

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Environmental tourism as a resource for the sustainable social and economic development of regions

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The authors note that today, in most cases, protected areas are the only structures in the regions that can take over planning, managing, and monitoring tourism activities, which is an indispensable condition for environmental tourism. It is shown that the territories most visited by ecotourists are situated in developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, and Australia and Oceania. Social and economic, and political factors significantly impact the geography of demand and supply in environmental tourism. The authors prove that world experience shows that environmental tourism's social and economic efficiency is highest at the local and regional levels. Therefore, protected areas can become a natural source of new jobs and additional sources of income in the local economy. The development of environmental tourism in protected areas will help to attract international attention and investment to the region, which, in turn, will increase the importance of protected areas in the eyes of the local population and change their attitude to environmental problems.

**Keywords:** Environmental tourism, sustainable development, natural ecosystems environmental sustainability, social and economic development of regions.

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### Introduction

The term "sustainable development" first appeared in 1980 in the published document "World Strategy for the Protection of the Environment". It emphasized that modern society exerts too much pressure on the environmental sphere of the planet, leading to its degradation. Currently, the development of environmental tourism, like society as a whole, is impossible outside the concept of sustainable development. Only an immediate transition to sustainable development will meet the existing needs of people while ensuring the same opportunity for future generations. The concept of sustainable development is imperfect at the initial stages of development and implementation. However, at the same time, it is the most realistic of what modern science has, and therefore can be considered at this stage of economic development as the basis of a strategy for further development.

The World Conservation Union formulates the concept of sustainable development as follows: "Sustainable development is a process in which development takes place without damaging resources and wasting them, which makes development possible. This is generally achieved either by managing resources at the same rate as they are used or switching from slow renewable resources to fast renewable resources. With this approach, resources can be used by both future and present generations".

Through the efforts of the World Tourism Organization experts, the concept of sustainable development has been further developed in the field of tourism. At the International Conference held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1990, the following types of positive impacts of tourism on the sustainable development of the territory were formulated:

- Contributes to the choice of areas of its influence on the natural, cultural and social sphere of the region;
- Ensures equitable distribution of income and expenses, creates jobs directly in the local tourism sector and related sectors;
- Stimulates the improvement of the efficiency of accommodation facilities, food, transport, excursion show facilities;
- Facilitates the inflow of foreign exchange into the region and provides investment in the regional economy, promotes the diversification of the regional economy, especially in rural areas where employment can be seasonal;
- Encourages the modernization of regional transport, communications, and other basic systems infrastructures;
- Creates recreational facilities that can be used by residents, as well as domestic and international tourists;
- Finances the preservation of local historical and architectural monuments; promotes the productive use of land that is not of agricultural importance, which allows the conservation of natural flora in large areas;
- Forms the growth of self-awareness among the local population and makes it possible to achieve better understanding and close contacts between people representing different cultures;

Clearly demonstrates the importance of natural and cultural and historical resources for society's economic and social well-being and helps to preserve them.

## **Methods**

The methodological basis of the research is a systematic approach to managing management problems and integrated economic analysis, mathematical. The authors relied on domestic and foreign theoretical and methodological developments in tourism management, materials, and recommendations of scientific conferences, symposia, and seminars.

## **Information sources**

The official legal documentation on tourism management is used in work. In the development of theoretical issues, the work of domestic and foreign scientists was used, devoted to the development of the theory of organization, marketing, and strategic management in environmental tourism.

## **Results and Discussion**

Environmental tourism differs from traditional tourism in the following features: the predominance of natural objects of tourism, sustainable environmental management, less resource and energy intensity, direct participation in the social and economic development of the territories, environmental education of tourists.

Environmental tourism is very diverse in terms of travel geography. The main factor that determines the geography of environmental tourism is the presence of attractive little-changed natural complexes. Many ecotourists attract territories with maximum biodiversity-equatorial and tropical forests, savannahs and mountainous areas (Fennel, 2007; Borysova et al., 2021).

The territories most visited by ecotourists are situated in developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, and Australia and Oceania. Social and economic, and political factors significantly impact the geography of demand and supply in environmental tourism. These factors often limit the geographical spread of environmental tourism in countries with reactionary political regimes, closed economies, and low levels of economic development.

