

## **Social and Legal Mechanisms for Stimulating the Development of Ecotourism: International Practice and the Possibilities of its Application**

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### **Abstract**

*The study reveals the concept and essence of ecological tourism and considers a complex of environmental and social problems that can be solved if it is widespread. The international experience of public and private participation in supporting ecotourism has been studied. The possibility of conducting an effective environmental policy and interaction between public and private structures, designed to monitor the development of ecotourism and minimize the impact on the environment from the constantly increasing tourist flow, is shown. Particular attention is paid to the institutional features of the promotion of ecotourism, and the role of legal regulation in the support as well as the development of ecotourism is revealed. The authors examine in detail the private and state mechanisms for certification and regulation of the activities of companies operating on the market of ecological tourism services and touch on the issues of stimulating its development. As a first step towards the development of programs that provide for the use of mechanisms of social and legal incentives for the development of ecotourism, it is proposed to develop and legislatively consolidate its definition.*

**Key-words:** Ecological Tourism, Legal Regulation, Support Measures, Improving the Well-being of the Population, Sustainable Development.

### **1. Introduction**

The study examines the social and legal mechanisms for stimulating ecological tourism. Under the restrictions imposed by many states in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, many types of tourism are not in demand. One of the types of tourism that remains popular is ecological

tourism, through which the problems of environmental protection and restoration and social problems of the population can be simultaneously solved. We aim to show the main organizational and legal problems that hinder the spread of ecological tourism and provide support measures of a social and legal nature for the spread of this type of tourism [20-22].

Tourism is currently undergoing a severe crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the duration and possible consequences of which are not yet determined. The World Trade Organization (WTO) has already revised its forecast for international tourist flows for 2021, considering its likely decline by 20-30% [1]. Moreover, it is obvious that a quick recovery of the tourism industry cannot be expected, since the demand of the population, due to a decrease or loss of income for the services of the tourism industry, will remain limited for some time. The industry itself, including the infrastructure, will face numerous bankruptcies, and among potential tourists, distrust of long trips abroad will remain. The Russian tourism industry is no exception. Inbound tourist flow according to the Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in the first half of 2020 fell by 83.6%. In the first quarter, 322.8 thousand trips were made for tourism purposes. In the second, after the closure of the Russian borders, this indicator reached zero [2]. Russian domestic tourism has suffered less from the crisis. This kind of tourism, even under conditions of restrictions, not only will bring additional income to the country's budget but will also help in the rehabilitation and transformation of the industry as a whole and minimize the damage in case of such repeated shocks. Head of Rostourism (Federal Agency for Tourism) Z.V. Doguzova is convinced that the situation that has developed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic opens up unique opportunities for the development of domestic tourism in Russia, and the tourism industry as a whole for some regions can become the most important driver of economic recovery [3].

In addition, many tourists today, guided by the popularity of a healthy lifestyle and conscious behavior in the environment trends, choose sustainable destinations as their vacation spot. The modern tourism industry, according to several experts, is becoming more and more "green", as many tourists are paying attention to the issues of environmental friendliness of resorts and destinations, aspects of the preservation of natural complexes. More tourists choose natural, relatively untouched by economic activities territories, as potential destinations [4].

It is likely that due to the fear of large crowds, the popularity of ecological routes, forest hikes, and similar types of individual recreation will only grow. The study of the main directions of development of the tourism sector shows that the priority development of ecological tourism in all its various forms is on the agenda. After the end of the global pandemic, the demand for ecotourism is likely to increase significantly [5].

Thus, now, the development of a state policy in the field of tourism, stimulation of the development of niche areas [23, 24], in particular, ecological tourism in its various manifestations, and consideration of the tourism industry as one of the engines of the revitalization of the regional economy are acquiring key importance.

