

SIGNIFICANT FACTORS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

In the XXI century all the efforts of mankind are directed towards the inculcation of principles of sustainable development in all the spheres. Population growth, rapid economic development and a high level of globalization caused environmental pollution, emission of dangerous gases, climate change, loss of diversity of nature, etc. It is a well-known fact that the consumption of resources during sustainable development of tourism is implemented in two ways to meet economic, social and esthetic demands and to maintain the country's cultural originality, essential biological diversity of the environmental and substantial vital systems. Principle of sustainability and correspondent approach is urgent for tourism since the promotion of the sector mostly depends on sightseeing and activities derived from natural environment, historical and cultural heritage of a certain region. Encroachment and damage of the resources, let alone their destruction, will by and large end all the talks about tourism. It is also remarkable that maintenance and rescue of a certain part of the resources is possible by tourism uniquely.

Keywords: Tourism, cultural heritage; sustainable development; tourist product; regional development

Introduction

The apparent awakening started in the 60-ies when symptoms of the planet degradation and the first signs of ecological crisis became visible. Scientists concluded the current state of the planet to be a consequence of limitations of the resources and overpopulation, as well as, political, social and economic inequality. The difference between riches and poor in analogy

to the one between industrial and developing countries, has reached colossal scales.

In 1987 the UN General Assembly reviewed the report “Our Common Future” revealing precise concrete ways to explore and solve the issues mentioned above. It also reflects a unified concept of the so called sustainable development: “Sustainable development is an economic and social road paved on the steady sustainability of the environment. The road should meet the demands of contemporary society at the same time considering the prospects of the development of future generations”.

In 1992 Rio de Janeiro held an international conference on the issues of environment and development. It refined the concept of sustainable development and posed new initiatives to make it true. It also declared a historical document – “agenda” of the XXI century (Program 21).

The first nongovernmental organizations such as “The friends of the earth” (1969) and “Greenpeace” taking care of the environment were found in order to increase global awareness in population (Geoffrey 2001). Publications by Rachel Carson – “Silent Spring” and “Growth Limit” - about the outcomes of aggressive economy became extremely popular.

For this reason, the concept of sustainable development was created and integrated in all the spheres of human activity and in tourism as well in 1992. A new ideological platform for tourism sector was generated from the roots of sustainable development.

Notwithstanding the fact that the term sustainable development is basically associated with environmental protection, it does not comprise only the latter. Social and economic dimensions are equally important here. It also reflects current standards of social and political liabilities recognized to be the leading principles by international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Sustainable development is a continuous process of changes and alterations in the frames of which the implementation of current resources, investments, technical progress, institutional updates altogether correspond to modern and future requirements.

We think sustainable tourism development should be based on the economic model aiming at:

- Security of pleasant travel for tourists;
- Maintenance of the state of environment directly influencing tourists and local population;
- Increase of the living standard of local population.

Achievements in sustainable development stipulate the existing conceptions of tourism promotion in many developed countries. It implies application, conservation and protection of natural, cultural and other tourist

resources. Tourism based on sustainable development is special since most of the volume of activity is related to attraction and the types of actions linked to the preservation of nature, historical heritage and cultural identity of an appropriate territory. If the resources get deteriorated or destroyed tourist regions will not attract tourists and tourism will not be successful. Tourists appeal to natural, clean and less packed places.

A number of principles are crucial for sustainable development and the essential one is to create conditions that would enable:

- Efficient implementation of resources, elimination of wastes and recycling;
- Restriction of pollution so that eco systems do not get damaged;
- Recognition and protection of the diversity of nature;
- Arrangement and solution of local needs according to the possibilities on a domestic level;
- Adequate food, water, shelter and fuel equally available in a reasonable price;
- Health care through creating safe, clean and pleasant environment and services focusing on illness prevention and care of patients;
- People not to fear any assaults or punishment because of their race, gender or faith;
- All the layers of society to have the right to participate in decision making;
- Availability for all the layers of society to participate in cultural, entertaining and leisure opportunities.

Sustainable development of tourism implies the possible growth on the expenses of efficient realization of the existing factor recourses because a significant aspect of sustainable development conception is fostering the tourism that is built upon domestic natural, material and labor resources. This way we enable development of the types of tourism which can bring maximal benefit to local population (for example, eco tourism). In this case population perceives the meaning and importance of tourism much better and actively encourages maintenance of domestic tourist resources as well as their complex or consistent operation.

Tourism is a rather complicated branch of business directly related to different sectors of society and economy. Without correct and accurate planning tourism may cause undesirable negative impacts on ecology, social-economic processes and protection of cultural heritage. Strategic planning on national and regional levels should cover policy of tourism development, structural plan, standard of sites, institutional factors and all the other elements necessary for the further promotion and management. In general, the frames of strategic planning should elaborate detailed plans for tourist attractions, resorts and other fields of tourism.

