

## **ECO-TOURISM POTENTIAL IN PROTECTED AREAS AND ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES**

**Associate Professor Maia Azmaiparashvili**

Gori State Teaching University Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Business and Law, Georgia

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**ABSTRACT:** *The object of research is Eco-Tourism in protectad areas and its Sustainable Development Challenges. It should be noted that national parks and protected areas have huge potential for ecotourism development. Its goal is to conserve ecosystems and create environmental awareness between people. Sustainable tourism means the duty of the society to provide the protection and maintenance of the environment for the future generations. We should realize what does ecologically sustainable environment means for the development of tourism and what part in this case plays eco-tourism as one of the main part of the development of the sustainable tourism. So, as to provide sustainable economy for tourism, tourist sustainability is needed. During the sustainable development of tourism the resources should be used so as to satisfy economic, social and esthetic needs, but at the same time maintain the originality of the country. The main biological variety of the environment and the main tourist systems, the stable development of tourism should provide social, cultural, ecological and economical criteria of harmonic mixture, which will give us not only maintenance of natural and cultural resources, but will become the predominance of their development and renovation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable Tourism, Ecotourism, Ecological sustainability, Recreational resources, Economical sustainability.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is based on the goal-directed and clever using of tourist resources. Tourist resources are the subject of tourism, which have potential to satisfy the demands which occur in tourist process. Tourism cannot exist if there is no tourist resource. Tourist resources are national property. Though the resources which have special meaning gained worldwide significance. The term "Ecotourism" was firstly used by N. Muller in 1978 and meant one of the variant of sustainable tourism development. Nowadays eco-tourism has become the most popular and fast developing industry. Eco-tourism means travelling to see the natural and man-made cultural variety without doing any harm to it. Eco-tourism is considered as one part of natural tourism, which joins together people who travel with educational purpose. This tourists' interest is the environment, its observation, and partly its defending. In this kind of tourism the main interest represents protected natural areas. According to this ecological tourism is considered as a strictly specialized kind of brightly marked scientific-cognitive free time activity.

The growth of demand on eco-tourism predetermined the necessity of founding protected areas and parks. Nowadays these areas represent the main objects of eco-tourism. In the frame of especially defended natural area the organizers of eco-tourism prefer scientific – cognitive tourism, because they think that such eco-tours are easy to make. Ecotourism, to be successful, must promote sustainable development by establishing a durable productive base that allows local inhabitants and ecotourism service providers to enjoy rising standards of living. An ecotourism project must incorporate the social dimensions of productive organization and environmental conservation.

Tourism should develop sustainable, controlled and integrated basis. Using the principles of prudent planning. This concept provides a natural, cultural and other resources saving. Their continuous use in the future, benefits the society today, which represents an important environmental protection. Tourism is important for the protection of cultural heritage. Sustainable development is concerned with acknowledging economic, social and environmental development aspects, catering for the current needs of society without damaging the well-being of future generations. Ecotourism is a niche market emerged because of increased market demands for sustainable tourism practices. It serves to provide tourism products and services which accommodating for the economic, social and environmental aspects of society. However, earlier research suggests that it is difficult to handle three dimensions of sustainable development, indicating that trade-offs may occur. Furthermore, as tour operators are able to affect local development prospects, it is of interest to examine how they handle sustainable development, and more specifically, contribute to trade-offs between, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development (Eriksson, Lidstrom, 2013).

Ecotourism is a sub-component of the field of sustainable tourism. Ecotourism's perceived potential as an effective tool for sustainable development is the main reason why developing countries are now embracing it and including it in their economic development and conservation strategies. Ecotourism, as an alternative tourism, involves visiting natural areas in order to learn, to study, or to carry out activities environmentally friendly, that is, a tourism based on the nature experience, which enables the economic and social development of local communities. It focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their habitats, as well as cultural artifacts from the locality.

Georgia can become one of the powerful center of the world tourism. A thorough study of the forests we see climates-recreational functions, mineral and thermal and thermal springs medicinal properties, grotto, spa resorts and places of functions, we come to the conclusion, that along with the tourism Georgia may become a health cache. Nature has richly rewarded Georgia with tourist recreational resources. The world is not found in such places, where a small area, which our country has, there are so many different landscapes. That's why Georgia for its unique natural-gives economic conditions-one of the strong possibility of becoming a tourist country. Are only a few countries in the world, which is natural – climate and recreation – spa resources, so the of God “rewarded”.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Area

The origin and development of ecotourism is closely connected to the allocation of the natural areas which are especially attractive from the recreation point of view, to the processing of their usage and norms of safety. In order to support safe management of tourism on the sites on the permanent bases, the monitoring is made according to basic indicators of sustainable tourism. Here are used such indicators with the help of which the cause-affect connection between tourism and area is measured. The most important are two types of indicators: 1) general indicator of sustainable tourism, which is worked out for general use in tourist sites; 2) the indicator of tourist site which is used by the particular ecosystem or one of the tourist type.

