes the introduction of other forms of activities in the open space. The presence of ca 160 volcanoes within such a small territory is not the only element of its natural environment that enhances the visual attractiveness of the place, however making life there quite difficult. The volcanic

terrain of the Kuril Islands abounds in caves formed in the Quarternary lava flows.

Among other natural attractions of the Islands are river valleys, often turning into canyons with numerous rock steps elevated as high as 140 m above the sea level, which is the evidence of the progressing tectonic uplift of the land. Many river mouths form waterfalls and there are also many crater lakes and coastal lagoon lakes (Berg 1962).

Another element of the natural environment which may be a limiting factor to the demographic and economic growth of the area is its climate – moderate cool, of monsoon type, with annual precipitation of up to 1000 mm. Winters are long, frosty and with considerable snowfalls (which may occur even in June). Kurilsk has the annual average of 220 days with snowfall. Summers are short, humid and foggy. Sea water along the coast is cold, and when warm masses of air come from the south east in summer, they cool down, rapidly producing fog. Air temperature varies, the further north, the colder it is – in winter temperatures drop down to  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Very strong winds greatly increase the chill factor.

The peripheral location of the Kuril Islands and, hence, the limited access, constitutes the essential factor conducive to the growth of the flora. These are extremely valuable areas due to the presence of rare species of plants. There are about 1000 species of plants in the Islands, of which only five belong to the evergreen family (not counting conifers). The south of the archipelago abounds in forests with Kuril larches, oaks and maple trees and in the central section of the Islands there are birch groves with Kuril bamboo undergrowth. Bamboo shrubs, sometimes up to 3.5 m high, proliferate in places with big amounts of snow in winter. Siberian dwarf pine and Kamchatka alder grow in the northern islands.

The fauna of the Kuril Islands is not as varied as the flora. Brown bear and wolf live in the Kunashir and Iturup islands, while northern fur seals and not too many sea otters live in the central islands. Bird species are quite numerous, among others, guillemot and puffin. The coastal sea abounds in herring and cod, while the rivers – in salmonids e.g. dog salmon.

The above mentioned restricted access to the islands involves several elements, though undoubtedly the peripherality of their location is one of the key factors affecting their further development. Equally important is also the unclear political and national status of the islands.

Another factor determining an evident isolation of the archipelago is the visitors' obligation to have special entry permits. In spite of the fact that such permits are available, in order to obtain them one has to overcome multiple

administrative obstacles. The permits can be obtained through e.g. travel agencies in Sakhalin, yet the procedure itself is troublesome and takes about a week. Another impeding factor, especially for persons who prefer to travel alone, is the obligation to visit the islands in organised groups in the presence of the representative of a local institution.

The peripheral location of the Kuril Islands limits the choice of a place from which we can embark on a tour of the islands. After successful overcoming of the administrative obstacles, there are only two ways of reaching the archipelago – by sea or by air. In the first case, there are only irregular boat services from Korsakov, a port in the south of Sakhalin. This is not a ferry line, but one can get on board of a ship and the voyage to Yuzhno-Kurilsk takes the whole day.

A trip by air is easier and faster. There are a few flights from Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk to Yuzhno-Kurilsk per week and a trip lasts 100 minutes. However, one has to take into account another factor impeding the archipelago's accessibility. Due to the fact that the Islands are often shrouded in fog making aircraft landing impossible, sometimes one has to wait several days for the weather to improve.

A decisive factor for the development of the Kuril Islands are complicated political relations between Russia and Japan. Both states have been interested in the Islands since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Islands were drawn on a map of this part of Asia by M. de Vries, a Dutch traveller and sailor, in 1643. Both states offer historical arguments in which they refer to the same, but differently interpreted, bilateral agreements.

In 1855, Russia and Japan signed an agreement concerning trade, navigation and border delimitation. Pursuant to the Treaty of Shimoda, the Russian-Japanese border ran along the De Vries Strait and so the islands stretching from the isle of Uruppu in the south to Shumushu (next to the Kamchatka Peninsula) belonged to Russia, while the southern part of the archipelago including among others, Kunashir and Iturup (with Kurilsk, the present capital of the archipelago) belonged to Japan. In accordance with the Treaty of Shimoda, Sakhalin remained under the joint administration of the two states, without border delimitation (Potocka 1999). Sakhalin was of great strategic importance for Russia, as it facilitated the control of the mouths of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers.