The growing popularity of ecological tourism is gaining increased interest in it from both theoretical scientists and practitioners. Today, publications are actively appearing on various aspects of ecotourism. The most popular areas of research in ecotourism are theoretical research (study of approaches to the definition, characteristics of certain types of ecotourism, debatable issues and problems of sustainability of this area) [4, 6], research of international experience in ecotourism management [7-9], issues of environmental safety in tourism, the study of Russian experience and ecotourism destinations [5]. International studies are devoted to a theoretical discussion of the essence of ecotourism [10], general problems of the development of this type – ethical, economic, and ecological [11], the characteristics of ecological tourism, as well as the problems of ecological tourism management in certain regions, countries [12] and destinations [13]. At the same time, there is no generalization of the mechanisms of social and legal stimulation of the development of ecological tourism in different countries, analysis of the possibilities of their application. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to summarize the experience and review the best practices for promoting ecotourism [26, 27]. The hypothesis of the study: for the effective use of social and legal mechanisms to stimulate ecological tourism in Russia, it is necessary, first of all, to develop and consolidate its legal definition.

## **2. Methods**

The study was carried out using the dialectical method of cognition of reality, in combination with historical, statistical, formal legal methods, and method of comparative jurisprudence. The informational basis for the study was: regulatory documents from reference and legal systems; statistical data, other relevant information available on the official websites of government agencies, environmental organizations, tourist business communities, and news agencies. The theoretical basis of the study was the opinions of scientists on the concept, essence, and methods of regulation of ecological tourism, in available scientific works.

### 3. Results

Every year, with the development of industrial production, the negative impact on the environment increased and began to lose its pristine beauty and attractiveness, which affected the attraction of tourists. The tourism industry, primarily in industrialized countries, was forced to think about negative changes in natural landscapes and ecosystems and the deteriorating environmental situation in the world. At the end of the 20th century, the first scientific studies appeared, devoted to the study of the negative consequences of the mass gathering of tourists for the environment [10]. Scientific research and awareness of the need to change the current situation led to the emergence of the concepts “soft tourism”, “green tourism”, and “ecological tourism”, which included recommendations for the conscious and environmentally competent use of natural areas. A new idea of tourism formed, which includes is being responsible to nature, contributing to its protection, enhancing ecological culture, and respecting the traditions and culture of the local population [6]. The idea of developing ecological tourism reflects the need to create a balance between economic benefits and environmental safety. Ecological tourism is the type of tourism that is closest to the environment in its broadest sense. It is based on the use of predominantly natural resources, minimizes damage to the natural and sociocultural environment, focuses on environmental education, ensures sustainable economic and social development, as well as the cultural and environmental well-being of the local population. In the context of the growing environmental crisis, the development of green tourism has acquired particular relevance.

Today, ecological tourism is the only type in the tourism industry, the purpose of which is to preserve the environment and cultural values that serve as a source of income for the local population [13]. By offering long-term market-based solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives to conserve and enhance biocultural diversity and helps protect and preserve the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet. In addition, by enhancing local capacity and employment opportunities, ecotourism is an effective means of empowering local communities around the world to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development. It is also important that ecological tourism contributes to a greater understanding of nature, local society, and their culture [13].

Despite the official state support for ecological tourism, the legislation of the Russian Federation has not yet developed a unified approach to the definition of this term and there is no legislative consolidation in the form of a rule of law. In the normative acts that regulate relations in the field of the environment, the concepts “environmental education”, as well as “educational tourism”, which are close in meaning, used. The definition of environmental education is given in Article 74 of the Federal Law “On Environmental Protection”: to form an environmental culture in

society, foster respect for nature, rational use of natural resources, environmental education is carried out through the dissemination of environmental knowledge about environmental safety, information about the state of the environment and the use of natural resources [14]. There is no normative consolidation of the concept “cultural tourism” in federal laws, however, in the order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated December 22, 2011 N 2322-r “On the Development of a System of Specially Protected Natural Areas of Federal Significance up to 2020” [15] the term is defined as one of the special types of ecological tourism, the main purpose of which is to get acquainted with natural and cultural attractions. The definition of ecological tourism is mentioned in the Strategy for the development of tourism in the Russian Federation up to 2035 [16]. This document uses the definition of ecological tourism in accordance with the current GOST R56642 - 2015 “Tourist services. Ecological tourism. General requirements”. Ecological tourism refers to the activity of organizing travel, which includes all forms of nature tourism, in which the main motivation of tourists is observation and introduction to nature while striving to preserve it. It should be noted that in international practice there are completely different approaches to the definition of ecological tourism. One of the most cited is given by Mexican environmental economist Hector Ceballos-Lascurain and approved by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Ecological tourism is considered as a type of tourism that is compatible with the tourist’s ecological and social obligations to preserve the environment, respect the traditional cultures of the local population and perform an ecological and educational function. The prerequisites for its implementation are relatively untouched natural and distinctive cultural landscapes, sensitive respect for ecosystems, assistance in the implementation of nature conservation objects, and improving the well-being of the local population [10]. International experience shows [17] that projects for the development of ecological tourism are primarily aimed at implementing the concept of sustainable development. This is ensured, firstly, when the socioeconomic well-being of local communities is achieved through additional earnings of the population involved in tourist and recreational activities. Secondly, the attracted additional funds contribute to the development of environmental protection programs and testing of new approaches to the preservation of natural heritage. The use of the internationally recognized definition of ecological tourism in the Russian regulatory and legal field would expand the understanding of this type of tourist and recreational activity and draw public attention to the problem of sustainable socioeconomic development of natural areas, taking into account environmental factors.