There are two types of tourist sites indicators: ecosystem specific and site-specific. Seaside areas, parks and protected areas, mountain regions belong to site -specific category. In the table 1 are given main indicators of sustainable tourism and particular measurement.

By defining the particular indicator to each destination and by their fulfilling, the achievement of high level of sustainability is possible.

**Table 1: Sustainable tourism main indicator**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Particular measurement</b>
Protection of the area	The category of protected are according to IUCN
The impacts	Number of tourists per year/ peak month
The intensity of usage	The intensity of usage during peak periods (person/ hectare)
Social influence	The ratio of tourists and local people
Control of development	The existence of control of development and usage level
Waste management	Percentage of sewage
Planning process	The existence of organized regional plan in the tourist region.
Critical eco-systems	The amount of rare endangered species
Consumer satisfaction	Visitors satisfaction level
The share of tourism in local economy	The ratio taken from the tourism in the global economic activities
<b>Complex indexes</b>	<b>Particular measurement</b>
Throughput	Previously worked out complex measurement which regulates endurance of the territory on the level of complex indicator of the impacts on the territory
Attraction	Qualitative measurement of the territory by which it is attractive to the tourists.

It should be noted that these indicators are not only used for ecological attraction, but also in an economical point of view. The use of these indicators is directed at the support of economic sustainability, tourist sites and society. The development of tourism cannot be sustainable if it is not properly planned and ruled. So as the demand for tourism and resources is increasing, the approach of sustainable development are needed. The conception of sustainability is practical when it is identified with what must be remained and protected (Charles Geldner, Brent Ritchi 2013).

The object of our research is Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park. Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park is situated in the center of the Caucasus Ecoregion. Due to biodiversity and vulnerable ecoregion is included in the 35 priority ecoregions of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and 34 hot spot list of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Borjomi-Kharagauli Protected areas are located on the verge of the Caucasus and Anatolia hot spots. From 56 priority areas of the Caucasus Ecoregion Conservation plan one of the important parts are – Protected Areas of Georgia. The territory of the park is rich in relict, endemic, rare flora and fauna vulnerable species. There are 63 species of mammals on the territory, eleven of them are the Caucasus endemics and 8 species are included in the “Red List” of Georgia. There are 217 species of migratory and nesting birds, 13 of them belong to the “Red List” Georgia.

Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park tourist route network allows hiking for one or several days. Tourist route network is up to 400-2,642 meters. Paths are marked and well-arranged. Tourist shelters, picnic spots and camping sites are arranged along the routes. Sites for setting up a fire are also allocated. National park offers hiking, horse riding, biking, snow shoes, cultural and educational tours. The routes function throughout the year. Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park has 11 trails, arranged with support from the German Government and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

We researched the existence of safe management on the solid bases on the tourist destination place. We did the monitoring according to sustainable tourism main indicator. The park belongs to IUSN II category. Borjomi-Kharagauli natural park was founded on the purpose of protection of the wildlife especially its mountainous untouched forest. The territory is considered convenient and attractive, in the process of planning we used zonal method. The zone of natural landscape contains the territory of wildlife rich with natural resources, this territory is used for tourist recreation activities. According to the standard of the loading norms, it turned out that optimal loading according to existing norms takes place only in temperate zone. The tourist recreation capacity in the forest is 2 human being a day on 1 hectare. In the forestless places it is less. According to theoretical calculations tourist recreation loading in this park per year is above the limit. There is no distraction from the tourist if we don't take into consideration the damage made by locals on the environment. So the capacity is the number of holiday makers, which can be present on this area without making any damage to the natural resources. Well planned and organized tourism will never damage the park. The research by signature method (signature- shows the quality of important tourism-recreational resources /objects) shows that tourism object is very attractive and is a great place for eco-tourism. Also was researched the conformity of tourism object with main forms of recreation. In particular, climate resources, the basic elements of weather in the recreation season. The research showed that the quality of comfort for the recreation season is really high. Solvency is between I and II. There are critical ecosystems in the park zone,

the number of rare species had seriously decreased. Locals use the territories that are good for tourism in their agricultural interests. We should say that the main indicators of the sustainable tourism were not revealed. According to the everything mentioned the achievement of sustainable level on this particular territory is impossible nowadays.

