

Review Paper**Tourism and Ecology in Adjara, Georgia: A Preliminary Review****Merab Putkaradze¹ and Nestan Gorgiladze²**¹Professor, Department of Geography, Batumi State University, Georgia.²Lecturer, Department of Geography, Batumi State University, Georgia.**Article history**

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Geography, Georgia.**Abstract**

In Georgia, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara is one of the important regions with regards to tourism where there are some ecological problems in relation with the tourism development. As a result of field observation and the conception of the sustainable development of tourism and application of the research methods of the tourist conductivity potential, we have found out that the ecological state of touristic objects in Adjara is within norms but on local territories we can observe the trends of deterioration. In connection with tourism development in Adjara, the ecological improvement of the condition depends on the implementation of the basic principles of rational nature management and on the execution of ecological issues in tourism taking in the account of environmental aspects.

The Autonomous Republic of Adjara is located in the far south-western part of Georgia, which is washed by the Black Sea from the west. It is situated in the humid subtropical climatic region where within the limits of 2992 m above sea level, the exotic landscapes of valley and mountain are combined together with various kinds of touristic and recreational resources. The compactness of the territory (2900 m², 4,2% of Georgian territory), complex character of the relief, much precipitation (the highest in Europe 4500 mm), high density of population (in 2014 – 336,1 thousand people, 9,1% of Georgian population) and anthropogenic load over the natural environment cause the deterioration of the ecological situation in most cases. Therefore, the study of ecological problems related to the rapid development of tourism is an authentic issue nowadays. The research is based on the methods of the field observation, the conception of providing sustainable development of tourism and the potential of touristic conductivity.

The obtained results of the research made it clear that despite the dynamic development of tourism in Adjara, the ecological situation of the region is satisfactory, though on local areas one can observe the tendencies of deterioration. The existed situation can be improved by means of providing the management of sustainable development of tourism and promoting the territorial organization of the touristic infrastructure with regards to rational nature management.

Key words: tourism, ecology, potential, load, conductivity

Introduction

Adjara region is distinguished with its touristic and recreational diversities. It is the region where different types of tourism are developed. The basic object of tourism development is represented by the natural environment where the ecological balance is lost as a result of touristic activities in most cases. Due to the peculiarities of natural conditions, influenced by the economic activities, the habitat of Adjara is less distinguished with its sustainability where some spontaneous natural processes are activated quite often (Khorava et al., 2012; Putkaradze et al., 2015). Therefore, the study of the given problem is one of the authentic issues today.

The main purpose of the work is to study the ecological situation of the region which has been changed as a result of the tourism development in Adjara. The research was based on the methods of the field observation, the conception of providing sustainable development of tourism and the potential of touristic conductivity (Birjchakov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008; Ukleba, 2009). The research made it clear that despite the rapid development of tourism in Adjara, the ecological situation of the region is satisfactory, though on local areas one can observe the tendencies of deterioration. In order to improve the situation it is required to carry out all the recommendations given by the ecological services in tourism management and to provide the rational territorial organization of the touristic infrastructure taking into account the natural environment.

Materials and Methods

In Eastern Europe, Adjara is one of the important regions of tourism where sea, cultural, ecological, mountain and other types of tourism are developed. In 2005 the number of tourists in Adjara was 147 thousand which was annually increased and in 2015 it reached to 443,7 thousand (265,5 thousand foreigners, 178,2 thousand internal visitors). On average, 1,3 tourist accounts for 1 person of the region.

Tourism is based on different touristic-recreational resources; consequently, the quality of impact upon tourists is varied. In order to find out what negative ecological outcomes are caused by the certain types of tourism, the research was based on the methods

of the field observation, the conception of providing sustainable development of tourism (ecological design) and the touristic conductivity (ecological conductance, social conductance, local social conductivity and limited density (Birzhakov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008; Ukleba, 2009). Besides, we have used the research methods and results connected with tourism ecology in different regions of the world (Aiallo,1998; Bramwell, 1994; Holden, 2003; Isaacs, 2000; Kolbovskiy, 2011; Orams,1995; Savage, 2009; Wegner et al.,2004).

The main type of tourism in Adjara is sea tourism and it makes about 65.5% of the total number of tourists. The main objects of activity of the sea tourists in the natural environment are beaches, which are more or less influenced by an anthropogenic disturbance and their ecological condition is determined by the potential conductivity of tourists. The total length of the sea coast in Adjara is 53 kilometers and the length of coastline used for the recreational purposes (Sarpi, Batumi, Chakvi, Tsikhisdziri, Bobokhvati, Kobuleti) is 36,1 m² (average width 20 m), the total area of which is 72,2 hectare. The simultaneous application potential of tourists at all beaches (3m² on a tourist) equals to 240680 tourists, but during the peak of the season, the simultaneous load together with the local population is 83200 recreants, or 34.5% of the total potential. The load of tourists on separate beaches is quite different. In the middle of the touristic season (5-20 August) the central beach of Batumi Boulevard is highly loaded with tourists and it reaches 85-90%. Gonio-Kvariatis is highly loaded with 75-80% of tourists and the Kobuleti central beach – with 80-85%. The presented data show that the beach potential has not been fully used and loaded with tourists.

Among the types of tourism in Adjara, ecotourism is developing very rapidly, where three areas are marked: rural tourism, bird watching and wine tourism. The ecotourism as one of the main branches of the sustainable development of tourism in the region is oriented on preserving the natural environment and on economic development.

