

## SCTMG 2020

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

## PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TOURISM IN THE MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS OF RUSSIA

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### *Abstract*

The article analyzes the scientific and practical prerequisites of eco-tourism development in the mountainous regions of Russia as well as the terminology in the domestic and foreign researches. There is a research on the evolution of the concept of ecotourism. The factors limiting this tourism sector in the studied regions include underdeveloped infrastructure, insufficient investment in the tourism sector, a shortage of highly qualified personnel (managers), etc. The potential of natural resources in the mountainous regions of Russia creates good conditions for the development of tourism, particularly, environmentally oriented tourism. The main issue here is to preserve the landscape and biological diversity. The scientifically-based organization of ecotourism in the mountainous regions of Russia will help to preserve the unique natural and cultural-historical heritage and increase the level of socio-economic development. Ecotourism should become the main motive for the local self-realization with a rich distinctive culture and access to better living conditions in the regions.

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**Keywords:** Ecotourism, mountainous regions, sights, recreation, protected areas.



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## **1. Introduction**

Modern ecotourism development issues have the most important theoretical and applied value being one of the most dynamically developing sector of the tourism industry (Fennell, 2015). The concept itself arose in the 1980s and became relatively widespread. Ecotourism has been the subject of many studies that differ in philosophical approaches, methodological focus and research objectives (Bocharnikov & Egidarev, 2017; De Vos et al., 2016; Fedotov & Roshchevkin, 2013; Gómez-Baggethun et al., 2013; Kim & Park, 2016). There have been about 200 cases in the domestic researches when the concept of ecotourism had such explanations and synonyms as nature-oriented, socially responsible, green, stable, conservation with nature, scientific, biosphere, alternative and others (Fedotov & Roshchevkin, 2013; Lapshina, 2008; Lapochkina et al., 2016).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The foreign sources widely use the term ecotourism as well (Boley & Green, 2016; De Vos et al., 2016; Fennell, 2015; Kim & Park, 2016), as for the German-speaking countries the term “Sanfter Tourismus” (soft tourism) (Zakirov & Kozlovskaya, 2019) is more relevant.

## **3. Research Questions**

- What prospects for the development of eco-tourism in the mountainous regions of Russia are actually exist?
- How competitive is North Caucasus region in ecotourism aspects?
- Can be tourism in Russia be internationally appealing?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Ecotourism is a type of nature-oriented tourism directed into wildlife and culture destination without violating the integrity of ecosystems, stimulating the conservation of natural resource potential, environmental protection, and socio-economic development of the touristic territory. The Ecotourism Society, based in the US and the most international of the ecotourism organizations, defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people. In the context of rational nature management, some authors interpret ecotourism as one of the varieties of natural tourism with a main goal to promote the ecological foundations of nature management in the real economy, production and public consciousness (Fedotov & Roshchevkin, 2013).

## **5. Research Methods**

There are methods of comparative geographical analysis, statistical, historical, SWOT analysis and content analysis of published domestic and foreign sources used to assess the tourist and recreational potential of the concept.

## 6. Findings

Other researchers (Lapochkina et al., 2016) attribute the emergence of ecotourism to the increasing pressure on natural and cultural-historical resources due to the mass tourism. Thus, ecotourism aims to provide a balance of environmental, socio-cultural and economic interests, which together constitute the basis of the concept of Sustainable Development adopted in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

The variety of modern approaches to the interpretation of ecotourism can be divided into two main forms: narrow (classic) and broad sense. In the first case, ecotourism involves conducting ecological tours within the boundaries of various specially protected natural territories and water areas. In a broad sense, the meaning of the term brings it closer to the Western European counterpart, according to which all forms of ecologically oriented tourism both within the borders of specially protected natural territories and water areas, and outside their borders.