Thus, the development of the definition of “ecological tourism” and its legal consolidation is one of the most important legislative tasks in the field of tourism development. Federal Law “On the Basics of Tourist Activity in the Russian Federation” [18] in Article 1 “Basic concepts” contains norms that consolidate the basic definitions of various types of tourism to further disclose the features

of their management. This approach made it possible to increase the efficiency of legal regulation of such types of tourism as “amateur tourism”, “children’s tourism”, “social tourism”, etc. Therefore, one of the possible mechanisms for the normative consolidation of the concept “ecological tourism” may be amending the said law on the foundations of tourism, which will lay the foundations for the further development of the legal and regulatory framework for the regulation of ecological tourism in the Russian Federation

Therefore, it is important to consider the best practices in the development of ecological tourism, the management system for this area of activity, and the mechanisms for its stimulation in the world and individual countries, to identify the most successful and applicable practices in Russia, as well as modern trends in this area.

#### **4. Discussion**

The UK, which is one of the greenest places in the world, is one of the leading ecotourism destinations. More and more environmentally accredited hotels are emerging in the country, and more and more representatives of the tourism industry are trying to reduce their impact on the environment. The number of organizations participating in green accreditation schemes is constantly growing [8]. VisitBritain currently operates the largest green accreditation scheme in the world, the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS). GTBS awards accommodations and visits that make arrangements for local and wider environmental support. It is the largest green tourism development, support, and control scheme operating globally and evaluating hundreds of holiday destinations in the UK [8]. Businesses that meet the standard set by the GTBS program receive a bronze, silver, or gold award, depending on their level of achievement. Areas assessed by this program include: management and marketing, social engagement and communications, energy, water supply, purchasing, waste management, travel, natural and cultural heritage, and innovation. In the list of participants in the program of places to stay and visit, one can find companies with the logo “working towards green tourism” [8]. These enterprises are participating in a program called “Green Start” and are just beginning to plan and implement the first changes in their business, aimed at reducing the negative impact on the environment. The Green Start program is the basis for any tourism business that has embarked on the path of sustainable (green) development and serves as a kind of springboard for companies wishing to obtain accreditation under one of the schemes supported by VisitBritain [8]. By accepting the terms of the Green Start, a business is communicating to visitors that it recognizes the importance and value of sustainable practices. The program covers over 2000 members in the UK, Ireland, and Canada. GTBS is the largest and most respected sustainability certification program in

