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# Sustainable Tourism Development in the Russian Arctic: Challenges And Prospects

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**Abstract.** The study aims to identify the main trends in the sustainable development of tourism in the Arctic Region of Russia and to develop theoretical, methodological and practical recommendations for the Russian Arctic tourism promotion. Crucial principles of tourism sustainability are listed. The author analyses the concepts of integrated tourism promotion of regions and sustainable tourism development, identified by the World Tourism Organization and the Arctic Council. The article outlines the concept of sustainable development of Russian Arctic tourism, defined by the national legislative, directive and statutory laws regulating tourism and the Arctic Region. Along with an analysis of tourism business modification, a review of the particular directions of the organisation and implementation of tourist services of the Russian Arctic is carried out. As a result, promising directions for promoting Russian Arctic tourism in correlation with the global trend of sustainable development, which is characteristic of a modern intensive economy using socially responsible management, are identified. The suggestions to improve the branding system and create an “umbrella brand” of tourism in the Arctic Region of Russia are formulated. The primary role and degree of involvement of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North in the development of Arctic tourism are determined. Innovative pedagogical technologies for highly specialised tourism personnel training are proposed.

## 1. Introduction

Geographically, the Arctic is limited to 8 countries of the Arctic Council (USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Russia). It covers 40.3 million square kilometres with 532 million people living on its territory, among whom there are 4.6 million people who live directly in the Arctic [1]. The Arctic tourism market has started to develop very intensively all over the world in recent decades. Most national tourism offices of Arctic countries have formed strategies to promote domestic Arctic tourism. Tourist services are characterised by the uniqueness and comprehensiveness of the tourist offer. However, the Arctic is a very vulnerable region, where even a small number of tourists can cause irreparable harm to the environment.

## 2. Principles of sustainable tourism development in the Russian Arctic

Trends towards sustainable local and regional tourism development in the last two decades have become characteristic of many tourist destinations. This phenomenon was caused by the global pattern of lasting, durable and sustainable development as a characteristic of the modern intensive economy with an application of socially responsible management. Those factors force countries and individual regions to revise their future development models and strategies based on the main 17 global sustainability goals adopted by 193 countries on September 25, 2015.



The sustainable development of Arctic tourism is being addressed by many international organisations and associations, including the UN World Tourism Organization, the European Travel Commission (ETC), the Arctic Council and The Barents Euro-Arctic Co-operation. For example, the concept of sustainable development of the Barents cooperation countries is reflected in the 1993 Kirkenes Declaration.

Contemporaneously, sustainability in tourism in a global context is a very complex and controversial issue. First of all, this ambiguity is caused by the "overtourism" or "excessive tourism" phenomena, steadily increasing in many tourist destinations. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has projected 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals in 2020, 7% sector growth in 2017 and 6% in 2018 [9]. However, the tourism market has proliferated recently in the last five years that 1.4 billion was reached two years earlier. International tourist arrivals reached 345 million in 2018. These figures are attributed to strong economic growth at the global level, accessibility of air travel, technological changes, new business models and simplified visa and formal regimes between destination and host countries [9].

The fundamental principles of sustainable development of Arctic tourism are economical and social sustainability, support for the local economy, environmentally friendly business, involvement and protection of local people, education of potential tourists, preservation of the environment, minimisation of consumption, waste and pollution, trained personnel as the key to responsible tourism, observance of safety rules when in the Arctic region.

The Russian Federation leadership has always considered the Arctic as a strategically important region of its presence and long-term development. Russia has steadily strengthened its position in the Arctic zone, while simultaneously defining the critical tasks for the future development of these territories at each new stage [7]. A significant milestone in the history of Russian Arctic development was the creation in February 2015 of the State Commission for the Development of the Arctic. At the same time, eight vital supporting zones for further Arctic development were identified, which will allow us to begin designing, launch new large-scale infrastructure projects and modernise existing transport infrastructures. Also, such an integrated approach to the management of the polar zone will intensify shipping along the Northern Sea Route and increase the efficiency of logistics, as well as create security and communication facilities in ports. All of the above will have a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the polar territories [10]. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May, 07th 2018 № 204 established the need to increase exports of services in non-resource sectors of the economy, which include tourism. At present, the intensification of development and promotion of Russian Arctic tourism largely depends on the adoption of the final version of the "Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security until 2035", as well as on the support and stimulation of entrepreneurial initiatives in the field of sustainable tourism and development of hospitality. The Security Council also emphasises that Russia's Arctic strategy for the period until 2035 should reflect a set of measures aimed at accelerating the socio-economic development of the Northern Russian regions. At the same time be aimed at improving the quality of life of the population, including the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North. Besides, it is noted that the new document should include a list of measures for the rational use of Arctic natural resources, the creation of an effective environmental protection system, and also take into account the adaptation of ecosystems and life support systems to climate change [5]. At the V International Arctic Forum "The Arctic - Territory of Dialogue" on April 09, 2019, in St. Petersburg, President of Russia V.V. Putin emphasised that "the Arctic accounts for more than ten per cent of all investments in the Russian Federation". Furthermore, he was convinced that "the importance of the Arctic factor in the country's economy will only grow. It is imperative to take into account the specifics of the problems concerning the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North" [4].