The cultural tourism in Adjara is relatively weakly developed, but in recent years the growth trends have been observed along with the growth of the number of foreign tourists. Cultural tourism is represented by the main touristic units - "Gonio Apsarus" fortress (built by the Romans in I - II centuries), various museums and Batumi Boulevard. Foreign tourists are also interested in the mountainous exotic landscapes, on the basis of which the adventure tourism is gradually developing.

Sports tourism, in particular, ski tourism is intensively developed in the region. Today, two ski resorts, Gomarduli (1500 m above sea level) and Goderdzi (2100 m above sea level) are functioning there. The mentioned resorts are located in the alpine zone of the mountainous region and are in service only in winter.

Results and Discussion

The natural action area of the sea tourism is basically represented by beaches. The studies ascertained that some of the beaches in Adjara are not crowded with tourists so that to make any negative impact on nature. Therefore, we can say that the ecological condition of the beaches corresponds to the modern requirements. If we consider the potential of the tourists' conductivity at the beaches in Adjara according to the forms of conductivity (ecological conductivity, social tourism conductivity, local social conductivity, the marginal density) (Birzhakov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008; Ukleba, 2009): the ecological conductivity does not make any serious ecological problems. In case of the touristic social conductivity, the excessive number of tourists on separate beaches makes negative impact on some tourists and these tourists may not visit the same beach for the second time. In terms of local social conductivity, the local have no negative attitudes towards tourists. As for the marginal density, the number of tourists does not exceed a level that may cause irreversible environmental disturbances.

In terms of the ecological conditions not every human action will be in an ideal state in natural environment. We refer to the fact that some of the beaches in Adjara are not crowded with tourists, but despite this fact, the noise, air pollution, throwing garbage etc. still take place. The above mentioned negative outcomes are so insignificant that the present situation of beaches meets the requirements of modern standards in ecological point of view which are proved by the growth trends of foreign tourists.

In developing the sea tourism in Adjara, some environmental problems have been observed on beaches and in the surrounding areas due to existing touristic infrastructure facilities, which are connected to irrational architectural planning and business interests. In this regard, as a result of our studies we have set the ways of improving the present situation (Khorava et al.,2012).

During the period of the sea tourism, with the increase of the number of tourists the number of cars is growing almost twice, which are mainly moving in the local area causing noise and air pollution. In this regard, there are some problems on Rustaveli Street in Batumi and on Rustaveli Street in Kobuleti, which are 150 - 200 meters away from the sea coast. The only way of solving a problem is the restriction of the movement of vehicles in recreational zones. This is the question which is still in the process of discussion.

Nowadays, the ecotourism is being developed basically in two directions: the first one is connected to the arrangement of ecotours in the natural environment and the second one – to the broad implementation and utilization of eco-protection technologies (Drozdov, 2005). The fundamental principle of the ecological sustainability – the preservation of the natural environment in the ecotourism of Adjara which is directed to the maximum consumption of the local resources, is highly protected. Our research made it clear that the development of ecotourism in the region does not make any serious ecological problems regardless the damage of plant coverage, mowing down fields and hardening soil (Putkaradze et al.,2015).

In the exploratory region the development of the cultural tourism is not connected to the serious ecological problems. In this regard there is a kind of discomfort in the central part of Batumi Boulevard where the tourist load is quite high, especially in late hours. This is the period when one can find no places to sit down in the boulevard. As a result, we can assume that the social-ecological conductivity potential of the central part of the boulevard is too excessive which worsens the visitors' impressions. Touristic infrastructure is being developed intensively in order to settle the problems in the peripheral parts of the boulevard.

The ski tourism is developed in the alpine zone where some natural calamities take place in most cases, especially avalanches. The ecological condition of the ski resorts is perfect and they are distinguished with their exotic landscapes and fresh air. There are no large buildings for making a tourist infrastructure causing negative anthropogenic impact on resorts which are functioning in the mountainous conditions. At the same time, it should also be noted that some additional communications have been made for providing a perfect infrastructure that may activate avalanche processes in the future.

Thus, the obtained results can be formulated as following:

- Adjara region is distinguished with its touristic-recreational resources on the basis of which different types of the modern tourism have been developed and the sea tourism is the dominant among them;
- The potential of tourist conductivity at the beaches of Adjara is not fully consumed; therefore, the ecological conditions of beaches correspond to the modern standards;
- In terms of the social conductivity of tourists, relatively high load of tourists on some beaches worsens the impressions in some tourists;
- In the point of view of the local social conductivity in the region, the local population does not have negative attitudes towards tourists and respect them;
- The irrational planning of the tourist infrastructure can be noticed on the nearby territories of the beaches which makes the ecological situation poorer. Besides, some noise, garbage and air pollution can also be observed;
- Ecotourism does not make any serious ecological problems not considering the damage of plant coverage, mowing down fields and hardening soil;
- The cultural tourism does not make any serious ecological problems not considering the high density of tourists in late hours in the central parts of Batumi Boulevard, which worsens the impressions in some tourists;
- The ski tourism does not have any serious negative ecological impact on the natural environment. In order to provide a touristic infrastructure some additional communications may activate avalanche processes in the future.

Conclusion

Adjara is a touristic region with diverse recreational resources, where different types of tourism develop with a rapid rate. The research made it clear that the tourism does not make any serious ecological problems in the natural environment of the region; therefore, the ecological conditions of the touristic facilities correspond to the modern standards. In order to improve the ecological conditions revealed in the tourism economy of the region, it is required to take into account some ecological recommendations in tourism management and carry out the territorial organization of the touristic infrastructure in the field of rational nature management.

Ethics

All the authors read and approved the manuscript and no ethical issues involved.

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