Development of ecological tourism: Russia and China

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Abstract. Innovative development and further collaboration of Russia and China, when our countries experience EU and US sanctions, require a deep study of the domestic and foreign tourism experience. Today, ecotourism is of special interest in developed countries and should be an important component of the socioeconomic development of our countries. The work presents the modern concept and approaches to ecological tourism, the implementation of which is required for sustainable development of the countries and the promotion of local natural, cultural, and historical heritage. Ecological tourism plays an important role to preserve natural, historical and cultural values too. This type of tourism attracts many tourists and is, thereby, profitable from economic, social and political points of view, resulting in further lucrative collaboration between our countries. Some common benefits of ecological tourism are proposed for Russia and China, as the prospective centres of the world ecological tourism. Some recommendations for the further development of ecological tourism in the region are presented. The role of specially protected natural areas with its wealth of natural resources determines the conditions favorable for the development of eco-tourism and its forms in our countries. Therefore, the importance of ecological tourism in our countries is revealed.

1. Introduction
The necessity of the development of ecological tourism is substantiated today by problems of environmental preservation as well as requirements for sustainability of entrenched economic activities in specific regions. After studying many modern sources about tourism, the authors concluded that ecological tourism should be an important component of the socioeconomic development of Russia, China and North-East Asia, which are able to preserve their natural, historical and cultural values. The ecological tourism, particularly, with the active involvement of local residents, should become an important element for the development of the regions promoting both economic development and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the regions.

2. Materials and methods
There are some well-established ecological tourism principles to be implemented in Russia and China. Since ecological tourism is always described as an industry developed specifically to promote the sustainable use of resources, the question is, how this actually can be achieved in Russia. What should be done if the local people often disregard the ecological importance of the flora and fauna in favor of the visits and advantages of mass tourists, who often ignore the harm and damage that is possible to the environment, which is done to maximize the profits per visit to a site? The ecological approach to the tourism suggested in Russia needs to meet a certain set of conditions, and it is required to comply
with rules and an overall ecotourism concept. If the conditions and rules of ecological tourism are followed, then the sustainability of the tourism and use of the resources involved will be achieved.

There are two traditional approaches to ecotourism in developed and developing countries, including China. The first view puts a premium on the conservation of local wildlife, culture and other resources and uses ecotourism as a method to achieve that preservation. Another approach focuses on eco-efficient tourism that is based on the use of resources and depends on their continued existence in order to be marketable and, therefore, seeks ways of preserving the attractive or pristine state of the destination. Therefore, the proper management of ecotourism programs requires a somewhat different framework from mass tourism. Hence, the participation of scientists and practitioners, government officials, and the local community is always important for ecotourism. Thereby, in our model, there are at least five sectors involved in ecological tourism development in the order of their importance suggested for Russia and China [1]:

- Local citizens: These are local people with their everyday use of the natural, cultural and historic resources, who should play the crucial role in local ecological tourism development in our countries because they do not only monitor the use of these resources but are also the hosts to visitors.
- Scientists: The role of scientists is to look at the local resources and their evaluation from economic, social, and natural points of view. The importance of the involvement of scientists is their advisory position based on their thorough scientific, cultural, and historical knowledge as well as their ability to disseminate the relevant information. They can also work on planning and elaborating of various tour programs, keeping minimum harm to nature in mind.
- Travel industry: The travel industry should develop products based on research and advice of scientists. The travel industry helps stimulate local economies through running its businesses, such as guided tours.
- Tourists: The tourists, thanks to the knowledge imparted to them by local guides, become more aware of the environment and bring both direct and indirect profits to the local businesses and community. They are essential in helping local people realize that sustaining and conserving their natural resources is crucial for the stabilization of their economy.
- Government: Government bears the responsibility of supporting the establishment of ecotourism: for example, contributing to the drafting of guidelines, providing education for staff, and supporting non-profit organizations.

3. Discussion and results

Ecotourism is a relatively new concept in Russia and China. A distinctive feature of ecological tourism from regular tourism is that mass tourism means simply traveling a distance from home, whereas ecotourism is as responsible travel to natural areas, which promotes the protection of nature, supports the well-being of the local population, and includes interpretation and education. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as a system of travel and tourism that promotes environmental conservation by educating travelers about sustainable lifestyles [2] (TIES, 2020).

Other definitions of ecological tourism are the following:

- tourism involving travel to areas of natural or ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing wildlife and learning about the environment [3];
- tourism that is designed to contribute to the protection of the environment or at least minimize damage to it, often involving travel to areas of natural interest in developing countries or participation in environmental projects [4];
- the practice of touring natural habitats in a manner meant to minimize ecological impact [5];
- tourism to places having unspoiled natural resources;
- tourism to exotic or threatened ecosystems to observe wildlife or help preserve nature.

According to statistics provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), ecotourism accounts for approximately 12-15% of all tourist flows. Moreover, the number of eco-tourists
increases by 25-30% annually. It is expected that the share of Russian and Chinese tourists in the total number of eco-tourists will also increase.

