Potential of rural tourism in the Tunkinsky National Park (Baikal region): synergy of environmental and economic factors

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Abstract. The presence of unique natural and recreational resources in the Baikal region is a basic condition for the development of rural tourism. Rural tourism is becoming an ecological and social alternative to the technogenic development of agricultural areas. The optimal ecological, social and economic effect of the development of rural tourism requires a multifactor consideration of the territories specifics. This is particularly topical in relation to rural settlements located on the lands of specially protected natural territories. In the Baikal region, Tunkinsky administrative district (the only one in Russia) is located within the borders of the national park. Based on the analysis of the ecological, social and economic situation in the Tunkinsky district in the last decade (2009-2019), the authors conducted a preliminary assessment of the potential for the development of rural tourism. The most promising type of rural tourism, providing synergy of the social and economic development of the Tunkinsky district and compliance with environmental requirements, can only be eco-tourism, which is focused on recreational activities. The article proposes the creation of a tourist cluster of equestrian culture for the development of mobile recreation in a civilized manner. In particular, the Buryat ethnocultural equestrian center and the Cossack equestrian culture center in close cooperation and coordination with the administration of the district and the administration of the national park can conduct year-round work on programs and projects for sports, cultural, educational, ethnographic, and health tourism involving all the settlements in the Tunkinsky district.

1. Introduction
Growing interest in rural tourism, especially ecologically oriented recreational activity in nature, is becoming a global trend [1]. In the Russian Federation, the region of Lake Baikal (Lake Baikal was added to the World Heritage list by UNESCO) and the Baikal Natural Territory are among the most attractive tourist places for Russian and foreign tourists. Among the popular tourist routes “back to the wild nature” is the Tunkinskaya Valley; it is unique among specially protected natural territories. First, its borders completely coincide with the Tunkinsky District Municipality of the Republic of Buryatia. Secondly, since 1991, it has acquired the status of the Tunkinsky National Park. The coincidence of the boundaries of the district and the national park has no analogues in world and Russian practice.
The creation of the Tunkinsky National Park within the boundaries of the entire administrative district led to strict environmental regulation of economic activities. As a result of the coincidence of the administrative boundaries of the district and the park, there were contradictions between these power structures, as well as between the local population and the park management. As many studies have shown, the collision of economic and environmental forces is often the cause of social conflicts [2]. This, in turn, requires the development of an adequate tourism development policy and correlated interaction of all stakeholders [3].

According to the passport of the National Project "Ecology", approved by the Presidium of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and National Projects (Protocol dated 12/24/2018 N 16), on the one hand, it is planned to improve and develop the infrastructure necessary to preserve the unique ecosystem of Lake Baikal and the Baikal natural territory. On the other hand, the promotion of tourist products of the national parks and an increase in the number of visitors on the specially protected natural territories is planned. Based on the natural, historical and geographical features of the Tunkinsky National Park, the main strategic option of territorial development in the field of tourism can only be the economic specialization of the area. Currently, the growth rate of tourist interest in the Tunkinskaya Valley exceeds the capacity of the tourist infrastructure. Research into the potential of rural tourism in the Tunkinsky district is becoming relevant in the search of ways to solve this problem and the social and economic development of the territory.

2. Materials and methods

The system approach and the program-target method became the basis for studying the potential of rural tourism in the context of a three-pronged problem: recreational use, environmental protection, and sustainable rural development. To understand the current state and prospects for the development of various types of rural tourism in a specially protected natural area of the Tunkinskaya Valley, a SWOT analysis was carried out; the following methods were used: the case method, as well as statistical and cartographic methods. The review and analysis of regional and municipal regulations on tourism and environmental activities on the territory of the Tunkinskaya valley were carried out. For many years, the authors have studied the peculiarities of tourism in the Baikal region, including in Tunkinskaya hollow [4, 5]. The article is based on the author's field materials collected in the study area in the period 2010-2018.

