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Financial position of agroecotourist units in the Republic of Belarus

Introduction

The development of tourism in any country and its regions depends on the whole complex of factors, conditions, resources. According to the data of the World Tourist Organization (WTourO) the development of world tourism shows the tendencies to the growing competition among the countries and regions wishing to receive tourists. However, undeveloped material resources of tourism and its infrastructure, information vacuum, absence of objects ready to hold excursions disadvantage the countries wishing to receive tourists. Countries and regions with seaside and mountain resorts have more advantages in this respect.

The aim of this paper is to present the latest directions of financial position of agroecotourism units and its importance in village tourism in the Republic of Belarus. The information presented in this paper was taken from scientific databases and Reports (Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Finance, Centre of Agrarian Economy of Institute of Economy of National Academy of Sciences Belarus). The were also used latest materials from Belagroprombank and own studies of literature.

It should be noted that in modern domestic literature spared rural tourism not enough attention. Publications carry educational, but not scientific character rather [Rural tourism... 2006, Recreation and rest... 2009]. And only in 2008 two monographs, devoted to the problems of development of agroecotourism, were published in Republic of Belarus [Luchenok 2008, Agrotourism experience... 2008]. The special researches of financial aspect of rural tourism absent at the same time. This theme is only partly investigated in not numerous publications on the economic problems of agroecotourism [Redkovskaya 2004, Denisova 2008].

Besides, practically in all Byelorussian publications to agrotcotourism large enough expectations are related. Setting, as far as justified they will appear, is possible coming from research of modern terms of agroecotourism in Byelorussia of his financial problems in particular.

Modern conditions of agrotourism development in Belarus

In tourism there is such a regularity that if a tourist is satisfied with the rest, five – six men know about it, and still more learn about negative impressions. The tourist who has visited Belarus once and communicated with the Belarussians, will surely come here again and advise others.

However, it is necessary to take into account that not only employees of tourist agencies or owners of farmsteads are engaged in tourism but also service workers. Tourism is not only a company and tourist operators, it is the whole real sector of economy: hotel business, public catering, industry of entertainments, transport, household service and others. The product made by each sphere should correspond the world standards developed by WTourO. In order to create the competitive tourist infrastructure, effective and rational use of natural resources, historical and cultural heritage of Belarus, development of internal and entrance tourism the National Program for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Belarus for 2006–2010 has been adopted and is actively realized. According to the estimation of the modern condition of the tourist branch in Belarus the purposes and tasks of its development for the near-term outlook are determined, the major directions and priorities, measures and mechanisms of their realization, the basic economic indicators are predicted. According to the National Program the number of the tourists in 2010 in comparison with 2005 will increase six times as much, paid tourist-excursion services, revenues for the organization of tourism and tourist profits – almost 15 times [State program... 2005]. The achievements of the planned results are promoted by the measures for liberalization of the visa regime, easement of visa receipt, realization of the “one window“ principle on the boundary, elimination of price discrimination of the quality of a tourist product, its conformity with the world standards adopted in 2005 by the government of the Republic of Belarus. The assistance in the formation of the image of Belarus as the region attractive to the development of tourism and promotion of a national tourist product to the external market renders the entrance of the country in WTourO in April, 7, 2005 which works under the aegis of UNO and totals 146 states. The advantages of the entrance of the Republic of Belarus in WTourO are visible at once. The seminar “Belarus and its place in the international tourism“, where the foreign visitors shared their experience in hotel business gave the employees of the Belarusian firms and organizations the opportunity to do their training in WTourO. Being a member of this organization, Belarus uses valuable experience of WTourO experts in conducting the statistical reporting, calculation of results of this branch not according to the volume of sold tourist and excursion services, but according to the incomes on tourist trips (souvenirs, public catering,

other services), account of foreign tourists who do not use the service of tourist agencies. Besides the republic has received the access to expert estimation of projects with competitive tourist brands, to financial assets which are allocated by international organizations to the reconstruction of 26 tourist zones created in the country including museum – territories of Nesvizh, Myr, Novogrudok, Turov, Slonim, Polotsk [Radiuk 2005]. The government of the Republic of Belarus obliges each region of the country to open a competitive tourist object in order to insure a qualitatively new level in the development of tourism.