One of the benefits of tourism is conveyed in the idea that if it develops appropriately on the basis of sustainable development conception it can significantly subsidize the saving of natural and cultural resources of a correspondent region. One of the main methods of the security of sustainable development is the conception of ecological planning. It regards monitoring and analysis of all the elements of the environment which should be considered in the process of constructing tourist sites or infrastructure.

Benefits gained from tourism are profitable for the whole country: local population acts regarding the national interest, provides national policy of the field development and is actively involved in the maintenance of the environment and of cultural heritage through participation.

The concept of quality tourism is closely linked to sustainable development. It does not necessarily mean expensive or having a high cost, it is more related to the ratio of optimal prices and quality of tourist attractions, sites and services. Such an approach will also work with the type of tourists who are very well aware of local customs and traditions, nature, etc.

Sustainable development is a continuous chain of changes and the application of local resources, investments, technical progress and institutional updates within its frames match the requirements of current and future generations. The World Union of Conservation of Nature declares: “Sustainable development is a process in the frames of which the process of development goes on without damaging or destroying resources”.

We assume the principles of sustainable tourism development in Georgia can be formulated the following way:

- Natural, historical, cultural and other resources for tourism need to be protected for the continuous implementation in the future and for bringing the benefits for society;
- Tourism development should be planned in the way to avoid serious ecological and social-cultural problems in the region;
- The entire ecological condition of the region and its quality is urgent to be preserved and improved where required;
- Quality of tourist services should be secured so that tourist sites retain competitiveness and popularity;
- Revenues gained through tourism have to be spread on a maximally wide circle of population.

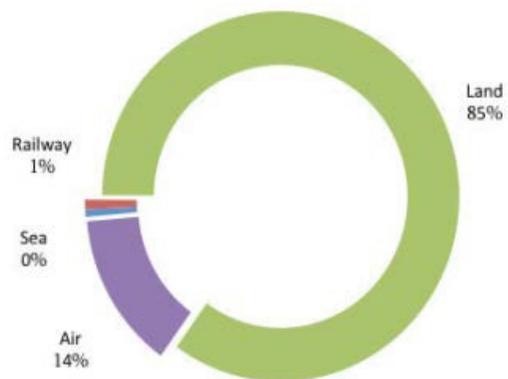
A suitable level of cultural traditions and ethnic diversity (uniqueness) is an important element of saving local cultural heritage. In addition, tourist resource maintenance assists local population to study and protect this heritage in a better way.

Border Crossing Statistics

- In the 2nd quarter 2015, 85% (1 141 466) arrived in Georgia by land transport, followed by air transport, 184 412. The first 6 month figure was 2 002 103 arrivals by land, followed by air transport with 292 033 arrivals.
- The busiest border was Sarpi (Turkish border), which saw 336 665 crossings in the 2nd quarter 2015, and 583 222 crossings in the first 6 months.

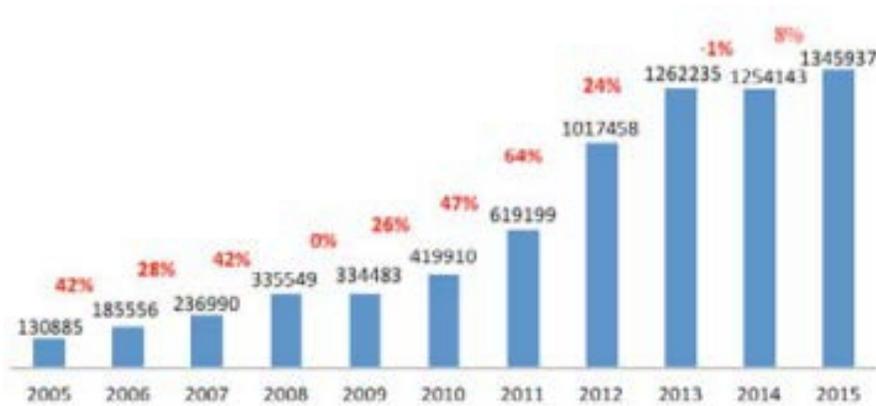
Border name	Border with	2014: II q	2015: II q	Change %
Sarpi	Turkey	367 407	336 665	-8%
Sadakhlo	Armenia	208 388	248 191	19%
Tsiteli Khidi	Azerbaijan	207 563	222 152	7%
Kazbegi	Russia	124 632	202 254	62%
Airport Tbilisi		130 166	153 323	18%
Tsodna	Azerbaijan	54 546	48 773	-11%
Ninotsminda	Armenia	45 401	40 645	-10%
Vale	Turkey	26 736	24 161	-10%
Airport Kutaisi		25 864	16 614	-36%
Airport Batumi		14 310	14 475	1%
Vakhtangisi	Armenia	11 505	12 538	9%
Railway Gardabani		6 777	7 156	6%
Guguti	Armenia	6 049	5 933	-2%
Airport Batumi		5 437	5 120	-6%
Railway Sadakhlo		4 643	3 693	-20%
Port Poti		3 785	3 312	-12%
Port Kulevi		527	778	48%
Samtatskharo	Azerbaijan	84	85	1%
Sarpi	Armenia	0	69	