## DISCUSSION

It must be mentioned that in the perspective of the development of eco-tourism, the international experts predict great future for Georgia. Along with other preferences they mention the geographical nearness of our country to the world's main tourist market - Europe. Georgia according to its geopolitical location and with its natural, historical or cultural resources has a lot of opportunities to develop tourism. Georgia represents the classical example of geographical landscape of vertical zones and has its almost complete variety from humid sub-tropics to nival zone. The most relevant regions to eco-tourism and health resorts are the regions, which are situated on Caucasian and South-Mtianeti's mountainous regions and on the Black Sea Coast. Along with aesthetic factor tourists are attracted by sea and mountainous medical features, the richest hydro-mineral resources.

It should be mentioned that sustainable development of the areas which also belong to the eco-tourism sphere helps to develop tourism infrastructure, to create new working places, and to give work to the natives in the tourist service sphere, which naturally will rise people's level of life in the region of the country. For the sake of development of eco-tourism it has to be protected the variety of flora and fauna of the recreation regions and all natural resources. It is natural that eco-tourism won't develop successfully if some amount of the means taken from it won't be used for the protection of the recreation zones and for getting results from the recreation profit.

Unfortunately, nowadays the mankind is facing the global problem of secure of national resources, which main reason is modern way of life (principal oriented on consuming). As a result of irrational use of the national resources the natural may lose the resource of self-restoration, especially it refers to the forests, the degradation of which causes a lot of negative ecological results. Protection of nature is the strategic integral part of the development of eco-tourism. It can bring economical profit. This happens in eco-tourism when both the environment and business are healthy. Sometimes people's interests are sacrificed to the protection of the environment. For example the population maybe forbidden to perform agricultural works, to collect wood and building materials. The protection of nature is sacrificed to maximization of short-time profit, the existing eco-system is ruining. The degradation of tourist resources acts against both interests (protection of nature and eco-tourism.) It is important to understand that tourism can not develop without determined influence on the environment. It is impossible to make the main accent only on the development of tourism, without ecological care. One of the main principal of the sustainable development of eco-tourism is including the native people into it. Very often native people are excluded from this process artificially (Gogelia, 2012).

The protection of natural, social and cultural resources and their sustainable usage is the base of long and successful activities. There are three main principles of sustainable development: **ecological sustainability** provides comparing of basic ecological processes with biological variety and biological resources; **social and cultural sustainability** predetermines such

situations which provide people's control on their being along with material and cultural growth, which are concerned to this process of development. Also helps to save local originality; **economical sustainability** provides effectiveness of economic development and such situation when future generations will use chosen methods of handling the operation of the resources (Metreveli, 2012).

## RESULTS

In tourism ecology and economy are more and more connected with the large system of causes and effects. Nowadays the mystery of popular tourist centers is based on the cleanliness of the environment. On the events of its effective defense and on the originality of the local culture in the places where there isn't any, it is noticed the decline of the level of service is noticed and also the shortage of volume of tourism. The aggravation of the environment, the lost of cultural originality, the decline of economic situation. Local authorities are responsible for clever handling of the resources, so as future generation will have opportunities to use them.

So as to provide sustainable economy for tourism, tourist sustainability is needed. During the sustainable development of tourism the resources should be used so as to satisfy economic, social and esthetic needs, but at the same time maintain the originality of the country. The main biological variety of the environment and the main tourist systems, the stable development of tourism should provide social, cultural, ecological and economical criteria of harmonic mixture, which will give us not only maintenance of natural and cultural resources, but will become the predominance of their development and renovation.

The events of maintenance and protection of natural resources and cultural legacy have both global and local aspects. In order to make tourism sustainable, the character of tourist activities and capacity should foresee the existed natural and artificial resources throughput. The base of conception of tourism sustainable development is the concept of throughput potential. Throughput potential is the maximum loading which any tourist object can resist, without any serious harm to local resources, negative influence and social economical problems among the population (Birjakov, 2004).

The growth of demand on eco-tourism predetermined the necessity of founding protected areas and parks. Nowadays these areas represent the main objects of eco-tourism. In the frame of especially defended natural area the organizers of eco-tourism prefer scientific-cognitive tourism, because they think that such eco-tours are easy to make. Some especially protected natural areas abroad which don't demand high qualification, let the participation of eco-tourists. For example, a lot of eco-tourists are busy calculating the amount of biocenosis of different populations.

