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Research note

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SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE TOURISM AND RECREATION ZONE “BAIKAL HARBOUR”

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Abstract: Lake Baikal, as the World Natural heritage site, represents an area in Russian Federation, where any economic activity is strictly regulated. According to the legislation, the prospects for economic activity within the Baikal Region can be linked to tourism. Special Economic Zone of tourism and recreation (TRZ) “Baikal Harbour” was organized in the Republic of Buryatia (Pribaikalsky District). Tourism is considered to contribute to the socio-economic development of the region, which has long been considered depressed. Comprehensive studies were carried out for several years (2012-2015) in the area of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”. A special emphasis was given to the analysis of problems and prospects for future development of the Pribaikalsky District in the context of creating “Baikal Harbour”. One of the methods used was sociological research, which revealed some new tendency in the development of the area, as well as different conflicts from the point of view of the local people.

Key words: sociological research, tourism and recreation, Baikal region

Introduction

Lake Baikal is the World Natural Heritage and any economic activity near Baikal and its catchment area is carefully regulated (Collection of the legislation of the Russian Federation, 1999). So it is of vital importance to preserve the ecological frame of the territory and at the same time to support its economic development. The ban on such main types of industry as logging and mining of metal ores was imposed. Also there is the ban on the production of other non-metallic mineral products (bricks, lime). The exploration and development of new fields, including therapeutic mud and mineral waters, is strictly prohibited, which limits further development of health and medical tourism (The Russian Federation Government, 2001).

Building and construction is only allowed for the creation and development of specially protected natural areas and federal special economic zones for tourism

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and recreation (Collection of the legislation of the Russian Federation, 2005), life support systems and environmental safety of existing industrial, residential and recreational facilities. Thus, according to the legislation, the prospects for economic activity within the Baikal Region, most likely, can be linked to tourism, although on a limited scale. Special Economic Zone of tourism and recreation (tourist recreational zone — TRZ) “Baikal Harbour” was organized in the Republic of Buryatia (The Russian Federation Government, 2007) (Figure 1).

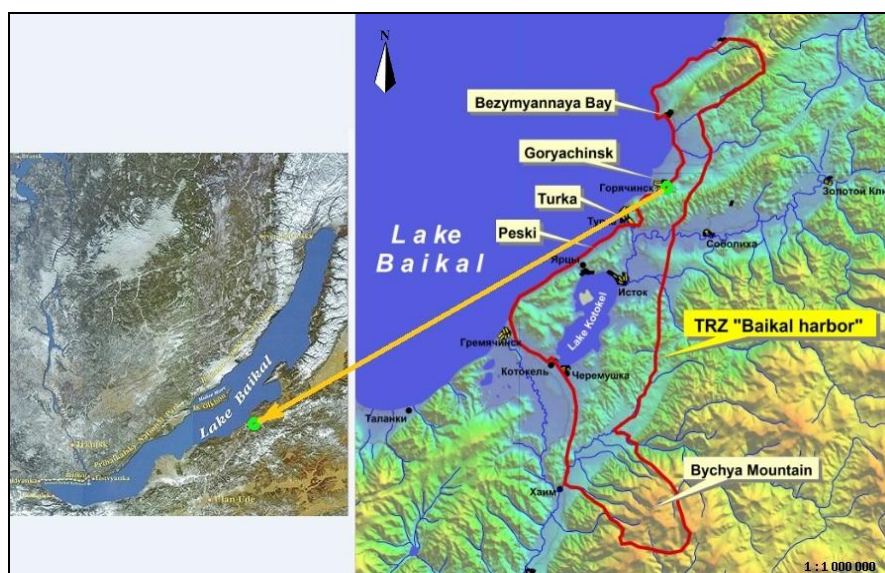


Figure 1. Location of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour” (Source: Vorobyevskaya, Zengina, Sedova & Ustyantsev, 2014).

The main purpose of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour” is the formation of the center of international tourism in the east of Russia, increasing the competitiveness of the tourism and resort product using the unique natural object Lake Baikal. According to the plan, the TRZ will specialize in mountain ski, spa, treatment methods of Oriental Medicine, cruises on Lake Baikal, family vacation (Investment portal of the Republic of Buryatia, 2015). It is planned as an all-seasonable resort meeting with the world standards. The total area makes 700 km² “The Baikal Harbour” is positioned as a key tourist direction and object of a transport boundary route “Vostochnoye Koltso” for the countries of Northeastern Asia. More over 1 million of tourists per year are expected to 2027, 20% of them will make foreign tourists (Information portal Baikal-lake, 2015). As a result, a flow of large numbers of tourists is expected. Tourism

development can contribute to the socio-economic development of the region, which has long been considered depressed.