The basic principles of the sustainable development of the Russian Arctic were formulated and are being progressively transmitted by the Security Council of the Russian Federation, including through joint international events and meetings of high representatives of the Arctic Council member states. For example, the Security Council of the Russian Federation has repeatedly held thematic forums and international conferences of the high and the highest level. During whose meeting the issues of tourist

and recreational potential of the Russian Arctic, such as transport, logistics and infrastructure support for Arctic tourist destinations, the safety of tourists during the organisation of routes in the northern latitudes, as well as comfort and preservation of the national identity of the indigenous peoples, their identity, lifestyle and culture were actively discussed:

- International conference “By The Northern Sea Route to Strategic Stability and Equitable Partnership in the Arctic” aboard the Yamal nuclear icebreaker along the Northern Sea Route in August 2011;

- Conference “Security and Cooperation in the Arctic: New Frontiers” in April 2012, Murmansk with visits to the Franz Josef Land archipelago and a visit to the border branch “Nagurskoye” of the FSB of Russia. The meeting was attended by representatives of Canada, the USA, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Russia;

- Conference “Ensuring technological and environmental safety in the Arctic: solutions”, an international meeting of representatives of the Arctic Council member states, Arctic Council observer countries and the scientific community in April 2013. Route: Nagurskoye border outpost, Barneo ice base, North Pole, Salekhard, the village of Yar-Sale, Aksarka;

- An international meeting of representatives of the member states of the Arctic Council, observer countries of the Arctic Council and the scientific community in August 2014 in Naryan-Mar, and several other events that are actively covered on federal channels and in foreign media.

International meetings of representatives of the Arctic Council member states are aimed at intensifying practical cooperation between the countries to ensure comprehensive human life safety in the Arctic. The conferences demonstrate the proximity of national approaches of the practical states to the development and preservation of the Arctic, their focus on activating multifaceted cooperation in the region, help to strengthen mutual trust and contribute to the formation of a positive image of the Russian Federation, including the issues of sustainable development of Arctic tourism.

Particular attention is paid to the revival of navigation along the Northern Sea Route, including to international transit traffic ensuring. Issues under discussion include the construction of new icebreakers, modernisation of existing ones, creation of new ports, strengthening the system of search and rescue in Arctic waters, navigation and communication systems. On tourism, the following issues are discussed:

- development of safe and environmentally friendly types of tourism in places of traditional residence and traditional economic activity of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North;
- cooperation and tourist exchanges with northern tourist destinations; the potential of the Northern Sea Route for tourism;
- ensuring the safety of tourists travelling in the Arctic;
- possible risks in the development of tourism;
- development of tourist infrastructure and facilitation of transport routes;
- facilitating border crossing;
- business incentive issues;
- personnel aspects of supporting tourism activities;
- environmental points,
- search and rescue, and others.

As the genesis of tourism business shows, organised tourism in the Russian Arctic is not a mass direction in its essence. Thus, for example, for the period 2011-2018 “Russian Arctic” National Park was visited by 6.5 thousand people from 70 countries, while in the tourist season of 2018, 1079 tourist arrivals were recorded [6].

### **3. Tourism business in the Arctic**

The tour operators who are involved in the formation, implementation and promotion of the Russian Arctic tourism, in terms of the realisation, are following: Poseidon Expeditions, Hapag-Lloyd cruises, Quark Expeditions LTD, Oceanwide Expeditions, and other foreign travel companies. They provide

customers with unique tour packages and offers such as visits to the Russian Arctic National Park, Franz Josef Land archipelago, Severnaya Zemlya, Wrangel Island; activities like flag raising at the North Pole, helicopter tours, combined tours with floating along the Northern Sea Route, excursion programs in Barentsburg, the Pyramid, etc. Among domestic tour operators it is worth mentioning uniquely Special Travel Club, which is an expedition partner of the Russian Geographical Society in joint expedition projects, such as the complex high-latitude Arctic expedition - Ice base "Barneo" named after A V Orlov at the North Pole. The tour operator is also an active member of the Association of Russian Polar Explorers.