Russia and China have great recreational resources that are studied and used for further ecological tourism purposes. Our countries have many specially protected natural areas (SPNAs) which have the world’s fame and are of interest to both tourists and local residents, especially those who are interested in wildlife. It is the wealth of natural resources, which determines the conditions favorable for the development of eco-tourism and its forms in our countries.

It is worth to mention that the peculiarity of Chinese and Russian attractions is not only their diversity and scale but also their geographical location with considerable distance from each other. The basis of ecotourism in Russia and China are SPNAs, which include nature reserves, national and natural parks, State reserves, natural monuments, dendrological parks and botanical gardens, health-improving areas and resorts, and territories of traditional nature usage.

Many SPNAs are included in the UNESCO world heritage list. Moreover, some of them, such as Lake Baikal, are under the threat of extinction.

Ecological tourism in Russia is on the rise. Tourism in Russia has seen rapid growth since the late Soviet times, first domestic tourism and then international tourism. Rich cultural heritage and great natural variety place Russia among the most popular tourist destinations in the world. Not including Crimea, the country contains at least 23 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, whereas many more are on UNESCO's tentative lists.

In total, there are 11 World natural heritage sites on the territory of the Russian Federation, which include 13 nature reserves, seven national parks, three Federal reserves, several natural monuments, and buffer zones of nature reserves. There are 105 state nature reserves, 52 national parks, 57 Federal reserves, 17 natural monuments, and 67 botanical gardens, which have been created in Russia [6]. The total area of federally protected areas is 63.3 million hectares, and together with regional territories, the area of protected areas in Russia is 209.5 million hectares.

Major tourist routes in Russia include a travel around the Golden Ring of ancient cities, cruises on the big rivers including the Volga, and long journeys along the famous Trans-Siberian Railway. Diverse regions and ethnic cultures of Russia offer many different foods and souvenirs and show a great variety of traditions, including Russian Maslenitsa, Tatar Sabantuy, or Siberian shamanist rituals. In 2013 alone, 33 million tourists visited Russia, making it the ninth-most visited country in the world and the seventh-most visited in Europe.

Very few residents of Russia live on tourism. Despite the fact that many local residents are aware of the prospective incomes to be brought by tourists, only few are in the tourism industry and even fewer are aware of the ecological tourism potential.

The local products, including souvenirs, are still of low interest for tourists. Ecological and regional products can be marketed better by ecological tourism.

China has become one of the most popular travel destinations in the world. Ecological tourism in China is also on the rise. Tourism in China is a growing industry that is becoming a significant part of the Chinese economy. The rate of tourism has greatly expanded over the last few decades since the beginning of reform and opening-up. The emergence of a newly rich middle class and an easing of restrictions on movement by the Chinese authorities are both fueling this travel boom.

China was the fourth most visited country in the world in 2015, after France, the United States, and Spain, with 56.9 million international tourists per year. Today, the UNWTO World Tourism Rankings rank China as the third most visited country in the world. The Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection or the MEP stated that there are 2,541 nature reserves covering 147 million hectares or 14.7% of China. 80% of these reserves have some form of ecotourism. With its rich natural landscape and features, China has beautiful natural scenery that tourists long for [7].

In 2017, tourism contributed approximately (US$1.45 trillion) 11.04% of the GDP and contributed direct and indirect employment of up to 28.25 million people. There were 139.48 million inbound trips and five billion domestic trips. The 2016 data indicated that the majority of China's foreign tourists came from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Among the number of tourist arrivals who stayed for at
least a night, 27.72 million came from Hong Kong, 4.81 million from Macau, and 5.09 million from Taiwan. When adjusted to exclude transfers from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, the number of tourist arrivals from foreign countries directly to China is 21.65 million people.

China ranked second in the world for travel and tourism contribution to GDP in 2014 ($943.1 billion) and first in the world for travel and tourism contribution to employment (66,086,000 jobs in 2014). Tourism based on direct, indirect, and the induced impact was 9.3% of China's GDP in 2013.

The Key Points of Ecological Tourism: today we can name at least seven defining points to describe ecotourism in international practice, which is still to be adopted in China and in Russia, particularly, in the Baikal region. The profound studies of ecotourism including University programs use the following defining points for the working definition [8]:

- It assumes travels to sites of real nature: These places are usually rather remote areas, whether inhabited or uninhabited, and officially under the environmental protection at the international, national, regional, municipal, or private level.

- Minimum impact: Ecological tourism always strives to minimize the adverse anthropological impact, which can be achieved via, for example, well established and organized tours and use of recycled materials or local construction materials for hotels and other buildings required to provide the tourist infrastructure, environmentally and culturally sensitive architectural design as well as alternative energy sources, recycling and/or non-harmful disposal of wastes. Minimization of impact also requires that the behavior of tourists and the number of visits be regulated to ensure no damage to the local ecosystem.

- It educates environmental awareness: Ecological tourism always means education, for both tourists and residents of the local communities. It is very important to provide travelers well before the departure to a destination with the relevant information about the country, environment and people, as well as about the formal and informal institutions involved. According to Ecotourism Societies guidelines, it is required to learn about the places and peoples visited as well as to minimize their negative impacts while visiting sensitive environments and cultures. Therefore, good eco-touristic programs should be provided by well-trained, multilingual guides with the knowledge of natural and cultural history, environmental interpretation, ethical principles, and effective ways of communication. All ecotourism projects are supposed to educate tourists and local community members, including adults and kids in the host country.