Comprehensive studies of students and scientists of Lomonosov Moscow State University were carried out for several years (2012–2015) in the Baikal Region of the Republic of Buryatia in the area of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”. The environmental, economic and social factors and problems and prospects for development of the Pribaikalsky District in the context of forming the TRZ “Baikal Harbour” were studied (Vorobyevskaya et al., 2014).

Methodology

One of the methods of research used within the complex TRZ “Baikal Harbour” was sociological research. Sociological studies (sociological survey, standardized and focusing interviewing, observation) serve as a link between theoretical research and reality. To conduct a poll, a questionnaire was developed for people of different target groups. Questionnaire is frequently used as the research tool for various tourism and recreation studies (Williams & Lawson, 2001; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Vorobyevskaya et al., 2014; Brankov, Jovičić & Milijašević, 2015; Srdanović & Pavić, 2015). This paper is also based on the data obtained from the questionnaire conducted during the summer (August, 2014) and the winter (February, 2015) periods. The survey included the poll of various groups of the population (187 people) and expert interviews (18 people). The studies were conducted in the surroundings of settlements Turka, Gremyachinsk, Goryachinsk, Istok, Yartsy, Cheryomushki, Kotokel situated in the area of the TRZ. When processing the data poll, the method of serial sampling was used. The sampling was random, and included people of different ages, nationalities and activities.

The aim of the survey was assessing the prospects for tourism development and the region development in general in the context of forming the “Baikal Harbour” from the point of view of the local population. We were interested in the following points: 1) what is their attitude towards the creation of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”; 2) in what the locals see the development of their region; 3) if the locals are aware about the prospects of development of the area and whether they have a desire to participate in decisions about its future development; 4) whether local people want to preserve the natural environment, traditional industries; 5) what the local people think about the prospects of tourism development and whether they are ready to work in this field. The data was interpreted and displayed in the form of diagrams, which are discussed in the following section.

Results and discussion

Sociological research showed that only half of the population surveyed expressed positive attitude towards current development of the region, however, more than 20% of respondents are skeptical or negative towards the creation of the “Baikal Harbour”. This shows the emergence of conflicts related to the rejection of new trends in the development of the area by the local population. The opinions of the respondents vary widely. The residents of the village of Turka, located near the main facilities of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”, took the most unacceptable position. Turka has no running water, sewage systems, hospitals, the large number of people is forced to work on a rotational manner in large settlements. A lot of money was already invested in the Pribaikalsky District, but the local population cannot use the benefits of it. For example, the sewage plants built in Turka are unprofitable to run without the objects of the “Baikal Harbour”, which are under construction now.

The majority of respondents are residents, and they plan to continue living in the Baikal Region (75%). However, more than half of the respondents do not want their children to stay and live here further, due to the lack of jobs, the normal conditions of life, lack of high-quality health care (no hospital, and the building of new clinics does not have the qualified health workers), lack of housing, quality education (the school lacks teachers) etc. (Figure 2). These are the reasons the locals identified as the main problems in the region. Not all the young people clearly understand what to expect in the future — only about half of them have plans.

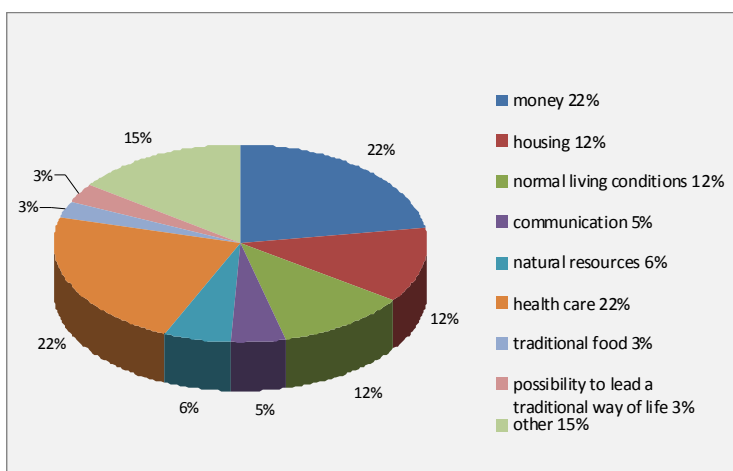


Figure 2. What do the families of the respondents lack?