For example, a German consumer interested in environmental tourism favors Costa Rica, which leads by a clear margin from its competitors, because of the country's stable political environment for many years.

The country's geographical location affects the predominance of tourists from different countries and regions in countries specializing in environmental tourism. For example, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific region are dominated by tourists from North America; there are Europeans in Africa and South Asia. In many former colonies, a significant part comes from the former metropolises. For example, in Kenya, tourists from the UK predominate, but they make up a large share in Australia, India, New Zealand. In Madagascar and Mauritius, tourists from France are leading (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Bustam, Buta & Stein, 2012).

A series of sociological studies conducted in the USA revealed the following five main motivations based on which clients choose environmental tours:

- Improving physical fitness and health;
- Informal communication;
- New experiences and adventures;
- Knowledge of oneself and nature;
- "Flight" from urban cramp and stresses.

Despite the massive variety of ecotourists, they all combine some standard features that are recommended to be taken explicitly into account when organizing and marketing environmental tourism. Ecotourists love active recreation but are not supporters of extreme conditions and prefer "soft" tours (Macdonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Doran, Hanss & Larsen, 2015) instead. During travel, tourists strive to experience something new and meaningful, they choose such tours that enable development, self-improvement, as well as knowledge and acquisition of new experience.

Since the main thing that attracts ecotourists in the wild, ecotourists are less demanding on comfort without human intervention and nature traces. So, more than 80% of visitors to natural parks in Latin America were quite satisfied with their journey, despite the primitiveness of tourist infrastructure. There is an opportunity to identify four main types of environmental tourism participants based on their objectives and the nature of their activities:

- Highly specialized ones—scientists or participants in specialized tours (environmental, educational, scientific, ornithological, botanical, ethnographic, archaeological);
- Enthusiastic tourists who purposefully come to specially protected natural areas in order to know the local nature and culture;
- The mainstream is tourists, whose primary purpose is simply an "unusual journey" (for example, through the Amazon or to the mountain gorilla park in Rwanda);
- Casual tourists, for whom visiting natural corners is a random part of a more extensive tour (Gössling et al., 2005; Fennel, 2007).

However, such a classification is not undeniable since the same tourist at different times and under different circumstances can be classified into different categories.

It should be noted that the development of environmental tourism is not just a business, and maximizing profit is not its own goal. Because of this, the introduction of the theory and practice of such tourism cannot be based on ordinary travel agencies.

Today, in most cases, protected areas are the only structures in the regions that can take over planning, managing and monitoring tourism activities, which is an indispensable condition for environmental tourism.

There are scientific departments whose functions include the constant monitoring of natural ecosystems. In general, they are a network of research institutions covering a variety of natural zones. This makes any educational tourism, student practices, scientific tours and volunteer programs up-and-coming.

The combination of environmental education and tourism activities based on protected areas will significantly increase the effectiveness of environmental education, draw the general public's attention to environmental protection issues, and strengthen public support for protected areas. Moreover, protected areas will have a real potential to become centers of social and cultural life (Cerina, Markandya & McAller, 2011; Boley, McGehee, Perdue & Long, 2014).

World experience shows that environmental tourism's social and economic efficiency is highest at the local and regional levels. Therefore, protected areas can become a real source of new jobs and additional sources of income in the local economy. The development of environmental tourism in protected areas will help to attract international attention and investment to the region, which, in turn, will increase the importance of protected areas in the eyes of the local population and change their attitude to environmental problems.

To date, opportunities for the development of environmental tourism in protected areas remain debatable both among representatives of the scientific community and various environmental organizations and PA staff. Many still see the very idea of developing environmental tourism in protected areas as an encroachment on the fundamental principles of nature protection. The main argument is that the conservation system developed uniquely, as a standard of untouched nature, on which only scientific research is permissible. However, an analysis of the documents showed that this issue was never resolved unequivocally, and among the founders of the conservation work, there were always supporters of the ideas of its wide popularization.

In its development, environmental tourism in Ukraine meets several serious problems. It is advisable to identify the following major groups of these problems and identify ways to solve them (Fennel, 2007; Bustam, Buta & Stein, 2012).

