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**ETHNIC RURAL TOURISM IN REPUBLIC OF
BASHKORTOSTAN: CURRENT STATE, ISSUES AND
PROSPECTS**

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Abstract

Rural tourism was a part of Western European protectionism in 1980s, when it has come to be considered as an alternative activity that allows partially transferring population from the production sphere to services. Today, rural tourism is quickly becoming a profitable and self-contained business model with constantly growing popularity. Making tourism an integral industry in the rural economy requires adopting federal and regional development programs aimed at rural tourism development. These programs shall describe measures aimed at creating material, technical and organizational framework for rural tourism development, means and methods of its support on behalf of state and local authorities and other prerequisites and conditions favorable to the rural tourism business. A correctly planned and organized ethnic rural tourism built on the foundation of integral and efficient use of available resource potentials of the rural locality may become a factor in sustainable development of rural Bashkortostan. Ability to invest funds obtained from provision of tourism services into improvement of environment and rural infrastructure development will facilitate conservation of nature and landscapes, historical lifestyle of rural people, social and cultural heritage, etc. Development of rural tourism will facilitate changes in psychology of people by means of turning them from producers of traditional rural produce to service personnel. It will lead to increased self-esteem and possibilities for self-actualization of rural population by means of expanding the area of application of labor, creativity, communication with interesting people, necessity in obtaining knowledge in the area of rural tourism and entrepreneurship.

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Keywords: Ethnic rural tourism, rural tourism, ethnic produce, arts and crafts, countryside, sustainable development.



1. Introduction

The results of Russian reforms of the 1990s were mostly negative for the Russian countryside, as it drowned in a mix of social-economic, spiritual-psychological and environmental problems. Shift to a market economy differentiated the economy, living standards and quality of life over various rural territories of the country in the extreme way. Only some of them succeeded in a certain adaptation to changed social and economic conditions, kept and developed their supply base, social infrastructure and human potential. Vast majority of the rural territories have become depressive, with no specific prospects of a better future (Kalugina & Fadeeva, 2009; Patsiorkovskii, 2009; Wegren, 2015). Under such conditions, a need arises to search for new ways of rural development on the foundation of diversification and development of alternative business profiles (Serova & Zviagintsev, 2006). Ethnic rural tourism (rural tourism) may become one of such business profiles for the Republic of Bashkortostan.

Rural tourism became recognized by the public of most of the Western European countries during the second half of the 20th century due to a reduction in agricultural employment and a necessity to create alternative means of labor and entrepreneurship in the countryside. Rural tourist was deemed to stop migration of rural population to cities, becoming a field of labor and source of income for rural families (Zdorov, 2009a).

Rural tourism has quickly become a self-contained business, competitive and with low investment requirements. Currently, demand for this product changed the very concept of rural tourism in Europe, as for many families it has grown from a secondary to primary business activity.

2. Problem Statement

Nowadays, many vacationers aspiring to be well-traveled reach out for virgin nature, original culture of various peoples. In this regard, Bashkir South Ural is very attractive, as it is the nurse of the Bashkir people, a treasury of its original culture. Here, age-old traditions, folk-life culture, and local lifestyle have been well-preserved, thus, forming a good foundation for development of ethnographic and rural (agricultural) tourism.

Development of rural tourism into a full-fledged and stable industry of the rural economy requires organizational, economic and institutional conditions that depend largely on the federal and regional authorities.

Thus far, Russia has been lacking a scientifically-justified concept of rural tourism development, the question of legal coverage remains unsolved (there are no laws and regulations for certain aspects of ethnic rural tourism), as is the financial security of the process (concessional lending system, tax benefits, grant support etc.).

The necessity to create an efficient organizational, economic and institutional environment for rural tourism development, means and methods for its support on behalf of federal, regional and local authorities prioritizes the task of its theoretical and practical development.

3. Research Questions

Ethnic rural tourism in Russia is a new social-economic phenomenon, oriented towards using natural, cultural-historical, ethnographic and other resources of the countryside to create and offer to the general public a tourism product. In a related move, it should be assumed that the strategic priorities of the regional (municipal) policy aimed at stimulation of tourism in the countryside shall be concentration of tourism resources necessary for arrangement of ethnic rural tourism by creating destinations that include tourism support centers having a high potential for forming countryside tours and their neighboring territories.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this paper we aim to justify the importance and prospects of ethnic rural tourism development in the Republic of Bashkortostan.

5. Research Methods

This study experimentally uses a method to reveal ethnic rural tourism development areas in the region on the basis of unique natural and resource-related prospects and capabilities of the rural Bashkortostan (ethnic produce, arts and crafts, culture, customs and traditions, local folklore), which serve as potential anchoring zones for development of the ethnic business of the republic attracting tourist traffic.

The study used the methods of economic and statistical analysis, conceptual synthesis, comparison, generalization, socio-economic forecasting, overt observation, interview and field studies as its research instruments.