Under high urbanization rates there began the transition from mass tourism to agroecotourism which in the countries of West accounts for 20% in the total amount of tourist trips and grows by 30% annually [Klitsunova 2004]. According to the data WTourO more than 50 million Europeans are ready to pay for agroecotourism. This international organization has developed the universal model of agroecotourism which includes all its basic components: village nature, village style of life, cultural and material heritage in a countryside, leisure [Figure 1].

Belarussian countryside has all possibilities to satisfy the growing demand for agroecotourism which is the most dynamical branch of the world tourist industry. Brest and Grodno regions are the leaders in the development of village tourism in Belarus. Frontier status, transeuropean corridors, untouched nature, unique monuments of Belovezhskaya preserve with its residence of Belarussian Ded Moroz (Father Frost), Brest fortress, ancient temples and churches attracting tourists both from East and West contribute much to the development of tourism

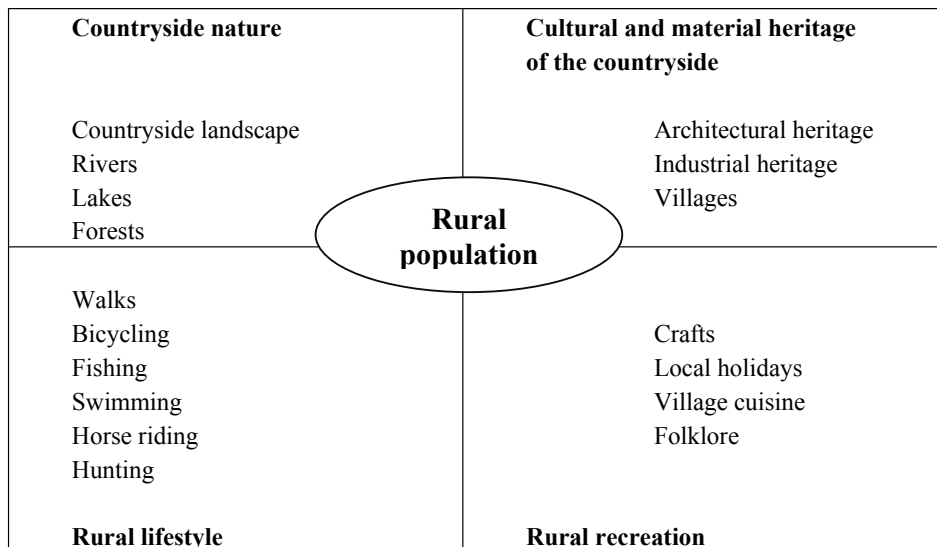


Figure 1
Conceptual model of agroecotourism

in these regions. Grodno region is famous for the August canal which was constructed in 1824–1839 and connected the Neman and the Visla in order to provide marketing of Polish goods past Prussia which increased tax tariffs. Now the August canal flows through the territory of the Polish Republic and the Republic of Belarus. The total extent of the canal is 101.2 km. In Belarus it accounts for 21.2 km where 4 sluices and 2 dams are located. Little remained of its former greatness on the territory of Belarus. The sundial located near the Valkushki hydropowerunit have no analogue in Europe. The system of the August canal became the first complex of water construction created according to the European technical standards of that time. 34 billion roubles from the budget were allocated for its reconstruction. Such a large scale hydraulic engineering work was not conducted in Belarus for a long time, and the neglected state of the object did not inspire optimism in builders. The qualification of hydroengineers was lost. It was necessary to train them again in order to restore what was created by our ancestors. Looking at the impressive amount of work which has already been done and which is to be done it is difficult to believe that tourist campings, tent camps, social objects with necessary service, hotels, country houses for rest and other buildings of the tourist infrastructure will appear on marshy areas covered with cane and wild forests. The territory to be developed accounts for 35 km² with the area of 1700–1720 hectares. The main task is to keep local colouring and rural style. The basin of the Belarusian part of the August canal is rich in a large number of monuments of history and culture, their concentration on a rather small area. Here there are some monuments of sacral architecture of XVIII–XIX centuries, a unique palace and park complex of the Volovichies in Svyatsk included in the list of countryside historical monuments, garden and park complexes of XIX–XX centuries, some forts and fortified posts of the Grodno fortress of XIX–XX centuries; World War II fortifications of the so-called “Molotov’s line”, burial places of German soldier of World War I; ancient Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries; archeological monuments of the Neolithic epoch etc. The August canal is a water artery connecting the three neighbouring states Belarus, Poland and Lithuania, and also the resort zones of Avgustov in Poland, Druskeninkai in Lithuania and Porechany and Sopotskino zone in Belarus. The territory situated near the canal is attractive for the development of international tourism and organization of rest.