Ecotourism should include:

- 1) information about the educational tourism products of a nature-orientation, aimed to develop the skills and knowledge of tourists;
- 2) ecosystems conservation through the rational use of natural resources, the involvement of tourists and tour operators into the campaigns for wildlife protection;
- 3) veneration of the customs and traditions of indigenous ethnic groups, intercultural exchange.

According to Lapochkina et al. (2016) and many other researchers one should pay attention to the evolution of ecotourism. This is characterized by manifestations of modern trends, expressed in new forms, as well as the integration of ecotourism with other types of tourism that are not always nature-oriented. Some authors (Shubnitsina, 2016) see ways to minimize the negative impact of tourism in determining and observing the maximum loads on tourist routes and trails, regulating and clearly controlling the flow of tourists.

Modern researchers focused on this topic mark the need for greater environmental awareness of tourists and the promotion of their environmental responsibility as the most important condition for the development of ecotourism (Ermolina et al., 2011; Han et al., 2018; Lin, 2018).

According the statistics, ecotourism accounts for more than 10–20 % of the profit from the entire tourism market (Lapochkina et al., 2016). The United States, Canada, Australia, Germany and other developed countries have achieved the greatest success in this area. Ecotourists are mostly interested in such developing countries as Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal, Ecuador. According to the World Tourism Organization, Russia has a great potential and opportunity to develop ecotourism and become one of the leading countries in this area. Nevertheless, due to various limiting factors, Russia lacks good practice in the field of ecotourism. There are researchers describing this issues as ‘the lack of motivation, desire and financing (Lapochkina et al., 2016).

As mentioned above, the basic principle of the international ecotourism is a travel into the wildlife, responsibility for the nature protection, enhancing the ecological culture of tourists and fulfilling an educational function.

Natural systems to the least extent transformed by anthropogenic activities are confined to mountainous regions. The mountainous regions of Russia which are stepping forward the development of

ecotourism are the North Caucasus, Altai, the Far East and others. Collective strives and good conditions for the development of ecotourism create an economic and geographical position, potential for natural-resource, cultural and historical heritage. According to Kovalenko and Aleksandrov (2013), ecotourism may become a priority sector of the economy of the North Caucasus Federal District. In the modern world, the development of ecotourism is inextricably linked with the system of specially protected natural territories (SPNA).

The mountainous regions of the North Caucasus as a whole have a high level of biodiversity compared to other regions of Russia. However, the area of protected natural territories is minimal in comparison with other mountainous regions (Zaburaeva, 2014). There are no national parks in the North-East of the Caucasus, and nature reserves in the Chechen Republic.

The Law of the Chechen Republic "Specially Protected Natural Territories" from December 4, 2006 No. 40-P3 (updated on November 11, 2018), the Chechen Republic divides the territories into natural parks; state nature reserves; natural monuments; dendrological parks and botanical gardens.

The above mentioned Law from February 27, 1992 (updated on June 21, 2019), in addition to the categories of protected areas provided for by federal law, there are ecological and ethnic zones identified. These areas require a special nature management regime in order to preserve and restore biological natural resources, habitat and traditional lifestyle of this population. Among all regions of Russia, Dagestan stands out for its higher level of ethnic and cultural diversity. There are about 30 nationalities living here in a small area.

The system of protected areas in the North-East Caucasus began to take shape in 1963, when hunting reserves were established in Chechen-Ingushetia - Sovetsky, Vedensky and Parabochevsky. The total area of federal protected areas in the North-East Caucasus is about 330 thousand ha, including 2 reserves, 7 reserves and 1 botanical garden (Zaburaeva, 2014). The "youngest" reserve of the North-East Caucasus was formed in Ingushetia by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation on December 21, 2000 identified by No. 992.