As for the prospects for the tourism development the following was found out. According to the survey, 52% of respondents see the development of their region in tourism and agriculture (17%) and traditional industries (19%). The great number (77%) of the respondents suggested a positive attitude towards tourism. At the same time, the majority (83%) were in favor of organized tourism. Half of the respondents (54%) believe that the development of tourism will contribute to the preservation of monuments of nature, which are important like other memorable and sacred places for 72% of the respondents (e.g. nature monument rock Turtle).

Half of the respondents are ready to work in the tourism sector, but only 46% of local residents are willing to be trained for future work in this sector. Basically, young people (16–17 years) responded positively that they see the future in the development of the tourism industry and believe that working in tourism can bring them good and steady income. The respondents see themselves in the role of a tour guide (28%), travel agency managers (10%), employees of hotels (10%). And 35% referred to other professions, such as an employee of the medical center, cook, etc and other activities that residents are able to perform. As for infrastructure, according to the opinions of the visitors of the “Baikal Harbour” the existing tourism and recreation facilities of Pribaikalsky District do not meet the needs of most tourists and requires further improvement.

The next point of our questionnaire was whether the local residents know about the prospects of the development of the area. 70% of the people are familiar with the plans for its further development. With regard to specific projects, the respondents more often mentioned the construction of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”, including the ski resort on Mount Bychya. Nearly equal number of people find the plans positive (44%) and negative (41%), some of them (15%) keep neutral position. Positive aspects are associated with an increase in the number of jobs, the development of the area. The negative attitude of the people is because of the impact on their familiar environment, a decrease in areas for hunting, fishing and gathering wild plants. Another negative point mentioned by the local residents is that the employers of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour” are oriented at skilled labor force, bringing them from the regional centers (Ulan-Ude, Irkutsk) and taxes from the “alien” investors do not go to the district budget.

A high level of awareness and the willingness of people to participate in decisions about the prospects of the development of the area show that they are not indifferent to the future of their land, they want prosperity for themselves and their families. Especially willingly people aged 35–55 years participated in

the survey, they are most familiar with changes happening in the region, and their position is rather active. The main thing on which they focus is the need for registering investors in the region; in this case, taxes will go to the area that would help raise the level of the economy in the area.

Conclusion

The sociological research is an effective method, which enabled us to assume the existence of new trends in the development of the Baikal Region in terms of the local population living in the area of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour”. Sociological research showed that the majority of local people favor the possible development of tourism and recreational activities and are ready to contribute to it. Also it is important to emphasize that the locals are not indifferent to their land, as well as to their future. They care about preserving the nature of their area. Most of them are going to continue staying on their native land, and for them it is essential that their opinions should be taken into account when making decisions about future development of the region.

Undoubtedly, the local population after the formation of the TRZ in the Baikal Region will have certain benefits. There are some improvements in the existing infrastructure of the area together with new well-appointed areas and facilities for recreation, designed for a wide variety of consumers. Also among the positive effects of tourism development of this area we can emphasize job creation and sale of goods and services to tourists (Kirillov, Sedova, Vorobyevskaya & Zengina, 2013).

But for the local people is not everything so bright. There is a gradual outflow of local residents, desperate to find job. Some of them do not see prospects for themselves, their living conditions, leisure conditions leave much to be desired. In this case we should remember that the project of the TRZ is a long-term one until 2026. It takes time to fulfill all the plans and realize the entire project.

Also some improvements can be made from the part of the local authorities. The results of the poll were given to the local administration and caused a genuine interest. It allows hoping for the possible consideration of the interests of the local residents. The sociological survey showed the scope of work to the officials, set priorities consistent implementation of which will transfer the area from the depressed one into the category of economically developed areas. The creation of the TRZ “Baikal Harbour” here could be a key point for the local economic development and the catalyst for socio-economic development of the region.

The prospects of the TRZ are really promising. Tourism business and the related fields will provide one third of the gross regional product of Buryatia, because tourism is the most rapidly developing branch of the world economics. The TRZ will allow Buryatia to settle itself on the world tourism market. Moreover, the creation of such clusters in the Baikal Region will help to realize effective interaction between public authorities, organizations, tourism industry, academic and civil society organizations. Application of this method of planning tourism activities is an effective mechanism for addressing the challenges of building in the Baikal Region of modern tourism and recreational complexes (Kirillov et al., 2013, p.533). The limitation of predatory nature use, preservation of a large part of the territory for future generations controlled by its recreational use with all the natural resources, the adoption of “transparent” decisions on the development of natural resources from the part of managers, their willingness to establish contact and to listen to public opinion could become the basis for the beginning of the process of environmental planning and management in the region.

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