The first group of problems is the disunity of participants in environmental and tourist activities, the absence of specialized tour operators, insufficiently developed legal framework, and an information deficit. Therefore, it is necessary to create associations and chains of environmental tourism enterprises (including national parks) and tourism agencies, to create special databases, to disseminate the experience of successful pilot environmental tourism projects. Thus, the task is to identify, inventory, and evaluate environmental and tourist resources and situations.

The second and third groups of problems are specifically Ukrainian. These are expensive transport services due to the monopoly of carriers. And in addition, a low level of service with inadequately high prices, especially for accommodation and food services. Overpricing is primarily due to ineffective state tax policies. Its improvement is possible in the regions through the introduction by the regions of Ukraine of local tourist rents collected from tourist enterprises by reducing other taxes. This rent should be specifically designed to invest in the conservation, rehabilitation and development of recreational resources, which requires developing a cadastre of environmental tourist areas.

The fourth group of Ukrainian problems is associated with the habit of citizens and heads of enterprises and the authorities to free natural resources. This is one of the reasons for the underdevelopment of environmental culture, neglect of environmental law.

The fifth group is the general lack of construction of the territory, the poor development of environmental infrastructure and environmental technologies in tourism. Overcoming this group of problems requires considerable time and effort. One possible way is to develop economic mechanisms that effectively integrate the environmental benefits of a tourist product into its value (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Cerina, Markandya & McAller, 2011).

It is also important to promote international cooperation between tour operators, environmentalists, and geographers. Often, major national and international environmental alliances and foundations focus their efforts and funds exclusively on the strict protection of wildlife, protecting flora and fauna without paying attention to the essential means of environmental education, such as environmental tourism. Meanwhile, in the buffer zones of biosphere reserves and in other territories where traditional, aboriginal forms of environmental management are implemented and should be preserved, environmental tourism programs and goals can naturally be combined.

The modern attitude towards protected areas as closed institutions protecting untouched natural areas for scientific purposes has led to severe problems - isolation from the regions' general social and economic development and lack of support from the local population. The recent economic crisis has further exacerbated the contradictions between the unemployed and PA, which are perceived as natural resources removed from use for unclear reasons and uncertain purposes. The need to develop environmental education and tourism in the PA has become an issue where budget cuts have led to serious thinking about the need to find extra-budgetary funds that can be used as income from environmental tourism [Cerina, Markandya & McAller, 2011; Doran, Hanss & Larsen, 2015).

Many protected areas have little idea of the essence of environmental tourism and the principles of its organization. At the same time, spontaneous development of environmental tourism often arises, and many still see this activity mainly as a source of additional income. This is a severe danger. Without proper planning and management, in the absence of knowledge and experience in this specific area of activity, environmental tourism will not provide significant economic benefits to protected areas and residents. Instead, it can irreparably damage unique ecosystems and discredit the very idea of environmental tourism development.

Currently, the further effective development of environmental tourism is hampered by the following reasons.

At the state and regional levels, these reasons are as follows:

- The economic crisis and political instability have an impact on Ukraine's image, especially in the eyes of foreign tourists;
- Imperfection of legislation, in particular - tax policy, visa system, land-use rules. Today, legal and economic conditions do not create favorable conditions for investment in the development of environmental tourism. In many cases, the development of

environmental tourism is disadvantageous for nature reserves, as they are forced to contribute a significant part of the funds as taxes;

- Lack of a strategy and specific plans for environmental tourism development based on protected areas. Environmental tourism plans could become a visible phenomenon at the regional level and be included in regional social and economic development plans and other areas.

Thus, environmental tourism has not yet received sufficient attention either from the state or from commercial structures. Weak legal support and the structural space of this sphere of the economy, the lack of tools for the examination of individual projects often give rise to uncivilized development of the tourism market by both local and external participants in the process, the main motive of which is to obtain maximum profit in a short time (Gössling et al., 2005; Bustam, Buta & Stein, 2012).