The regional conservation areas of the North-East Caucasus include state nature reserves (Bezhtinsky, Stepnoy, Shalinsky, Vedensky, Urus-Martanovsky, Bragunsky and others), a natural park (Upper Gunib), a dendrological park (Grozny) and numerous botanical (linden park) Caucasian, Oak-old-timer, Kazanischensky, Sosnovka), hydrological (lakes: Kezenoi-Am, Galanzhozhskoye, Shaitan-Kazak, Mochokh, mineral springs: Melch-Khi, Ephe, waterfalls: Shatoysky, Khanagsky, Chvakhilo), geological (oil sources: in the valley of the Bolshaya Yara river -Su, on the outskirts. Simsy) palaeo (outliers "Arch" and "brother" in the upper p. Gehinka, Assatinskaya Cave) and others. Monuments nature.

Waterfalls as the Vashindaroevsky waterfall in the Varanda river valley are very picturesque on the mountain rivers of the North-East Caucasus (Zaburaeva et al., 2018). This waterfall is situated in the easy-to-reach area and considered one of the most popular place among tourists until 1990s. The Guadarine, Hanag and Khunzakh waterfalls situated in Dagestan are also known very attractive.

An important component of natural recreational resources are lakes used for recreation and boating. Lakes of various origins (dammed, landslide, glacial, karst, etc.) are numerous in the studied regions, which attract recreants due to their proximity to settlements. At the same time, they are more vulnerable ecologically in comparison with large water bodies.

The Kezenoy-Am Lake is particularly popular. Being the largest alpine reservoir in the North Caucasus the lake was declared a natural monument in 1978 (Zaburaeva et al., 2018). There was an Olympic base for the USSR national rowing team and nowadays attracts a significant number of recreants (Zaburaeva, 2014). Lake Galanchozhskoe in the mountainous part of Chechnya is framed by emerald greenery of subalpine meadows at an altitude of 1533 m above sea level. Very unusual Mochokhs koye lake in the Khunzakhsky district of Dagestan. It arose as a result of a landslide and the formation of a natural dam 60 meters high in 1963.

Ecotourism in the mountainous regions of Russia is still being developed. For example, the largest republic of the North Caucasus (Dagestan) attracts no more than 5 % of tourist enterprises specialized in environmental tourism.

In the mountainous regions of the North Caucasus, the most interesting are sports, health-improving, extreme and beach tourism. Mountain landscapes with lake mud and mineral springs with a wide range of medicinal properties have significant healing and health potential. Mineral water was used to treat a wide range of diseases (cardiovascular, skin diseases, diseases of the joints, bones, muscles, etc.

There are mineral sources of various chemical composition with an important balneological value: carbonic hydrochloric, alkaline, sulfate-calcium hydrogen sulfide, hydrogen sulfide-chloride sodium, alkaline hydrogen sulfide thermal in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Sources of the Isti-Su group (Melch-Hee, Enhe, Neftyanaya hot), declared natural monuments, are located at the foot of the northern slope of the Gudermes ridge. In the coastal part of Dagestan, highly mineralized sodium chloride waters with a high content of trace elements: iodine, bromine, and boron are widespread.

The differentiated nature of the relief led to a variety of floristic resources of the Caucasus. The flora of Chechnya has more than 2200 species, Dagestan – 4500, and Ingushetia – more than 1400 species. Of great recreational value are forest resources. An important role is played by the species composition of forests, their properties that determine the physiological and psychological comfort of outdoor recreation (spatial structure of forests, the presence of open and half-open spaces, etc.). The average forest cover in Chechnya is – 21.6 %, Ingushetia – 21.8 %, and in Dagestan – 10.6 %.

Cultural and historical recreational resources include the entire set of achievements of the Caucasian peoples in material sense, education, science, art, in the organization of state and public life. Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia have a significant historical and cultural heritage especially widely represented by architectural, historical and archaeological sites.

The Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve is considered one of the main attractions of the Chechen Republic. On February 20, 1995 the President of the Russian Federation signed the paper identified by No. 176 to include it in the list of historical and cultural heritage on the federal significance. The castle is built huge and complex in the 13th Century in the mountainous area with unique historical and architectural species. In total, in the Argun reserve on an area of 240 thousand hectares there are 650 active cultural monuments and about 200 stone towers need to restoration (Zaburaeva, 2014). There are rare species of flora and fauna represented only on the territory of the museum-reserve and listed in the Red Book of the Russian Federation.

