

## **Model of Competitiveness of Eco-Tourism Product (By the Example of Tourism Organizations in Primorsky Krai)**

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**Abstract:** In this article we consider the model of competitiveness of eco-tourism product. Evaluation of the competitiveness of the tourist product is the starting point for special activities in a free market economy. Assessment should be carried out by using a comprehensive method, including integral index of competitiveness, through expert research and consumer confidence index. Ecological tourism, recognized by the experts all over the world as a perspective type of tourism, in future can become profitable in Primorsky Krai. Successfulness of eco-tourism in Primorsky Krai is restrained by imperfect management of competitiveness of tourism organizations. Analysis of environmental problems related to tourism activity and the creation a model of competitiveness of eco-tourism products will encourage development of ecological tourism in the region.

**Key words:** Ecological tourism • Eco-tourism product • The integral index of competitiveness • The model of competitiveness of eco-tourism product

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The global tourism industry continues its sustainable growth, providing services to a larger number of people and generating domestic and foreign revenues often due to social and ecological integrity of the destination regions [1]. At present, eco-tourism, as one of the most developing spheres of world tourism industry can become a profitable activity in Primorsky Krai. Ecosystems provide services essential to humanity, which in short can be described as supporting life, supplying materials and energy and absorbing waste products [2]. Ecotourism may be seen as an exercise in power that can shape the natural world and the people who live in it in the ways that contradict some of its essential values [3]. Successfulness of eco-tourism in Primorye, as well as in Russia, is restrained by imperfect management of the tourism competitiveness, insufficient information on the problems, the lack of scientific knowledge and ecotourism research update. The latter ones are aimed at studying the ecological tourist destinations, creating a model of competitiveness of eco-tourism products and developing scientific methods to improve its competitiveness.

A diversity of various definitions of eco-tourism, insufficient classification of types and forms of ecological tourism and lack of researches of the factors of eco-tourist product competitiveness, have shown, that now ecological tourism is not well-defined: there is no uniform concept; classification of the types of eco-tourism has not been systematized; characteristics and features of a eco-tourism product are not generalized and factors and criteria of its competitiveness have not been determined. The problems can remain unresolved without the centralized management of ecological tourism including concentration of finance and manpower.

Analysis of ecotourism definitions, proposed by various domestic and foreign researchers, revealed the one that in our opinion, the most fully reflects its essence.

Eco-tourism is a type of organized tourism activity that does not damage the integrity of ecosystems, brings in funding for protected natural areas and creates sources of income for the local population and environmental education [4; 5].

Thus, three main components of ecotourism may be distinguished [6, p.19]:

- “knowledge of nature”, i.e. the tour aims at studying nature and mastering new skills;
- “preservation of ecosystems”, i.e. participation of tourists and tour operators in the programs of environmental protection;
- “respect of interests of local residents”. It is not only observing local laws and customs, but also the contribution of tourism to the socio-economic development of tourist destinations.

The aforesaid assumes that ecological tourism should be considered as a type of sustainable tourism, which main principles are determined by the Swedish Agency on Protection of Environment (Environmental Protection Agency):

- Sustainable use of natural resources;
- Reduction of over-consumption and waste;
- Conservation of natural resources and social and cultural variety;
- Careful planning, integrated approach, integration of eco-tourism into programs of regional development;
- Support of local economy;
- Participation of local population in tourism development and taking financial and other advantages from this activity;
- Consultation with interested persons and community;
- Personnel training;
- Tourism marketing [7].

The concept of sustainable tourism development is based on carrying capacity. Carrying capacity is the maximum load sustained by a tourist product without serious damage to local resources, negative impression from traveling and any other socio-economic problems.

One of the kinds of carrying capacity defines the sustainable and ecological tourism. Ecological carrying capacity is often determined by attendance, which excess leads to unacceptable environmental impacts, either as a result of the actions of the tourists, or as a result of the service infrastructure.

Ecotourism includes a range of different eco-tourism products and services. Below are the definitions of eco-tourism products and its competitiveness:

- eco-tourism is a complex of tourist tangible and intangible components that form ecological-tourist paths (eco-tour, tour) with consumer utility and value.

- competitiveness is a relative characteristic of tourist product, which can be determined only in the course of production, formation, promotion and sales. It meets the needs of the tourist and reflects the degree of conformity of this product in terms of quality, cost, environmental and safety parameters of the ecotourism market in the period of this analysis.