- It provides direct financial benefits for nature protection and conservation: Ecotourism not only promotes environmental awareness but also is directed to raise some funds required for environmental protection, research, and education. This can be achieved via various financial mechanisms, including park entrance fees, contributions to eco-tour and transportation companies, special offers in hotels, eco-taxes and voluntary contributions.

- It should provide financial benefits and job advantages to local people: It is a common belief that national parks and other conservation areas will only survive if there are "happy people" around the area. It is getting obvious that local communities must be involved with and receive income and other tangible benefits related to the state of life improvement and local infrastructure as a result of the conservation areas promotion and construction of tourist facilities. Indeed, people from the local communities surrounding an ecotourism attraction should run campsites, lodges, guide services, restaurants, and other concessions. Such a partnership is suggested for all sorts of investors planning their activities in parks or other tourist destination. More importantly, since Ecotourism is often viewed as a tool for rural development, it should also allocate most of the economic and political control to the local communities. This is the most common mistake of the operators and the foreign partners to neglect the role of the local officials and business people, including those living in villages and nearby settlements.

- It respects local culture: Local culture is another concern of the ecotourism. Ecological tourism is not only "greener" but also less culturally intrusive and exploitative than any other
forms of tourism. Ecotourism always strives to be culturally respectful and have a minimal effect on both the natural environment and the human population of a host country. Sometimes it is difficult, since ecotourism often involves travelling to distant and secluded places where small and isolated communities have had little experience interacting with foreign visitors. Sometimes, even ecotourism involves an unequal relationship between the visitors and the hosts as well as commoditization of the relationship through the exchange of money. Responsible ecotourists are learning beforehand about the local customs, dress codes and other social norms and do not intrude into the community unless either invited or as part of a well-organized tour.

- It should support human rights and local democracy: Traditionally, it is tourism that is loudly hailed as a tool for building international understanding and world peace promotion. However, it is not always the fact, or it does not necessarily happen immediately upon a visit. Most often, tourism just bolsters the economies of various countries, including even those that tend to be or are undemocratic and repressive. Regular tourists pay low attention to the political system of a country they visit unless civil unrest breaks out there, which is also harming for the tourists. In fact, the rural population living around national parks and close to other ecotourism attractions are in contradictions with the national and regional laws and regulations, and multinational corporations for control of the assets and possible benefits.

4. Conclusion
The result of ecotourism activities in our countries is to attract the resources for the development of tourism and the economy of the regions, in which they are located. Therefore, the importance of ecotourism in our countries is currently highly relevant. This type of tourism plays a significant role in preserving the unique natural, cultural and historical heritage used for tourism purposes. It attracts a huge number of tourists and is, thereby, profitable from economic, social and political points of view.

Therefore, there are some common benefits of ecological tourism, which can be proposed for Russia and China as well as their regions and tourist destinations, which are as follows:

- Russia and China are prospective centers of the world ecological tourism. In Russia, nowadays, we can offer some purely ecological tours. The visitors wishing to see the cleanest and most beautiful lakes can easily reach it, stay in the modern ecological facilities for a few days or weeks, and enjoy the comfort of local small resorts and campsites.

- Ecotourism to natural attractions located in specially protected natural areas (SPNAs), which have the world’s fame and are of interest to both tourists and local residents, especially those who are interested in wildlife, which is usually accompanied by recreational and educational activities, is a promising means of advancing social, economic, and environmental objectives. It offers Russia and China new opportunities for small-enterprise investment and employment and increases the national stake in protecting biological resources. However, making ecotourism a positive economic and environmental tool requires policies that foster responsible nature tourism development, broad-based and active local participation in its benefits, and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. It helps educate travelers and locals and make them environmentally responsible; it even supplies funds if not for the conservation but the minimization of the negative anthropogenic influence and can directly benefit the economic development and social empowerment of local communities, and it fosters respect for different cultures and human rights.

Wildlife and its habitats in Russia and in China are becoming increasingly popular attractions for international tourism. There are many regions that can provide richness in terms of unspoiled nature, places with conserved biodiverse inhabitants. The numbers of eco-tourists to these regions are growing, despite the crisis and sanctions. The new wave of nature tourists is expected to bring the finances with them to spend. This money will support the local travel industry that already exists and create new jobs and incomes for households and local communities in and around places of attractions, such as Lake Baikal and adjoining forests as well as other protected areas. There is a need to establish
ecotourism enterprises, special tour agencies and guide services, lodges, and private reserves as well as such activities as arts and crafts industries already present in Russia. There is also a need to develop transportation and food services at the local levels to improve ecological tourism. Local administrations can use the incomes generated in this way for more efficient operating and protection of natural attractions.

It is necessary to implement modern effective and efficient European ecotourism practices [9] in Russia and China, such ecological tourism practices that can be observed nowadays, for example, in Switzerland and in Germany.[10]

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