the world [8]. It offers a reliable, credible, independent assessment of the tourism business that wants to operate sustainably. The Green Tourism Award shows that the business has been valued and certified, so one can confidently choose places to visit with this logo. [8] The tourism business participating in the Scheme is at various levels on the path to achieving sustainable development plans. Some of the businesses are not yet able to meet the standards, but they are striving to make their business green. This is expressed using three levels of classification (bronze, silver, and gold). The Bronze Award (Green Tourism Bronze) means that the tourism business expresses a commitment to sustainable development and has achieved success along the way. Typically, the facility has local suppliers for green shopping, uses energy-efficient technologies, uses recyclable materials, and facilitates local public transport, bicycles, and walking for tourists. To achieve higher rewards, businesses will need to work on reducing environmental impacts in all key areas [8]. Silver award (Green Tourism Silver) shows progressive sustainable development and the achievement of excellent results in this direction. Business personnel and customers share the values necessary for the transition to sustainable development. The award-winning travel business relies heavily on recycled products and also takes care of recycling to close the cycle. Local sourcing is widely used throughout the supply chain. Efficient use of energy and water is a key issue, to address which changes have been made to the process and the heating and lighting system. Monitoring the use of resources such as energy, water, and waste helps to achieve significant change [8]. The Green Tourism Gold is awarded to places with the highest sustainability standards and excellent results in all areas [8]. Once every two years, each of the members of green tourism is visited and assessed by a qualified specialist who checks compliance with the established standards: business focus on sustainable tourism and minimizing damage to the environment, provision of high-quality service, compliance with all points of the relevant legislation, as well as compliance with good practice standards for a range of sustainable development indicators. The business exercises effective control over the consumption of water and energy resources and takes measures to further save them. Green procurement systems include the availability of environmentally friendly sources of meat, fish, and several other products, work with local suppliers to provide customers with fresh, local produce. VisitBritain recommends buying local produce. Good local food and handicrafts contribute to a higher level of relaxation. By advertising local suppliers, shops, and restaurants selling local crafts, local meats, fish, fruits, and cheeses, changes in work practices result in significant business benefits [19].

The GTBS also lists numerous eco-friendly farmhouses, boarding houses, and lodges throughout England and Wales; many of them have received awards for sustainable housing. The GTBS program provides information on eco-infrastructure throughout England, from a 19th-century

organic bed and breakfast farmhouse in the east of England to an eco-friendly manor house on the North Norfolk coast. Visitors can even rent English “eco cottages” that are powered by wind and sun [7].

The program not only focuses on attracting tourists and certifying vacation spots, it also encourages everyone to help reduce their impact on the world by making several positive decisions, not only when traveling, but also while at home.

In the countries of Eastern Europe and the former republics of the USSR, including Russia, the issues of stimulating tourism activities in combination with elements of nature protection are at the stage of development. However, countries such as Romania and Bulgaria already have experience in promoting ecological tourism through social and legal mechanisms. The previously established economic model, a change in specialization that led to an increase in unemployment, the illegal market for raw materials became the reason for distrust and negative attitude of residents to the format of ecological tourism. After all, the creation, for example, of specially protected areas leads to the loss of the local population of the opportunity to use the resources of this territory – to cut down forests, extract, often illegally, minerals, hunt, etc. However, realizing the benefits of ecotourism, over time, people abandoned industries that were harmful to the environment and took an active part in serving tourists. For example, the Bulgarian public organization Green Balkans carries out explanatory work in the Rhodopes for the local population, explaining that ecological tourism, ecological paths, mini-hotels, etc. This is considered the only way out of the current deadlock of unemployment and lack of money [7].

Thus, world experience shows that the following social and legal mechanisms for stimulating ecological tourism are used:

- application of a system of accreditation and licensing of business enterprises serving tourism, the results of which are the preservation and improvement of the environment;
- conducting independent expert assessments of environmentally friendly enterprises in the area of tourist destinations, with the awarding of environmental awards of various levels;
- use of the system of “green procurement” of environmentally friendly products;
- information support (placement of information, advertising, recommendations) of the tourism business specializing in ecological tourism, owners of environmentally friendly accommodation places, manufacturers of environmentally friendly products.
- environmental and educational activities of the state and environmental organizations that explain and show the economic benefits and prospects from the conservation and restoration of nature for tourism purposes.

## 5. Conclusion

The study shows that social and legal mechanisms for stimulating ecological tourism have already been tested in several countries and shown their effectiveness. To use them to stimulate Russian ecological tourism, it seems necessary, first of all, to legislatively consolidate the concept of ecological tourism. Such consolidation will allow developing clearer and more intelligible strategic documents for the development of ecological tourism, which will outline the general directions for stimulating ecotourism. Specific mechanisms for stimulating ecotourism should be detailed in program documents in relation to individual regions and ecotourism destinations. Thus, the hypothesis of the study seems to be proven: improving legal regulation is the main part of the system of measures to support and stimulate the development of ecological tourism in the Russian Federation.

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