All components of eco-tourism products are bound with environment: ecology-friendly technology, environmental susceptibility to tourist-and-recreational resources and their sustainability, environmental learning and ordered system of knowledge and skills of tourism organizations with mandatory environmental training.

The development of ecological tourism is an economic perspective. However Russian tourists do not distinguish ecotourism from cultural recreation. Eco-tours usually focus on the environmental education of travelers and limit to the original inhabitants, their traditional way of life, crafts and folklore.

Ecotourism development in Russia and in the Primorsky Krai is hindered by:

- lack of initial capital to finance the creation of environmental centers;
- low investment in eco-tourism infrastructure, which affects the condition of hotel and transportation services;
- lack of funds for advertising to attract the attention of potential tourists.

There are some organizational reasons influencing the development of eco-tourist directions: limited tourist routes in the places of ecological tourism and their poor arrangement; lack of specialized tour organizations in eco-tourism; absence of advertising; lack of skilled specialists oriented to development, organization and realization of ecological tours [8].

At present, the tourism industry in Primorsky Krai is developed in accordance with the concept of the Federal Target Program "Development of internal and in-bound tourism in the Russian Federation (2011 - 2016) " [9], approved by the decision of RF Government from July, 19 2010 No. 1230-ø and within the framework of the "Strategy of socio-economic development of Primorsky Krai up to 2025", adopted by Primorsky Krai Administration and by the Law of Primorsky Krai from October, 20 2008 No. 324-KL, where the compliance to the world standards of tourism infrastructure is set as one of priorities [10].

At the 5<sup>th</sup> regional conference "Tourism. Perspectives of development in the South of Primorye", it was stated that for period from 2006 to 2009 in the tourism industry of Primorye, 1.3 thousand workplaces were created. In 2009 in the consolidated regional budget, tax revenue only from international tourism was 62.9 M. rubles, growing 1.6 times in 2008 year. The volume of internal tourism in the region increases firmly, with the annual rate of 10-15 %; in 2010 in the region, the number of journeys was about 740 thousand [11].

Regional target program "Development of internal and inbound tourism in the Russian Federation (2011 - 2016)", considering tourist resources and tendencies of forming of tourist demand, states that it is necessary to create and reconstruct the specialized facilities for all-the-year-round and summer rest, i.e. bases for fishing and hunting, infrastructures of national parks "Call of a Tiger" and "The Legend of Udegeya", to form the tourist cluster of "Pidan"; and to develop the tourist routes and programs, including hunting, fishing, organization of river rafting and ecological tours.

Ecological tourism in the region is developed due to the areas of outstanding natural beauty, among them are: Far-Eastern marine reserve, Kedrovaya Pad, Lazovsky reserve, Sikhote-Alin reserve, Ussuriisk reserve and Khankaisky reserve. In Primorye there are 13 reserves, 2 national parks and 1 natural park, more than 520 unique natural objects (lakes, waterfalls, ancient extinct volcanoes and caves).

Analysis of five-year period (2001-2006) of eco-tourism activity in one of the protected regions of Primorsky Kray, Lazovsky State Natural Reserve, showed 2.8 time increase in demand for eco-tourist product [12, p.20]. At present the number of ecological routes and excursions constantly increases. There are different tours: to the village Chernoruchye, the village of old believers, visits to Ju Chen developments, Glazgovsky mountain pass, Dangerous island, the Monomakh's Cap mountain and the excursions to Elamovsky waterfalls.

Research of consumer preferences and analysis of factors of competitiveness of ecological tourism defined basic criteria, effecting the competitiveness of eco-tourist product, such as price, quality, safety, ecological uniqueness and attractiveness of product.

The estimation of competitiveness of eco-tourism product should be performed using the expert method and index of consumer satisfaction. Competitiveness should be considered from two positions, from the viewpoints of consumer and producer of eco-tourism product.

According to marketing research the model of consumer behavior is based on the value of eco-tourism product for money, i.e. the meaning of quality for every consumer. The model of producer behavior is based on the correlation of price and quality, i.e. how this quality can be achieved. In conclusion, there are two contradictory requirements to the same thing (competitiveness): in one case, what is the price for quality, in other case, what is necessary to get the quality [12, p. 69].