6. Findings

Currently, there are several dozens of rural tourism businesses operating in the Republic of Bashkortostan. During the pilot study, we inspected 17 businesses where tourism services amount to a significant part of profits (more than a third) and which were situated in the mountainous forest area of the republic – Burziansky and Beloretsky districts. All these businesses operate within the Personal Subsidiary Plot framework and are located in villages surrounded by picturesque natural landscapes.

In all the businesses, the tourism service packages include standard and special services. Accommodation, catering, local guide and sauna comprise a standard set of services provided by businesses, while their special services may include a guided tour to the the Bashkir State Nature Reserve, Shulgan-Tash Reserve (Kapova Cave), visits to historical and natural monuments, arrangement of hunting and fishing trips, acquaintance with arts and crafts, visiting dens of various animals (bear, fox, badger), collecting berries, mushrooms and medicinal herbs. The farms may simultaneously accommodate up to 10 persons.

Habitation directly in the host house allows for a better understanding of the rural lifestyle, getting to know new customs and traditions, taking reasonable part in agricultural works, eating together with the hosts.

The profit from the activity is mainly reinvested into development of the farm (outfitting and improvement of domestic life, expansion of services being offered). The vacationers include not only residents of the republic and other regions of Russia, but also tourists from other ex-USSR countries (Estonia and Kazakhstan), as well as EU residents (from Denmark, Poland, Slovenia).

The general consensus among the owners of the inspected farms is that the tourism brings in a significant return, however, the tourist traffic varies, has a seasonal nature and is limited only to the summer period, while there are capabilities for round-the-year accommodation. The owners of these rural tourism establishments offer quite a wide range of services. Many of them forged close links with OOO Kapova Peshchera (Kapova Cave), a local tourism company that provides them with advertisement, organizational, informational and consultive support.

International practice of rural tourism development indicates that the effect will reach its maximum if the rural tourism is developing within the framework of federal or regional programs rather than by spontaneous means. Otherwise, all the local projects and endeavors in the rural tourism sphere are doomed to slow development full of hardships, especially under current lack of finances (Zdorov, 2009b).

Local municipalities play an important role in development of ethnic rural tourism, as their population is involved in providing most of the tourism services.

Management of the rural tourism shall be based upon existing system of government authorities, local governance and self-regulatory organizations. At that, each controlling body has its own functions, resolves specific issues and has a well-defined set of rights and responsibilities (Barlybaev, Sitnova, Nasyrov, & Rakhmatullin, 2018).

Control authorities of all levels shall perform the following functions within the limits of their competence:

- regulatory support of rural tourism;
- development of a regional policy and regional development programs for rural tourism;
- creation of favorable investment climate in the region;
- promotion of the regional tourism product in domestic and international markets;
- training of personnel for the rural tourism sector in the institutions of elementary and secondary vocational education;
- planning of tourism development within their jurisdiction;
- organizing interactions between the participants of the tourism activity;
- management and control over performance of tasks and final results.

Tourism control authorities at the municipal level are tasked with the following principal tasks:

- drawing up rural tourism development programs for the territory of the municipality;
- local infrastructure development;
- training the population in tourism-related activities;
- forming a positive attitude to tourism and tourists among the local inhabitants;

- performing measures aimed at development of tourism and recreation infrastructure, including outfitting recreation localities, designing routes and guided tours;
- implementing measures to attract tourist traffic to the territory, including PR campaigns;
- organizing interactions with tour operators and other organizations involved in accommodation and service of tourists and vacationers.

One of the prioritized tasks that will facilitate development of this sector in the region is developing a Concept of Rural Tourism Development in the Republic of Bashkortostan, aimed at creating legal, organizational and economic framework for development of tourism in the countryside, advancing the development of its resource base, etc. In addition, the Concept will serve as a landmark for executive authorities and local governance of the Republic of Bashkortostan, legal entities and sole proprietors involved in tour operation and tour agency activities within the territory of Bashkortostan.

Information and consultancy centers shall initiate development of regional rural tourism development programs, provide the rural populace with the significant information and consultation support necessary in tourism arrangement. The principal areas of such support may include: informing on best practices in developing rural tourism in Russia and abroad; conducting training sessions, conferences, round tables dedicated to organizing tourism in the countryside and sharing experiences; composing business plans; assistance in formalizing the documentation necessary to obtain loans (subsidies, grants); consultancy and assistance in enterprise registration, marketing research, advertisement in media and on the Internet; creating rural tourism demo facilities, etc.

Taking into account the conservatism of the rural inhabitants, a significant attention shall be paid to propaganda and advertisement of the rural tourism domestically by advertising local traditions, customs, rituals and events (Sabantuy, nomad games, Bashkir wedding, etc) in various regions of the country and organizing complexes of ethnographic villages (Bashkir village, the Land of Bashkirs, Terra Bashkiria etc.), thus facilitating better understanding of culture, tradition and lifestyle of the Bashkir people on behalf of the tourists. In such villages, the tourists would have an ability to directly participate in rituals and ceremonies, try on ethnic costumes, taste ethnic dishes, take part in ethnic arts and crafts (Akhmetov, 2018).