3. Results and discussion

Since 90s of the twentieth century, market changes in the needs of the population in the recreational and tourist sphere led to the transformation of agrotourism into rural tourism. As a result, many small forms of agricultural enterprises began to specialize in tourist services [6-8]. This trend has become characteristic of the Tunkinskaya valley. Tunkinskaya branch of the intermontane hollows belongs to the South-Western Baikal region; it includes Bystrinskaya, Torskaya, Tunkinskaya, Khoytogolskaya, Turanskaya, and Mondinskaya hollows. Its length from the South-Western tip of Lake Baikal is more than 200 km. From the north, the territory is bounded by the Tunkinsky loaches and from the south - by the Khamar-Daban range. The Tunkinskaya valley is an integral part of the Baikal rift zone.

The district shares borders with Irkutsk region and Mongolia. But remoteness from large cities as potential sales markets and sources of investment puts the Tunkinskaya Valley at a disadvantageous position compared to other municipalities (competitors).

The Tunkinsky National Park, the second largest Russian national park, has a high ecological potential for the development of a recreational tourist cluster. The main objective of the Tunkinsky National Park is to preserve the integrity of the unique natural landscapes, geological objects, flora and fauna, natural monuments, history, and culture. Along with the preservation of natural complexes, the park ensures the development of traditional sectors of the economy: agriculture, cattle breeding, fishing, hunting game, pine nuts, wild berries, and medicinal plant raw materials. In addition, the area is rich in mineral springs, where the resorts are functioning. Mineral springs are one of the main potentials of recreational value [9]. Mountains, rivers, lakes and a variety of landscapes attract tourists and travelers.
Statistics of the annual visit to the area (national park) are contradictory. In accordance with the “Concept of Tourism Development in the municipal entity the Tunkinsky District (for the period up to 2020)”, the number of tourists per year is expected to be at least 15.2 thousand people, according to expert estimates - 170-450 thousand people. "The Strategy for Social and Economic Development of the municipal entity the Tunkinsky District for the period until 2035" adopted in 2018 states that in 2017 the Tunkinsky District was visited by 265 thousand people, of whom 14 thousand people received spa services. The main stream of the visitors falls on the summer period; about 80.0% of the visitors come from Irkutsk region, 15.0% - from the Republic of Buryatia and 05.0% - from other regions. The main purpose to visit this area is rest and recuperation, in addition, excursions, photo and video filming, visiting of relatives and friends, wild plants harvesting, etc.

This leads to the first conclusion: during last 28 years of the national park activity, it was not possible to organize a reliable account of tourists; probably it happened since somebody deliberately (or accidentally) distorts the statistics of the tourist flow entering the territory of the national park. What depressive social and economic condition of the region can we talk about if 450 thousand tourists enter the district at present? Tourism statistics in the national park needs serious study and practical support since the state and degree of reliability of statistical data are the basis for planning and developing tourism, conducting marketing activities and determining the aggregate economic result and trends in the development of tourism in a particular region.

As part of the investment project ATC (autotourism cluster) "Tunkinskaya Valley", it is planned to increase the flow of tourists to 1000 people per year (i.e., more than two times). At the same time, it is widely believed that the development of tourism on the territory of the Tunkinsky district is not accompanied by a positive social and economic effect. Indeed, if we consider the main social and economic (statistical) indicators of the area in recent years, it is clear that the dynamics of the development of industrial production in the area is characterized by a rather high rate compared to the average one in the republic. However, the development of small businesses shows a slightly different picture. This direction of the development in the economy in the agricultural areas is one of the most vital, as the development of small businesses on rural territories may contribute to the material prosperity and increase in the standard of living of the population.

On the other hand, if the sanatorium-resort facilities are able to receive approximately 15.2 thousand people per year, then who serves the rest visitors - from 70 to 435 thousand people (according to the expert estimates)? We can’t find an answer to this question because the answer is not on the surface. By all indications, there is need in interdisciplinary research [10] and detailed analysis in order to find out how successful the tourism industry is developed in the area, the way it functions, what its statistical and economic parameters are.