Georgia International Arrivals by Borders 2015: II quarter

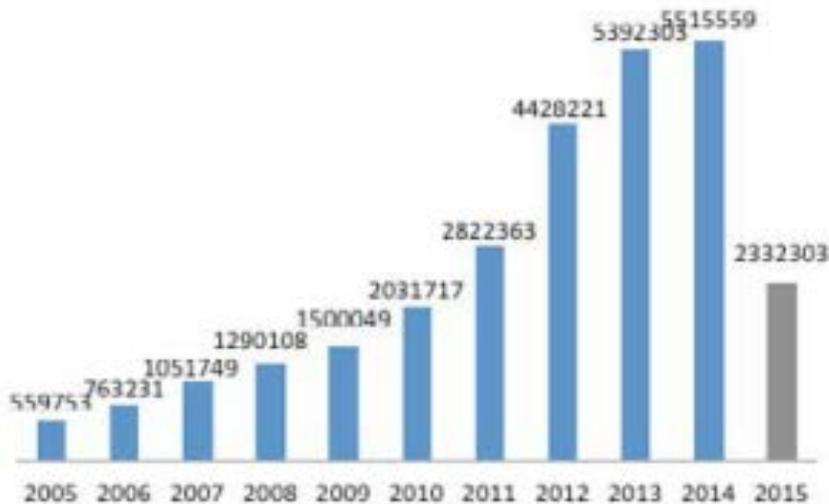


Control of massive international tourism is substantial for Georgia. We should not aim at steady growth of tourists. It would be better if streets and sidewalks were not crowded. We think it would be better to improve the quality in Georgian tourism industry; to offer an exclusive tourist product, increase prices and attract a higher class educated visitors.

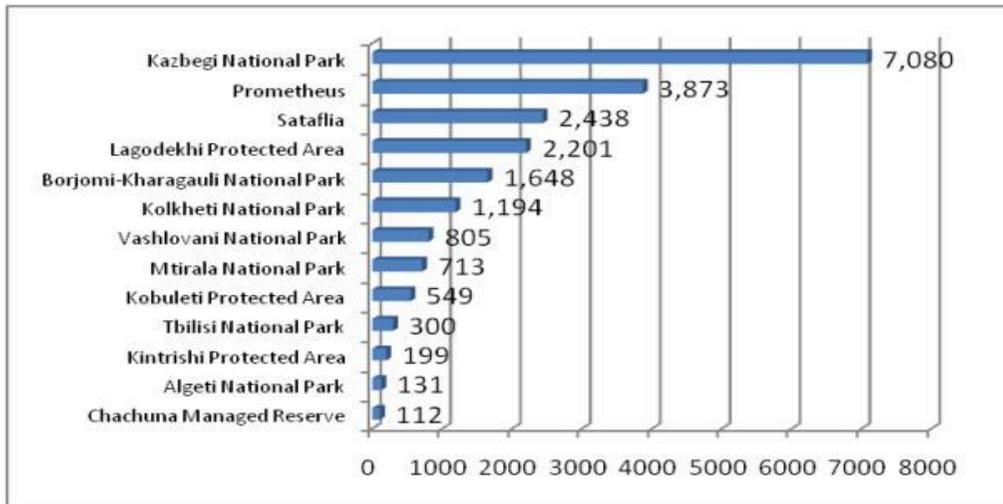
International Arrivals I I quarter (2005-2015)



International arrivals by years



Out of the factors having the impact on the realization of tourist product, the political state of the country and current legislation are utterly important. Tourism sphere in Georgia is regulated by Georgian laws on “tourism and resorts” and “resorts and zones of sanitary preservation of resort venues”.



Visitor Statistics by Protected Areas 2014

The listed laws cannot be complete since they have no stimulating factors; they also do not regulate business relations of the parties participating in tourism and they do not promote the development of the field.

Conclusion

We assume, initially it is urgent to pass stimulating legislation bills since the existing basis – Georgian law on “tourism and resorts” covers only the definition of primary concepts and terms. Some inessential amendments were made several years ago and yet they are related to concepts and terms. Such lawmaking (drafting) leaving a wide spectrum of problems aside, cannot enrich the field any way. In this regard, we consider the law on the development of highlands (high mountainous regions) of Georgia to be a step forward notwithstanding some minor implications. It can freely serve as a solid background for tourism sustainable development in the high mountainous region, for the employment of population, their social protection and also for attracting new investments.

We also think it is necessary to urgently form a group of practitioner and highly qualified specialists of academic circles (those whose trust gained in society is flawless) in order to finally set forth and approve strategic plan of tourism development to eventually foster and promote development of sustainable tourism in Georgia.

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