Competitiveness of eco-tourism product for consumers is determined with the formula 1:

$$KSP_{p1} = 0,0182 * C_{p1} + 1,3392 * K_{p1} + 1,3282 * B_{p1} + 0,7743 * E_{p1} \quad (1)$$

For producers it is determined with the formula 2:

$$KSP_{p2} = 2,0049 * C_{p2} + 0,9120 * K_{p2} + 0,8194 * B_{p2} + 0,3225 * E_{p2} \quad (2)$$

where  $C$ ,  $K$ ,  $B$ ,  $E$  are the weight characteristics of competitiveness of eco-tourism product for consumer and producer, designating a price, quality, safety and ecology of product.

It should be mentioned that when the competitiveness of tourist product is estimate, the weight characteristics of quality and price differ; a consumer gives the preference to quality of the given services (1.3392) and the producer - to its price (2.0049).

The level of competitiveness of the compared eco-tourist products of the organization is determined on a formula 3:

$$Y_{KSP} = \frac{KSP_i}{KSP_{maks}} \quad (3)$$

where  $KSP_i$  – integral index of competitiveness of the investigated eco-tourism product;  $KSP_{maks}$  - maximum (base) index of competitiveness (i) of eco-tourism product.

We calculated maximum index of competitiveness of eco-tourism product equaling 3.46 for  $KSP_{p1}$  and  $KSP_{p2}$  4.05 for .

The elements of tourist product are indexes of ecology. The Russian Federation based on "Environment Protection Act", adopted on December 19, 1991, formed the system of legal and normative provisions of ecological safety; as a result, these indexes are obligatory and must be used for the estimation of all groups of tourist products.

The group of indexes of ecology must include the following ones: ecological unicity and tourist (recreational) loading. The index of ecological unicity estimates the ecological attractiveness of natural resources in the consumption of tourist product on a scale developed by Prelovsky. Index of the tourist's loading, designated by researchers as ecological carrying capacity, determines the size of possible recreational loading during realization of eco-tourism product.

It is necessary to differentiate between the concepts of "ecology" of tourism and "ecological" tourism. The ecology is determined by the level and character of influence of industry on the environment; it includes all certain measures of protection and revival of the environment.

Taking into consideration all mentioned above, the dynamics of tourist current can change because modern progress in tourism market is not steady. In view of a significant impact on the economy, it is necessary to strengthen the direct influence of regional authorities on these processes. That is why it is necessary to develop not only the tours for foreign tourists but mostly for people living in our country. Therefore, the model of competitiveness takes into account the index of adaptation for consumer.

Adaptation is a complex of physiological and behavioral reactions of a man on the change of environmental conditions. Individual biological and social tension during adaptation to the new is sometimes very unusual; it results in inevitable loss of some part of health resources. Relocation from colder places to "hot countries" may be a serious physiological loading to the consumer of tourist product. That is why ecological and social and ecological knowledge are fundamental to form general principles of behavior and ecological culture of both organizers of tourism and tourists. Besides, the tours within the territory of residence will bring more benefits to consumer's health and help to develop internal ecologically oriented tourism.

The above-stated indexes of competitiveness serve as a basis for the model of competitiveness of eco-tourist product. The assessment of competitiveness of eco-tourist product was carried out in a few tourist organizations of Primorsky Krai: "Lotus-tour" Co. LTD (Nakhodka) and "Mirabel tour" Co. Ltd. (Vladivostok). It revealed a low level of quality and safety of the realized tourist products, allowed concluding about the competitiveness of the offered services and working out

measures to increase the product competitiveness with the increase of its weight characteristics.

An offered model of competitiveness of eco-tourism product is based on a regressive model; it determines a list of factors that influence competitiveness. Determining competitiveness of eco-tourism product it is not sufficient to compare its properties and the properties of competitors. It is necessary to study consumer behavior and reaction to a product and learn the basic criteria of a product: quality, price, safety and ecology, simultaneously with other main subjects of the tourist market: both consumer and producer.

## CONCLUSION

To increase the competitiveness of a tourist product the producers have to give the tourists full information about the features of ecological trips, about possible dangers during the voyage and about preventive measures to provide for the tourists' safety. The ecology of the tourist product in modern conditions must be controlled by not only legal norms and tourist organizations but also by the consumers of product directly.

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