Tourists visit rural sights such as historical and architectural monuments, museums. It not only improves statistics of the tourist branch, but also fills up local and republican budgets. In many countries including Belarus agroecotourism serves the achievement of social and cultural purposes. It helps to stop extinction of so-called unpromising villages and to keep their authenticity, original village culture and national crafts. Tourists, especially foreign ones, come to look at

the old Belarusian village. They will always prefer a lonely village manor in a picturesque silent place to urban hotel. Today in Belarus there are 160 subjects of agroecotourism which include businessmen, enterprises of various patterns of ownership and village inhabitants, owners of manors. But it, certainly, does not correspond to the tourist potential of the country. Now in Belarus there are more manors in the south-west, though the south-east and its ancient cities and village settlements are not less perspective for the development of agroecotourism.

Financial problems of agrotourism development in Belarus

The problem is the subjects of village tourism have not enough money to increase the scale of realization of basic concepts and models stipulated by the National Program for the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Belarus for 2006–2010. The question of rendering financial help is not registered even in the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “Measures for the development of agroecotourism in the Republic of Belarus” [On measures for the development of agrotourism... 2006]. The document mentioned creates very attractive conditions for country people wishing to be engaged in tourist business. Owners of village houses which have no more than five rooms and are going to let them to tourists should be registered in the local council and pay only one base amount, i.e. 9 euros. They do not pay any taxes and only once a year inform tax bodies of the rendered services.

At the same time despite good preconditions for the development of agroecotourism in Belarus there is also a serious obstacle for its dynamical growth. First of all there is sharp shortage of developed rural settlements and neighbourhood preserves. For modern tourists, especially foreign ones, availability of home comforts plays a decisive role in the choice of the tourist rout. But to meet such requirements the average village inhabitant needs considerable money resources. In the summer of 2007 the largest financial establishments of the country “Belagroprombank” adopted the social program to financially support and develop agroecotourism in Belarus. The main item of this document is granting soft loans to the subjects of this kind of activity. Both farmers and natural persons constantly living in a countryside, having private farms and engaged in services in the sphere of agroecotourism according to presidential decree № 372 can become credit receipts. Money resources are allowed in Belarusian roubles for the realization of the projects of agroecotourism under the preferential rate of 5% annually for 5–7 years with the delay for credit repayment for 12 months.

The size of the credit for natural persons can make up 750 base amounts cash (in May 1, 2009 base amount makes up 35 000 roubles), and the size of the credit on account accounts for up to 2000 base amounts according to the paying capacity of natural persons. The size of the credit to farmers is defined depending on their financial state and can make up to 2000 base amounts adopted by the legislation provided that the total sum of the previously received money resources and credit for agroecotourism does not exceed 750 base amounts.

