

Tourism cluster as an instrument of sustainable development

The world experience of sustainable tourism considers tourism cluster as one of the most effective instruments for following the theoretical concept mentioned. Recent investigations appeared in academic arguments show an upward tendency in the number of regions who adopt tourism cluster policy on their territory worldwide.

In the Russian Federation, the concept of tourism cluster was actualized in 2006 -2007, when legislative amendments necessary were adopted. Since then, a number of Russian regions had been projecting their own systems of tourism cluster. Most of the projects mentioned were finished and realized by the year 2012.

The downturn in the economy, coupled with negative geopolitical environment in 2014-2016, stimulated tourist interest in Russian internal destinations. The effect of the tendency mentioned could be illustrated with official statistics, which shows that: gross tourist flow in regions, which had created effective tourism clusters increased by 25 -30%. However in some regions among early adopters, gross tourist flow increased by 15%, which is equal to regions where cluster approach in tourism was not adopted.

Potential explanation of the present phenomenon could be found in the sphere of theorizing on the topic of “tourism cluster”, which level is considered as a relatively poor one. Another problem of the concept is an expanding gape between theoretical and methodological backgrounds. The problems mentioned significantly impede creation of a complex approach to projecting and tourism cluster for the purposes of sustainable development. This potential innovation is able to improve efficiency of new tourism cluster projects in Russian regions.

The general purpose of the present investigation is to create a complex methodological approach to projecting tourism clusters and their implementation for the purpose of sustainable development.

The present investigation includes three parts. The first part is a theoretical analysis of tourism cluster concept. This type of analysis in the context of special economy is highly criticized for its disability to follow the set of basic criteria including: “historicity”, “systematicity”, “objectiveness” and “potential repeatability”. This feature is considered as one of the main reasons for poor level of theorization on tourism cluster in general. To overcome the limitations presented we created our own methodology of theoretical analysis based on successive qualitative criteria implication. The set of criteria mentioned helped us to form a sample of publications which our investigation focused on. After sample creation, we analyzed each publication (included in the sample) according to special parameters. This strategy of analysis helped us to identify four theoretical approaches to the category of tourism cluster, emerged in the term from 2000 to 2017. Basing on theoretical approaches identified, we created our own complex approach, which was taken as the basis for following parts of our investigation.

The second part of the present investigation is devoted to complex analysis of tourism cluster projecting methods. First of all, we considered academic view on methodology mentioned via publication analysis. The analysis mentioned was based on the sample formed for the purpose of theoretical analysis. This strategy helped us to overcome identified gape between theory and methodology of cluster policy in tourism. Each method was deeply analyzed and described.

Then we analyzed practical models of tourism cluster creation applied in different countries. After that, all national models were compared with Russian practice. Basing on this analysis, we identified the most effective methods and tested their ability to work in Russian institutional context. Within this framework, we created our own methodology which gives ability to identify tourism cluster and presents recommendations on their development for the purpose of sustainable development.

In the third part of the present investigation we tested our methodology on the case of Perm krai, which is considered as problem region in the scope of cluster policy in tourism. Implication of our methodology showed that, the level of tourism sphere development in Perm krai was insufficient for creating tourism cluster. This feature showed the main reason for low efficiency of tourism cluster policy in perm krai. This mistake could be marked as a “scenario mistake”. The thing is that, government of Perm krai considered region as a territory which owned a number of tourism clusters. As a result, they realized cluster supporting policy, which was useless in the case when clusters were not formed. Basing on the results of investigation, we suggested some practical recommendations which are able to stimulate tourism cluster formation in the region described.