The practice shows that the owners of the guest houses accommodating the tourists are usually unable to advertise their services on their own. It may be related to a lack of time, insufficient experience with the Internet or absence of a specifically-tasks person. Resolution of this issue lies in bringing together the efforts of service providers and those involved in tourist transportation to the region. Then, joint advertisement in a prospect, booklet, on the TV or at a website will allow saving costs. Management of this process (or even its arrangement for a small fee) may be performed by a local tour operator that has relevant knowledge, experience and capabilities (Luchenok, 2008).

Taking into account rural tourism specifics, the main personnel shall come from graduates of elementary and secondary vocational institutions: vocational lyceums and colleges. (The countryside will need managers, tour guides, tourism instructors, regional ethnographers, caterers and other specialists in services that are untypical of the countryside).

Obviously, the personnel shall be trained starting from high school, by means of creating specialized classes in rural schools not only for agricultural disciplines as it is nowadays, but for the basics of rural tourism, rural hospitality and entrepreneurship, traditional arts and crafts, etc.

Currently, there are a number of issues standing in the way of dynamic development of rural tourism in the region, such as:

- underdevelopment of local tourism infrastructure (uncomfortable rural hotels and guest houses, unsatisfactory condition of roads, etc.);
- lacking or rundown engineering and social infrastructure in the countryside;
- low quality of services offered by caterers, providers of transportation, housekeeping, communication, etc.;
- insufficient information support of rural tours and tourist localities;
- lack of financial support of the rural tourism on behalf of regional and local authorities;
- inactivity of rural inhabitants, their unwillingness to involve themselves in the tourism business (risk aversion), as well as being afraid to take strangers into their home and problems with ensuring security of vacationers in the countryside;
- ignorance of basics of tourism and hospitality on behalf of villagers willing to take in guests;
- unwillingness or ineptitude to provide additional tourism services;
- lack of local consulting and training centers providing consultancy and distributing knowledge on the basics of entrepreneurship, arrangement of rural tourism, etc.

7. Conclusion

Marketing of rural tourism product to customers would require: being involved in the issues of its popularization; organizing advertisement campaigns at regional, national and international levels in various media and on the Internet; creating a database of rural tourism farms of the republic; creating rural tourism catalogs, etc.

Important prerequisites for successful development of rural tourism in the republic are strategic planning and forecasting of complex territorial development, application of territorial marketing tools, domestic and international best practices, but the main role is with the interested participation of population and local authorities' understanding of their part in establishment and development of rural tourism in the region, their joint and coordinated activities (Barlybaev, Akhmetov, & Nasyrov, 2009).

There is a long-standing need for adopting the regional rural tourism development program that shall describe specific measures aimed at creating material and technical foundation for development of rural tourism in Bashkortostan, means and methods of its support on behalf of national and local authorities, as well as other prerequisites and conditions designed to form favorable environment for the participants of the rural tourism market.

It is important to envisage a set of measures to energize private initiative and entrepreneurship among the rural inhabitants. Activities of farms located in tourism and recreation zones shall be directed towards meeting the needs and demands of vacationers and tourists, improving the content of their recreation by development and implementation of a system of measures aimed at stimulation of small and

medium-scale rural entrepreneurship, including those operating in the sphere of ethnic produce manufacture.

Demand for ethnic produce (including organic produce of Halal standard) and rural tourism services significantly surpasses the supply. In particular, in recent years ethnographic rural tourism has been becoming more and more popular, there is a growing interest to studying the lifestyle of different ethnicities, their arts and crafts, ethnic cuisine and produce produced following traditional ancient recipes and environmentally-friendly technologies.

Patenting, licensing and branding will facilitate increased awareness of produce and services sourced from the Republic of Bashkortostan (Bashkir honey, kumiss, qurut, qazi, talkkuno, kyzyl eremsek), highlighting its uniqueness and competitive advantages, protecting regional producers from unfair competition (Akhmetov & Iakshimbetova, 2018).

The result of developing the rural tourism sector shall be increased popularity of vacationing in the countryside, increased number of rural tourism providers due to their cooperation, forming unions, associations and clusters of rural tourism business. Effects of cooperation and clusterization will be seen in improved infrastructure, optimized distribution of financial and information resources, growth in business relationships and joint relations, minimization of risks and increased profits of cluster (cooperative) participants, increase in the quality of life of the local inhabitants.

Thus, currently, rural tourism is among the key factors in social and economic development of territories, it facilitates development of infrastructural industries, traditional arts and crafts, formation of ethnic brands of different territories, as well as resolves important social, economic and environmental issues in the countryside. It is especially important for depressive territories characterized by high level of unemployment, migration outflow of the most active part of population, lack of small and medium-scale enterprises and prospects for their future development, low income of local inhabitants, etc. At that, stable development of rural tourism would require extensive use of governmental support, such as subsidies and grants (Nasyrov, Ishnazarova, Barlybaev, & Sitnova, 2018; Trukhachev, 2017).

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