At the local level, these reasons are as follows:

- Most protected areas do not have adequate mechanisms to determine permissible recreational loads and monitor the environmental impact of tourism. This makes them vulnerable to possible environmental problems caused by tourism, which is carried out without proper planning and control;

- lack or insufficient comfort of infrastructure - living conditions, vehicles, organized tourist routes, equipped ecopath, observation towers, and other devices. The presence of some basic infrastructure and household amenities would significantly increase the flow of ecotourists. Improved infrastructure would allow protected areas and local communities to expand the range of paid services offered to tourists and thereby increase their incomes;

- Lack of detailed information on tour areas and environmental education programs in PA. Even in protected areas where there are eco-centers and some experience in environmental education, programs are often targeted at some abstract "average" visitor and do not correspond to the interests and level of training of specific people;

- Lack of specialized information, such as lists of plant and animal species with comments, lists of rare and endangered species, etc. The success of environmental tourism, especially international environmental tourism, depends on a large extent of the ability of visitors to obtain adequate information even before the start of the trip;

- No packages of routes and programs have been developed for different categories of tourists, i.e., no tourist product meets the standards of the international tourism market;

- Ukrainian staff lack the experience and knowledge necessary for the successful organization of tourism, especially in marketing, educational programs for various categories of visitors, pricing, ensuring adequate quality of services. Often, the "host" has a very vague idea about its guests' actual needs and desires, especially foreign ones. The organization of training of Ukrainian personnel would significantly improve the quality of environmental tourism and the satisfaction of visitors even without changing the basic infrastructure;

- Ukrainian natural territories are not able to provide tourists with a sufficient variety of paid services and products, so their tourism revenues are still significantly lower than they could be;

- There are no common civilized standards for pricing the services provided by PA for tourists; often, the services provided do not correspond to the level of prices;

- Most Ukrainian natural territories lack high-quality advertising and information materials and opportunities to enter the particular international environmental tourism market. Marketing problems are the most serious factor hampering the development of environmental tourism in Ukraine. Until now, the world community does not have adequate information about Ukrainian protected areas, their significance and the possibility of visiting them;

- There are no specialized structures capable of organizing and coordinating the development of environmental tourism at the state and regional levels;

Most protected areas seriously underestimate the need for local participation in environmental tourism.- There are no mechanisms in place where part of environmental tourism's financial revenue is directed to local settlements. Meanwhile, as world practice shows, this could be a good opportunity to change the attitude of residents towards protected areas, attract them to cooperation, get their support, and smooth out existing contradictions (Gössling et al., 2005; Bustam, Buta & Stein, 2012).

For environmental tourism to develop following international principles, coordination at all levels is needed within the framework of sustainable tourism. The unity of advertising and marketing policies, the development of corporate ethics, the uniform standards of service, and the organization of environmental tourism in protected areas will ensure the successful implementation of all proposed activities. The development of environmental tourism should be coordinated at the state level and at the level of regional reserve associations.

An analysis of foreign and Ukrainian experience shows that even in the current social and economic conditions, it is possible to make the development of environmental tourism much more effective, i.e., minimize negative effects and maximize potential benefits from the point of view of nature protection and social and economic development of the regions.

## **Conclusion**

A study of data on the development of environmental tourism in the world shows that the main factor determining the geography of environmental tourism is the presence of attractive little-changed natural complexes, territories with maximum biodiversity. In addition, social and economic and political factors, which limit the geographical spread of environmental tourism in countries with reactionary political regimes, closed economies and low levels of economic development, have a significant impact on the geography of demand and supply in environmental tourism.

The primary trend of the next few decades is revealed - the demand for environmental tourism and related facilities will overgrow. The basis of the demand for this type of tourism consists of the following factors:

- The growing interest of tourists in travel, which would contribute to increasing their knowledge of nature and man;
- Increasing the concern of people for their health and maintaining good physical, shape, as a result of which active recreation in nature becomes fashionable;
- Increased attention to environmental conservation (people are in a hurry to see the corners of wildlife that may disappear in a few decades).

The popularity of most territories in the tourism business is based on the purity of the environment, historical and cultural heritage, and local culture's identity. Therefore, territories that can specialize in environmental tourism count on the success and development of tourism only by respecting the basic principles of sustainable development. Concerning tourism, the sustainable development of the territory implies:

- Environmental sustainability, which ensures the rationalization of land use, the sustainable maintenance and protection of rare and endangered species of animals and plants, as well as natural complexes in general (specially protected areas);
- Social and cultural sustainability, which includes a situation where environmental tourism is compatible with the preservation of cultural and historical values and traditions, local identity, as well as an increase in intercultural understanding and respect.

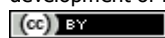
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