It is important to note that money resources are allowed not for the development and arrangement of village manors, but for the special project developed by “Belagroprombank” in which the owner of the manor should precisely state the purposes of the project, specify the exact site, give the description of his village manor, its state, landscape, infrastructure, general expenses, sources of its realization, general term and stages of realization of the project. If the manor requires only reconstruction, the project should be completed in a year, and a new construction should be completed in two years.

Moreover, “Belagroprombank” has undertaken not only financial obligations, but also has planned measures for information and methodological support of the subjects of countryside tourism. The experts of the bank have developed a special booklet “Simple answers to complex questions” for natural and legal persons engaged in the sphere of agroecotourism where they can find information concerning projects of agroecotourism [Program for participation of “Belagroprombank”... 2007]. The bank made a special catalogue of village manors in Belarus which contains information on the subjects rendering tourist services in the sphere of agroecotourism, their infrastructure, photos of manors and their vicinities.

Certainly, it is impossible to solve all problems of the dynamical development of agroecotourism effectively only with the help of experts from “Belagroprombank” and owners of village manors. This work is conducted in close contact with the district and regional authorities, representatives of Belarusian Public Association (BPA) “Recreation in the village” that has found its reflection in the agreements on cooperation signed by “Belagroprombank”, all regional executive committees and BPA “Recreation in the village”.

In each regional centre there is a working group consisting of the representatives of the bank, the executive committee and BPO to assist in considering the projects. The whole process of business-plan consideration should not exceed 15 days. The conclusion about the efficiency of the project is directed to the local council which gives the final conclusion on rendering assistance for realization of the project.

The preliminary and subsequent control of using money resources is stipulated. The experts of the bank will check the activity of the credit recipient at least

once in six months. As some manors can function all the year round and some only in summer, seasonal prevalence of the activity will be taken into account. The nearest task of “Belagroprombank” is to bring the number of agrotourist subjects to 1000 in two years under financial, information and methodological support of the bank. It will allow to raise the standard of living of the village population and to keep the original style of the Belarusian countryside.

Conclusion

Agroecotourism is becoming the most dynamical branch of the world tourist industry. The Republic of Belarus has inexhaustible potential for the development of agroecotourism. It promotes a steady development of rural regions, raises well-being of its inhabitants by attracting investments, creates modern social infrastructure and new working places, contributes to the achievement of social and cultural purposes. Agroecotourism is considered to be the important component for the successful realization of “State Program for the Revival and Development of the Countryside in the Republic of Belarus for 2005–2010”. Maintaining and developing natural and human potential Belarus will make agroecotourism into a profitable branch of the agrarian sector of economy.

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Sytuacja finansowania gospodarstw agroturystycznych na Białorusi

Streszczenie

Agroturystyka staje się coraz bardziej dynamicznie rozwijającą się branżą w światowej turystyce. Białoruś posiada niewyczerpane zasoby rozwoju agroturystyki. Pozwala to na wspieranie stabilnego rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, podniesienie dobrobytu mieszkańców wsi poprzez wdrażanie atrakcyjnych inwestycji, kreując nowoczesną społeczną infrastrukturę, sprzyjając tworzeniu nowych miejsc pracy. Przyczynia się to do osiągnięcia kulturowo-społecznych celów. Agroturystyka jest postrzegana jako ważny składnik realizowania Państwowego Programu Rewitalizacji i Rozwoju Wsi na Białorusi w latach 2005–2010.

Głównym problemem podjętym w artykule jest brak środków pieniężnych na realizowanie w agroturystyce podstawowych założeń i modeli określonych w Programie Narodowym dla agroturystyki wiejskiej. Zagadnienie związane z interpretacją pomocy finansowej nie jest określone w orzeczeniu Prezydenta Białorusi „Stopień rozwoju agroturystyki na Białorusi”. Utrzymanie i rozwój naturalnego i ludzkiego potencjału pozwoli na wzrost efektywności agroturystyki w sektorze rolnictwa w gospodarce Białorusi.