In Dagestan, there are over 6 thousand historical and cultural monuments, including 132 of them of federal significance. The oldest cultural center is Derbent with the Naryn-Kala fortress, recognized by

UNESCO as a monument of world significance. This picturesque terraced mountain slopes, ancient watchtowers, signal towers, mosques and other structures have been preserved in many suburban areas.

Mountainous Ingushetia is also rich in unique monuments of historical and cultural heritage. Here is the Dzheyrakh-Assinsky State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve. The combination of natural complexes with numerous medieval architectural monuments creates favorable conditions for the development of tourism. Of particular interest are the gorges of Assa, Dzheyrakh, Galgaich, Armkhi, Guloi-hee, Targim depression and others. Among the most significant monuments are the temples of Albi-Erdy, Thaba-Erdy, the castle complex Vovnushki, architectural complexes Hamhi, Targim, Egikal and others.

There are significant recreational resources for the development of ecological tourism in the Altai Territory: over 2000 lakes, about 36 species of rare and endangered plants, more than 130 species of birds, 26 species of mammals (Alyoshin, 2005). There is a high diversity of landscapes – from dry steppe to mountain taiga, mountain tundra, alpine-subalpine. Nevertheless, tourism is developing in an unorganized manner, in the absence of proper participation and control of local tourism companies, the regional administration and local authorities, which, in turn, creates environmental and economic problems (environmental pollution, lack of economic profit for the local population and the regional budget ) (Alyoshin, 2005).

The Far East of Russia also has rich natural potential and favorable conditions for the development of ecotourism. Recently, one can notice an increased interest in this type of tourism as a promising area that contributes to the preservation of the natural heritage of the region. Although its development at the proper level is complicated by harsh natural and climatic conditions, a low level of development of tourism infrastructure, and a shortage of cross-border transport links (Zakirov & Kozlovskaya, 2019).

The tourism industry as a whole includes a number of elements that a tourist is counting on (objects, housing, transport, attractions, etc.). Fennell (2015) a special role as a fundamental element of the tourism industry is given to attractions. On the other hand, the image of a region (country) is formed by the quality of service, infrastructure, and hospitality of the local population (Ouyang et al., 2017). De Vos et al. (2016) directly link tourism revenue with infrastructure development and business models for the development of protected areas.

Certain prospects in the conditions of mountain regions of Russia are associated with the development of a direction close to ecotourism – pilgrimage (Alyoshin, 2005; Kovalenko & Aleksandrov, 2013; Khusainov et al., 2017; Zaburaeva, 2014). Often it is defined as a kind of religious tourism, but the behavior of pilgrims is fundamentally different from tourist. They are more careful about environmental protection and much less demanding on comfort, quality of service, food and accommodation. They pay much attention to worship and prayers. Thus, the pilgrims for the most part give (energy, strength) to nature than consume its benefits.

## **7. Conclusion**

The potential of natural resources in the mountainous regions of Russia creates good conditions for the development of tourism, particularly, environmentally oriented tourism. The main issue here is to preserve the landscape and biological diversity. One of the key factors limiting the development of

ecotourism in the mountainous regions of Russia is the underdeveloped infrastructure, the lack of highly qualified personnel (managers) in the tourism sector, etc.

According to Fedotov and Roshchevkin (2013), the objects of ecological tours can be both protected areas designed to maintain the natural ecological balance in landscapes, as well as cultural landscapes recreated by man through ecological knowledge, as well as ecosystems destroyed due to irrational nature management, which demonstrate damage caused to the environment by neglect of environmental laws.

The science-based planning and development of the model of ecological tourism in the studied regions will contribute to the preservation of natural and cultural diversity, increase the level of ecological education of visitors; reduce environmental costs; development of a regional economy; involving local people in tourism activities.

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