The Russians kept insisting that Japan should resign from the joint administration of Sakhalin. Negotiations lasted several years and successive proposals voiced by either party were rejected (Russia proposed annexation of four islands including Uruppu to Japan, while Japan proposed the sale of Sakhalin for 2 million yens). Neither proposal was accepted and, finally, an agreement was signed in 1875 in Sankt Petersburg, on the strength of which Sakhalin was exchanged for the Kuril Islands. Since then Sakhalin became a part of the

Russian Empire and the entire Kuril archipelago became a part of the Japanese Empire, which successfully blocked the Pacific Ocean against the entry of the Russian Pacific Fleet (Potocka 1999).

Another important phase in the history of the Kuril Islands started in 1945 when the Soviet Union annexed the entire archipelago on the basis of the secret Yalta Agreement. Nowadays, Japan does not question Russian sovereignty over the Kuril Islands north of the Uruppu island. However, it demands the return of the so-called Northern Territories which include about 10 out of 50 of the Kuril Islands, among others Habomai, Kunashir and Shikotan. The dispute concerning the status of the Islands has not been solved, in spite of a five-point agreement signed at the Kremlin in 1956. However, the agreement ended the state of war between the two countries, brought about the normalisation of diplomatic relations and exchange of ambassadors, repatriation of Japanese prisoners-of-war and the signing of a 10-year agreement on fishery, as well as the support of the Soviet Union for Japan's accession to the UN (Stephan 1974).

The peripherality of the Islands combined with an unstable political situation contribute to the feeling of insecurity of both permanent residents and seasonal visitors. It is the south and not the relatively politically secure north that is the most densely populated. To some extent, this is due to difficulties in travelling within the archipelago. Most visitors reach the capital – Kurilsk – on the Iturup island and Yuzhno-Kurilsk on the Kunashir island.

In order to answer the question concerning the prospective demographic growth of the Islands, one should go back to the beginnings of human presence in the Kuril Islands. From time immemorial, man has been an important element of the geographic environment of the Islands. The indigenous population of the Kuril Islands were the Ainu people. The name of the archipelago is not in any way related to the smoke belching volcanoes, but comes from the word *kur* or *kuru* which in the Ainu language means “man” (Berg 1962).

According to V.A. Anučin, in the Soviet Union, the environment was “humanised” and it was becoming a separate specific form of the movement of matter, different from geographic environment in the classical meaning of the word. In his *Theoretical Foundations of Geography* (1972), Anučin presented his concept of the place of man in the Soviet environment and society. The geographical environment constitutes a complex system of natural and social conditions – however, it is not the environment that is the source of social development but, on the contrary, the only factor that acts intentionally toward qualitative changes in nature is the society.

The above idea was put to life in human activity in the peripheries of the Soviet Union. Man decided about the management of the Kuril Islands and any

use of its natural resources. It was the decision of the authorities as to how many people lived there, both permanently or temporarily. It was equally difficult to reach the Islands as to leave them. There has never been a time when all the islands were inhabited; human settlements concentrated on not more than 10 islands of the entire archipelago.

Currently the number of permanent residents of the Kuril Islands is relatively low (ca 19,000 – according to the last census that was carried out in Russia in 2002). Only 4 of over 50 islands are permanently inhabited: Iturup, Kunashir, Paramushir and Shikotan. A small number of inhabitants is due to natural, institutional and economic factors. However, the main factor responsible for the scarcity of the population is most probably the unclear political status of the individual islands.

The peripherality of the Islands might have contributed to the ecological condition of this territory. However, we can only make guesses about the scope of activities that could have affected the natural environment of the Islands and the neighbouring sea area. In the case of the Kuril Islands the situation seems to be complicated – on the one hand, the archipelago is environmentally precious, with numerous areas requiring effective protection. On the other hand, one should be aware of the fact that in the past, the Kuril Islands may have been a scene of environmentally adverse activities. Due to the lack of reliable information we remain in the sphere of guesses.

The Kuril Islands constitute a natural border for the Russian Pacific Fleet to cross. It is very likely that nuclear waste has been stored and recycled in the vicinity of the archipelago. Already in the time of the Soviet Union, the broadly understood north of the country was used for that purpose, including coastal waters, yet the actual locations frequently remain unknown.