Arctic tourism is a unique, niche and expensive tourism product. At the same time, it is complicated in technical and organisational performance. After a comparative analysis of the market for Arctic polar tourism offers, we can conclude that the number of companies engaged in the sale of high-quality tourism products in the Russian Arctic is minimal. In contrast, the market and pricing policy has been stable over the past decade - many "northern" tour operators are mutual partners and do not seek dumping. For example, the average cost of a Poseidon Expeditions tour "Expedition Cruise - To the Top of the planet on the icebreaker "50 years of Victory" (duration - 12 days) RUR2 681 662 per person as of prices on March 27, 2020. The website also shows prices in US dollars, with accommodation in a standard double cabin is USD 30 995, Suite Arctic cabin - USD 45 095. The utterly identical program of the North Pole cruise on the 50 Years of Victory nuclear-powered icebreaker by Special Travel Club is available on the official website of the tour operator, which displays similar rates for the journey. A major tour operator of polar and expeditionary tourism Quark Expeditions LTD also indicates the equal minimum cost of a cruise on the icebreaker "50 years of Victory", 30,995 USD, identical to previous offers, in a standard cabin.

As we note, among the listed organisations there are no well-known companies based in the Russian Federation, except for the Special Travel Club, which is a priority representative in Russia of the largest polar cruise company "Quark Expeditions". The Arctic Tourism Center "Grumant" (Arktikugol State Trust), the domestic tour operators Jazz Tour, Skantravel and others organise trips to Spitsbergen with visits to Barentsburg and Pyramida, make a significant contribution to the promotion of domestic Arctic tourism, popularise the consumption culture in tourism and integrate the principles of sustainable tourism.

#### **4. Role of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North in the development of Russian Arctic tourism**

According to the Arctic Council, about 10% of the total Arctic population is indigenous. Following Russian law, indigenous peoples are considered peoples whose number does not exceed 50 thousand people. There are 41 ethnic groups live in the twenty-eight northern regions of the Russian Federation, which is about 270 thousand representatives of indigenous peoples.

The UNWTO insists that indigenous peoples should be the final decision-makers and beneficiaries of tourism development related to the culture and territory they inhabit [8]. The development of this type of tourism is impossible without a reliable partnership between indigenous peoples, government at various levels, tourist destinations, the private tourism sector and civil society. Besides, research institutes should also cooperate with all of the listed stakeholders to be able to conduct research based on valid data that will be used in future to develop tourism. Only a multilateral partnership can guarantee the observance of the interests of indigenous peoples in the process of participation in the tourism business and the preservation of their core values unchanged [8].

#### **5. Suggestions for improving the promotion of Arctic tourism in the Russian Federation**

The most promising tourist attractions in the Russian Arctic are:

- experience travelling or cruising on the atomic icebreakers of Rosatomflot;
- transition through the Arctic Circle;
- visiting the North Pole, active and extreme sports (ice diving, snowkiting, parachuting, helicopter flights, hot air ballooning, etc.), adventure tourism;

- the “Russian Arctic” National Park;
- the archipelago of Franz Josef Land;
- drifting ice base “Barneo” (Ice base ASPOL named after A. Orlov);
- passage along the Northern Sea Route;
- military-patriotic tours and passes along the routes of deer transport echelons;
- historical and archaeological tourism;
- observation of whales, walruses, polar bears;
- Barentsburg and Pyramida on Spitsbergen, subjects of the Soviet heritage;
- routes of the “Silver Necklace of Russia”, which unites eleven entities that are part of the Northwestern Federal District of the Russian Federation: St. Petersburg City, the Leningrad, Arkhangelsk, Vologda, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Pskov, Novgorod Regions, the Republic of Karelia and Komi, and Nenets Autonomous Okrug;
  - business and MICE tourism;
  - ecological tourism;
  - research and educational tourism, including the Arctic Floating University project of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after MV Lomonosov, projects of the Russian Geographical Society, and others.

The most popular types of tourism in the Russian North are cultural, historical, ethnographic tours, visits to the sites of indigenous peoples, sports tourism, extreme tourism, event tourism, architectural, cognitive and ornithological tourism, running and racing on deer, cruise tourism, ice diving, dog sledging, acquaintance with traditions and crafts, trips to reindeer herder parking lots and reindeer herding sites, expeditionary tourism, gastronomic tourism, etc. [7]. Tourists are also attracted by thematic tours, snow and ice installations, traditional north holidays and fairs. The mentioned objects should be united in the “Russian Artika” umbrella brand and promoted and positioned in the global tourism market following the critical provisions of the national “Strategy-2035”.