Only isolated fragments of marketing and sociological research were found, which relate to the quality of tourist service in the Tunkinsky district. Comments of tourists and residents of the area are different in their estimates: from strictly positive to strictly negative. This is understandable: tastes, inquiries and intended services have a significant degree of difference as tourist and recreational infrastructure.

Such assessments are not accidental; they confirm the steady trend in the industry and tourism infrastructure of the entire Baikal region. Marketing research of the tourism market in other areas of the Baikal Natural Territory also revealed a range of negative trends: low quality of accommodation, high prices, poor service, dirt, tasteless food, tourists are left to themselves, low culture of the local population. Similar trends are also found in the Baikal areas of Irkutsk region. Of course, there are territories of good quality service, but we should not turn a blind eye to the fact that, in general, hospitality and service is far from a high or even quite satisfactory level. For the sake of objectivity, it must be said that we can also observe a low cultural level of behavior among tourists on Lake Baikal and in the Tunkinskaya valley.

The problems of the Tunkinsky National Park, contrary to the opinion of local residents and the administration of the Tunkinsky District, are not unique; they are rather typical for the Baikal region and the entire Russian Federation [4, 5].
If, for example, we take into account the Pribaikalsky National Park in Irkutsk Region, founded in 1987 on the territory of three districts (Irkutsk, Olkhonsky and Slyudyansky), we will find a similar picture:

1) long-standing conflicts between the administration of the Pribaikalsky National Park and the administrations of Irkutsk, Olkhonsky and Slyudyansky districts regarding the use of land and business activities in the national park and its buffer zone;

2) spontaneous development of coastal recreational sites (on the land within the park boundaries) by private and departmental camp sites and other recreational facilities. The conservation status of lands and unique natural systems are broken. The attractiveness of landscapes is reduced and the possibilities of ecological routes are limited;

3) spontaneous intensive development of unorganized tourism along the entire coastline, which is a part of the Pribaikalsky National Park territory;

4) lack of long-term development programs, joint interests of the national park and the local population;

5) absence of a single and understandable concept for the development of tourism on the territory of the Pribaikalsky National Park, which takes into account the observance of the approved environmental protection regime.

A very similar situation, as in the Tunkinsky district, has developed on the territory of the Olkhonsky district and especially on the island of Olkhon.

The local population often violates the environmental regime of the Tunkinsky National Park. Violations are: unauthorized deforestation and landfills, fishing, hunting, and fires. The worst thing is that 80–95% of the environmental crimes are not punished. Environmental crimes are particularly highly latent crimes [11].

Sustainable development of the territory can be achieved not only if the population voluntarily and consciously chooses environmental priorities but also through the effective management. The second conclusion: during the last 28 years, the park administration and the district administration did not manage to work out a mutual balance of interests in cooperation in the field of environmental management and nature conservation. Instead of integration of the national park with the regional social and economic system and close coordination of the economic and environmental activities of all institutions, enterprises and organizations within the boundaries of the park area, we see a picture of the successful assimilation of the national park with the regional social and economic system (with the active support of the government of the Republic of Buryatia) by fully subordinating of the activities of the national park to meet the district’s current needs for land and natural resources, caused primarily by the low level of management and lack of the national park's own development policy to attract investments and financial resources, as well as creating favorable conditions for the growth of incomes and employment of the local population.

Needless to say that at the initial stage (after the park was founded) the local population and the district administration expected such actions and results from the national park; but after the first 10 years, the expectations began to give way to disappointment and development of the opposition to the national park. After the second decade of the park’s activities, this opposition, in many ways, turned into an active confrontation. The population and the administration of the district began to assert that the national park is the main obstacle to the happy life of all the inhabitants of the Tunkinsky district.

The administration of the national park has repeatedly made proposals to the administration of the Tunkinsky district to promote the development of Arshan resort, tourism, increase employment; it interacted with the public in order to comply with the environmental regime of the national park.