Over 150 Russian nuclear submarines, most of which operated in the Kuril water region, were planned to be decommissioned by 2000. In 1993, spent nuclear fuel from 25% of all submarines withdrawn from service in the Pacific Fleet stationed in the Russian Far East was removed and 4 storage facilities for scrapped nuclear reactors were established. Information about the precise location of the sites has never been provided, yet scarce population of the area is cited as the main reason for locating such facilities there. No attention is paid to the fact that this area is identified as a natural heritage of Russia.

Speaking about the Kuril Islands' development factors, one should also mention their technological resources going back to the technological achievements of the Soviet era. Undoubtedly, the technological infrastructure installed on the Islands several decades ago requires replacement or upgrading in most cases.

## Development opportunities

Due to their peripheral insular location and the still unresolved political dispute between Russia and Japan, the Kuril Islands were increasingly marginalised throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The current economic system has been determined by the Soviet economic policy applicable to this territory. The central control over peripheral regions was exercised by means of an extremely complicated administrative division of the country. The centralised planning forced a specific economic specialisation upon individual regions. Due to that, one region could not exist without another, which was a way of providing an additional security structure to protect and ensure the sustainability of the entire system.

The political, economic and social transformation that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 affected many aspects of life. In the new post-Soviet era, the transformation applied also to the attitude of state authorities to peripheral regions, including the Kuril Islands. Lack of adequate financial resources for modernisation of the local infrastructure makes the inhabitants of many of the regions in the Russian Far East confused and insecure under the new circumstances. People continue to use elements of the obsolete infrastructure, while only few selected areas are being included in modernisation programmes.

At the beginning of the transformation period, the authorities in Moscow were aware of the great strategic significance of the small Kuril region. In December 1992, President Yeltsin signed a document entitled: "On social and economic development of the Kuril Islands". In December 1993, a programme called "The Federal Programme of Social and Economic Development of the Kuril Islands in the Sakhalin District" was launched. Both these documents presented the development strategy and specific mechanisms for turning the Kuril Islands into one of the most intensely developing regions of Russia (Golubčikov 1999). However, due to their insular location and great distance from the Russian capital (over 10,000 km), the Kuril Islands fell under the category of the so-called "depressed" regions in which their social and economic growth encountered many obstacles.

Among the principal factors influencing the development of the archipelago there were initiatives aimed at the introduction of a comprehensive management of the area. The Kuril Islands administrative authorities were to be entitled to freely decide about the use of the land, water, mineral raw materials, as well as the existing and new real estate.

Constructive initiatives undertaken in the 1990s included the establishing of a committee within the structure of the executive authorities with the task of

providing assistance in the social and economic development of the Islands. What is also worth mentioning is that some forms of cooperation among three archipelago areas have appeared on the lowest local administrative level (Gevorkov, Lütty, Hropov 1999). However, to a great extent, the initiatives proposed in the early 1990s remained on paper and the 1998 crisis mainly affected the peripheral areas, including the Kuril Islands. When evaluating the implementation of the completed reform programmes, we can conclude that the transformation process lacked coordination of activities in various fields and a pragmatic approach to the management of economic processes.

In 2006, the Government of the Russian Federation adopted "The 2007-2015 social and economic development programme for the Kuril Islands". According to its authors, 18 billion roubles (i.e. ca USD 640 million) were to be invested in road infrastructure, public utilities and medical services (including hospitals). According to experts, this seems to be another proof that the Russian authorities are not too eager to conclude the unresolved dispute with Japan; it is also viewed as an attempt to hamper the progressing depopulation of the area.

Economic growth is correlated with the existing demographic potential. Introducing any reform programmes would be pointless in case of a decreasing number of residents. The authors of the development programmes for the Kuril Islands of the 1990s and the early 2000s envisioned ways of importing new or maintaining the existing population. Among the ideas that might be of interest both to local young men and to those who arrive here from other regions was the concept of exemption from military conscription for the inhabitants of the Kuril Islands (Gevorkov, Lütty, Hropov 1999). After the elimination of institutional migration barriers, in the post-Soviet Russia people may move freely, yet in the case of strategic areas the authorities will not allow for their marked depopulation.

The Ainu, the indigenous population of the Kuril Islands, have always used the local natural resources. Depending on the needs, the individual components of the environment have been exploited by people. In the Soviet times and in the early 1990s, the local population (mainly the Russians) lived on fishing, hunting and on forest pickings. Due to the existing restrictions imposed in trade and agriculture, the population on the Islands are now looking for other forms of activity.