Undoubtedly, creating a strategy for the further development and promotion of organised tourism in the Russian Arctic is fading into the background at the time of writing the present article. Moreover, the priority goal and task of the Russian Federation is to preserve and protect the main wealth of the Russian Arctic region - representatives of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North. Facing the critically tricky situation in the worldwide market, severe stagnation of tourism, aviation, hospitality and related business areas in the current circumstances of the global pandemic developing in the first quarter of 2020, we cannot predict the boosting tourism development. The lack of travelling and following the quarantine today is the key to the further development of the tourism industry. However, in the conditions of stable growth, tourism in the Russian Arctic should be planned and developed only with the use of an integrated approach and only in the context of a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensionality of the tourist space of the Russian North, national, ethnographic and biological diversity, historical and cultural factors of the Arctic region of the Russian Federation.

Successful promotion of tourist services in the Russian Arctic cannot be carried out without the active participation of tourism professionals – highly specialised tourism personnel who are competent in the development and specifics of the Arctic region of Russia. For the improving the educational process of highly specialised tourism personnel in connectin to the current conditions of economic development, digitalisation, globalisation and high competition in the labour market, we suggest using content and language integrated learning (CLIL), the up-to-date interactive pedagogical technologies, as well as AR, VR and other innovative technologies. Augmented and virtual reality technologies can significantly increase primary professional skills and students’ awareness of remote tourist sites, destinations, and the tourism potential of the Arctic region. Virtual reality technologies are also valid for modelling tourist routes in the Arctic and can be used in tourist and recreational design in the northern latitudes. IoT (Internet of Things) and the use of technology 5.0 is also a promising area in tourism pedagogy, which is especially crucial in the preparation of highly specialised staff for the field of Arctic tourism promotion. As practice has shown, the undoubted advantage in the pedagogical process in tourism is the personality of the professor and his/her unique professional experience. In this case, the lecturer acts as

a coordinator, expert or consultant, thereby maximising the independent activities of students. Remote technologies and e-learning are also successfully used in tourism education, which is especially important in the context of the specifics of the professional activities of future graduates. Academic practice at Arctic sites encourages students to further research.

## 6. Conclusion

The development and promotion of the tourism product of the Russian Arctic are impossible without an integrated approach. It has the prospect of only having a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensionality of the tourism space of the Russian North, the national, cultural and biological diversity of the northern latitudes of the Russian Federation. Tourism in the Russian Arctic should be in the interests of, first and foremost, the indigenous peoples living in it, to involve them in the economic process, to defend interests and protect their well-being. At the same time, the state should not allow growing "excessive" or "excessive tourism". In this case, the regulator can be both pricing policy and progressive education, and the formation of consumer culture in tourism.

In the severe Arctic climate, the organisation of tourist routes should provide a quick response system and debug the crisis communication algorithm in tourism. Well-established communication, working with tourists in a state of emergency and minimising its consequences is the key to the sustainable and stable development of tourist destinations in the future [3].

The creation of attractive living conditions and professional realisation in the Arctic for travel professionals and highly specialised personnel of tourism, hospitality, restaurant business, as well as specialists serving the main tourist programs of sports entertainment and cultural and historical knowledge, will increase the attractiveness of the region and lead to an increase in the domestic tourists' interest in travels to the northern tourist destinations of Russia. Naturally, the importance of the Northern Sea Route for inland transportation, northern import, already operating routes through the ports of Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, etc. is undoubtful. Besides, they have opportunities for growth tourist cruises in the seas of the Arctic Ocean along the route of the Northern Sea Route [2].

The creation of favourable economic and social conditions for tourism development should correlate with the comprehensive and integrated development of the Arctic region. Solving the transport accessibility issues, developing and modernising the tourism infrastructure, ensuring safe tourist trips for mass tourists unprepared for the extreme conditions of the Far North is possible through different levels of state support and at the same time introducing regulations on activities in the northern latitudes. The above measures, implemented through various forms of public-private partnerships with the involvement of domestic investors in national tourism projects, will ensure the sustainable development of tourism in the Arctic region of Russia. The lack of professional and highly specialised personnel involved in organised and legal Arctic tourism in the field can be compensated through the influx of population from urbanised and oversaturated territories [7]. The creation of a socially responsible tourism business system, the popularisation of the Russian national idea, the Arctic Thinking promotion and its projection on the tourism consumption culture should meet the basic principles of sustainability in the development of tourist destinations in the Russian Arctic.

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