However, the district administration especially looks forward to the changes of the borders of the national park, linking them with investment projects for the development of tourism and, first of all, with the development of rural tourism. If a part of the agricultural land and rural settlements becomes free from environmental constraints inherent on specially protected natural territories, local residents will have the right to sell land plots and real estate. Here, we can make a preliminary conclusion: the withdrawal of village lands and agricultural lands from the borders and jurisdiction of the Tunkinsky
National Park will have both positive and negative consequences. In the first case, a new land and real estate market will appear in the Baikal region, which will cause an influx of investment into the region and revival of social and economic life. In the second case, the impact on the nature of the Tunkinskaya Valley will increase dramatically as the volume of illegally cut industrial timber (activities of the so-called “black lumberjacks”) will increase. As expected, the development of rural tourism will be a promising direction to expand the range of tourism services in the Tunkinsky district. This will cause an increase in incomes of the population through the sale of its own environmentally friendly (agricultural) products.

The key advantage of rural tourism is that in addition to the usual for tourism task to provide rest and recreation for the population [12, 13] it is able to ensure the preservation and rational use of natural and cultural heritage, taking into account the interests of the local economy, support for entrepreneurship and social development of the village, and increase the attractiveness of rural life for young people [14].

It is clear that the spontaneous and independent development of rural tourism has little chance of success. It is advisable to use the program-target method to solve the problem of sustainable development of rural areas and support rural tourism, develop subsidy mechanisms and grant support for projects and programs of rural tourism, to be exact – support for district residents who are ready to develop services in rural tourism. Of course, there should be an information and consulting center for rural tourism in the district; ideally, we need to copy the US experience in usage of Google Earth Engine for environmental protection [15].

We believe that in case of withdrawal of village and agricultural lands from the national park, it is quite possible to create a new highly efficient sector of the economy capable of successfully interacting with all the structural elements of the existing agricultural complex and developing the cultural traditions of the local population, realizing their potential in a consolidated tourist product which has originality and high competitiveness to promote the tourism market.

In our opinion, the most promising type of rural tourism in the Tunkinsky district may be the creation of a cluster of equestrian tourism, organically combining the environmental and ethnocultural components of active recreation; the cluster should provide creation of a unified equestrian tourism system, which includes the regional network of riding schools for beginners, horse festivals with performances and competitions, and horse-riding tourist routes. In particular, it is possible to create two supporting centers of equestrian culture – the Buryat ethnocultural equestrian center and the Center of Cossack equestrian culture; the centers should help the district and national park administrations to jointly develop a program for the development of this tourist and recreational product, to link all 14 rural settlements of the Tunkinskaya Valley into a single tourist system. From the point of view of the infrastructure problem, the accommodation of tourists is very economical and exotic (with proper organization) in rural houses and special yurt camps equipped with biotoilets and autonomous power supply systems.

When the balance of interests and the integral interaction of the administrations is fulfilled, the Tunkinsky district has sufficient natural and human potential to solve the accumulated social, economic, cultural, environmental, and ethnopsychological problems.

4. Conclusion

From a scientific and practical point of view, the foundation of the Tunkinsky National Park within the boundaries of the administrative district is justified, since the effectiveness of the protection of diffusely located natural, historical and cultural sites is possible only with the legal status of the entire region as a specially protected natural territory. On the other hand, the existing status of the national park in accordance with environmental legislation makes it impossible to acquire ownership of agricultural land, limiting investor interest in the development of the tourism industry. Considering the main strategic variant of the territorial development of the Tunkinsky district as a zone of ecological tourism, it is necessary to develop a tourist infrastructure focused on various needs and incomes of tourists. Efforts should be focused on creating conditions for all-season tourism and the development of tourism-related
areas. The development of various types of rural tourism is a real chance to increase the level of employment and incomes of the rural population.

Currently, rural tourism has become a post-industrial response to the challenges of modern civilization and the prospect for achieving synergy of environmental and economic factors. Rural tourism has a high recreational potential, it allows reducing the anthropogenic load on nature and increasing well-being, both on a local and national scale. The use of the positive aspects of the development of rural tourism and increasing its efficiency requires interdisciplinary research and international cooperation.

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