Conceptual question is, if it is reasonable to develop eco-tourism in strictly defended natural areas, is the discussion topic till these days, both among scientific society and among the workers of these protected areas. The main argument is that the development of the protected areas happens the principals of the work of the preserves and nature, with the help of organized tourism and scientific expeditions, also to make excursions for servants, supporting the students' specifically, as an untouchable natural standard, on which only

scientific research is made. On the territory of Georgia the main aim of preserves should be the following: to explain to the people practice and tourism.

Among the systems of the development of the preserves is such as: preserve is the protected area of natural processes and preserving the resources in genetic dynamic and untouched position and scientific research activities and monitor the environment. This is the school of the nature protection and we shouldn't be afraid of people, but we should create such conditions that their presence in the preserves shouldn't become the violation of the conditions of being in the preserve.

In the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the growth of tourism the mankind began to think more about the difficult ecological situation in the world, in which tourism has already played its role. So in the process of developing of tourism it is important to take into consideration not only economical profit, but also its ecological and social results, because the development of this branch won't be complete without its social economic—and ecological parts.

The main principals of eco-tourism should represent the importance of getting rid of degradation of the resources and doing harm to the environment; the usage of resources for native people and industry; making moral principals and keeping the norms of behavior towards the natural cultural area. Sustainable development is the process of continuous changes in the frame of which the using of resources investment, technological progress and other innovations are developed according to the demands of the future and present.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

On the territory of the park was revealed the determinants of potential development of tourist recreation resources, positive and negative factors. It must be mentioned that the population has low level of ecological self assessment, There exist the low level of government, regional and local coordination of decisions. In the development of the sustainable tourism on of the main method is ecological planning conception. As a rule tourists usually are attractive by the regions which have high level of ecology. The locals should take part in the elaboration of tourism development plan of their region.

The development of eco-tourism of the protected areas is the important question which influences the economic situations of the regions, it also can activate the protection of nature in the country. To our mind strictly protected natural areas can not only strengthen ecological tourism in the country, but also give a stimulus to the tourists to come with the territory of Georgia. The natural areas which are protected for this reason—have uniquely organized territory, have professional scientific and administrative personel, the practice of protecting and restoration of ecological systems, close contacts with national fundamental science, the opportunity of sharing the experience of working abroad, have protected structures.

It should be noted that national parks and protected areas have huge potential for ecotourism development. Its goal is to conserve ecosystems and create environmental awareness between people. It is essential to encourage communication and dialogue with experts in tourism to evaluate potential and facilitate future planning. It's especially important at this stage of

tourism development. Not all issues are of the same importance in this conceptual phase. Some recommendations can be added to existing issues related to specific situations. What must be done now in this developmental stage of ecotourism for its successful development and use of resources? Firstly - tourist flows must be strictly defined and regulated in protected areas. Secondly - zoning is critical in protected areas for ecotourism development. Thirdly - if trails are implemented directly in protected areas, then planning and implementation must benefit the conservation and control of natural resources. Fourth - construction of new hotels in protected areas is not necessary. Use of existing accommodations around the protected areas can be utilized. Such action minimizes any adverse impact on the land and community. Income generated by ecotourism should not only aim to conserve protected areas, but to satisfy socio-economic needs of local communities. Social effect from such programs will provide educational and recreational opportunities for people to experience these natural resources and form informed opinions on ecotourism.

The participants of eco-tourism should develop such service and offers which will correspond to the demands of tourist market, which will become a guarantee of attraction of tourists. The government should play the great part in this with its supportive policy, which involves the development of infrastructure, the search of different educational programs and investors. In this direction the last aim of the government is the development of financially profitable industry of eco-tourism in the conditions of protecting and improving of nature. It is important for tourist experts to take an active part in the planning process of natural parks and protected areas. It is important for tourist specialists and the administration of protected areas to work together in the sphere of planning the tours and administration.

It is impossible to develop tourism that gives a sense of national pride, because your country, its nature and culture becomes recognizable. Tourism can be considered as the best means of communication to the world. Each of them tells a lot about his journey, thus evokes a desire for others to see it.

So, it is necessary for the development of eco-tourism and its functioning in the country the following: to draw up an inventory of regional natural and historical-cultural resources, making of the database and identifying of scientifically valid recreation loadings; basic planning of eco-tourism activities and its integration in the plan of the developing of a region; certification of routs; creation of minimal infrastructure; the rising of the professional level of a stuff. In the development of eco-tourism it is important to work out the regional strategy, Identifying of criteria for eco-tourism and its indicator, their winning mechanism and making up such system which will prevent any harm to protected areas.

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