The dramatic growth of transport prices makes the sale of fish produce (both salt and fresh water fish) practically unprofitable. Farming is limited to the southern islands where such crops as wheat, barley and rye are cultivated, as well as vegetables and potatoes. Only on the western slopes of Kunashir and Iturup islands (from the side of the Sea of Okhotsk) thermophilous plants such

as pumpkin, corn and tomatoes are grown (Berg 1962). Farming and fishing are increasingly becoming activities satisfying solely the demand of the local market.

In our opinion, tourism seems to be a prospective source of income for the inhabitants, especially due to restrictions on trade and farming. The tourist potential of the Islands requires specific activities that would be profitable both to the local population, as well as to the prospective tourists. Various tourist attractions of this area are still inaccessible for many people due to the administrative restrictions and absence of well-developed transportation facilities. It seems obvious that tourism in the Kuril Islands is not and should not have a popular character. Tourists wishing to reach the archipelago should be able to afford considerable funds for that purpose that will help the local population to function in these unpropitious conditions.

Development of tourism should comply with the laws of nature. The best solution for the Kuril Islands would be to implement the concept of sustainable tourism. Its ideal model combines modern economic, social and environmental needs with those of the future. It also includes elements of ecotourism which fosters economic growth while protecting natural and cultural resources. However, one should juxtapose the praiseworthy idea concerning the development of sustainable tourism with environmental threats the existence of which in the area of the Kuril Islands could easily be conjectured.

Many authors point out to the similarity of the environment of the southern islands to the Japanese island of Hokkaido, and of the northern ones – to the Kamchatka Peninsula, stressing a considerable diversification of natural conditions in the archipelago. The still unsettled relations between Russia and Japan constitute an important factor limiting the development of the Kuril Islands. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a few important bilateral meetings were held – in 1993 in Tokyo and in 1997 in Krasnoyarsk – during which it was agreed that attempts to sign a peace treaty would be made by 2000. The entire problem, however, may be resolved within a longer timeframe as mutual trust between the two countries increases, e.g. following their economic cooperation (Halizak 2004).

The Kuril Islands face considerable economic difficulties together with other peripheral regions of modern Russia. The improvement of living standards represents a serious challenge for the state authorities. Poverty has already been a problem in the times of the Soviet Union, however the recent drop in investments gave rise to further impoverishment of the scarce population of the archipelago.

## Conclusion

Due to their strategic location in the Far East, the Kuril Islands remain one of Russia's key peripheral areas. The region is characterised by a small surface area, considerable distances between the islands and unfavourable living conditions, particularly with regard to climate, and the limited space which could be used for production activity.

At the beginning of the systemic transformation processes initiated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, programmes were developed with a view to transforming the Kuril Islands from an economically backward region into a dynamically developing area of economic activity. There are reasons to believe that the attempts to relieve the transport difficulties may affect the social and economic situation in the Islands.

The still unresolved political situation between Russia and Japan concerning the return of some of the Islands (which the Japanese refer to as the 'Northern Territories') hampered the area's socio-economic development in the past. After the demise of the Soviet Union, numerous programmes were put in place in order to provide supports to this peripheral region under the circumstances of the changing economy. The basic implementation problem concerning these programmes is the lack of an agreement between Russia and Japan concerning the political affiliation of particular islands.

It seems very likely that a consensus, if reached, would bring many benefits to the Kuril Islands themselves, to the two countries involved, and to potentially great numbers of travellers. The Kuril Islands have a huge potential for tourism and could become a leading tourist region in this part of Russia owing to their many attractions, e.g. volcanoes, hot springs, caverns as well as diverse flora and fauna.

On the one hand, the peripheral location of the Kuril Islands can be viewed as a factor which hinders demographic and economic development, but on the other it allows for an incremental, controlled development of the archipelago. Owing to their critical significance for Russia and the resultant financial allocations, not available to other Far East areas, the Islands do have development prospects, which are however largely contingent on the current political situation.

*Translated by Dorota Szmajda*



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## Резюме

## Периферийность курильских островов – барьер или стимул развития?

в статье рассматриваются барьеры и стимулы развития одной из важнейших периферийных территорий России – Курильских островов, отличающихся незначительной площадью, но при этом стратегическим положением на Дальнем Востоке.

Удаленность от центров государственной власти, а также периферийное положение архипелага были в прошлом и продолжают оставаться в настоящее время факторами, влияющими на развитие Курильских островов. В статье отмечаются также возможности развития архипелага в будущем в контексте неурегулированного до сих пор территориального спора между Россией и Японией.