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## Major Tasks of Ecotourism Management in Georgia

Nino Paresashvili<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Kazbegi Avenue 31a, Georgia*

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### Abstract

The Caucasus has its dignified place among 34 “Hot spots” of biological diversity identified on earth. Georgia is considered among 200 global eco-regions identified by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). A number of animal and plant species spread in Georgia is included in the Red List of Georgia and Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Consequently, the importance of ecotourism in Georgia is always a topical issue setting important tasks to ecotourism management.

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the branches of priority in the economic development of Georgia. Georgia with its picturesque nature, many-century-long heritage and diversified topography is one of the world's most attractive countries for the tourists.

Sustainable tourism development is much important for Georgia, as it means development by using the means not having any negative impact on the environment or local people.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +995599280886.

E-mail address: [nini.paresashvili@mail.ru](mailto:nini.paresashvili@mail.ru)

The number of tourists to Georgia is increasing steadfastly. Eco-tourism is a much popular and demanded branch. Therefore, identification of the strategy and tactics to develop eco-tourism is much important. Consequently, the goal of the study was to examine the potential of eco-tourism and identify the levers to manage eco-tourism efficiently.

## 2. Method

By using the statistical and analytical study methods during the study, in line with the set problem, the quantitative and qualitative indicators will be assessed and the reliability of the study methods will be evaluated by confronting the set aims and made decisions.

As per the world statistics of ecotourism, year after year, an increasing number of people in the developed countries better recognize the significance of the sustainable development of tourism and environmental protection. As for the Georgian market, its consumers tend to be indifferent to ecotourism and the market is characterized by generally low developmental rates of local tourism. The developed methods and analysis should be used to identify the efficient management trend and make optimal decisions.

## 3. Results

On the background of the increasing global pollution and ecological challenges, the society's awareness and environmental interest tend to lessen; moreover, poaching and conflicts of interests between the protected areas and local population are the case. One of the major drawbacks in the field of ecotourism is poorly developed infrastructure (transport, roads, etc.).

As per the results of the study conducted by us by interviewing the Georgian people, the most popular kind of tourism in Georgia is adventure tourism (28%), followed by religious and cultural tourisms (22%). Eco-tourism is also quite popular (14%). It also should be noted that 38% of the respondents are informed about eco-tourism, 42% have never heard about it, and 16% refrain themselves from giving the answer. The final results of the interview of Georgian respondents are given in the chart below. (refer with: Fig. 1).

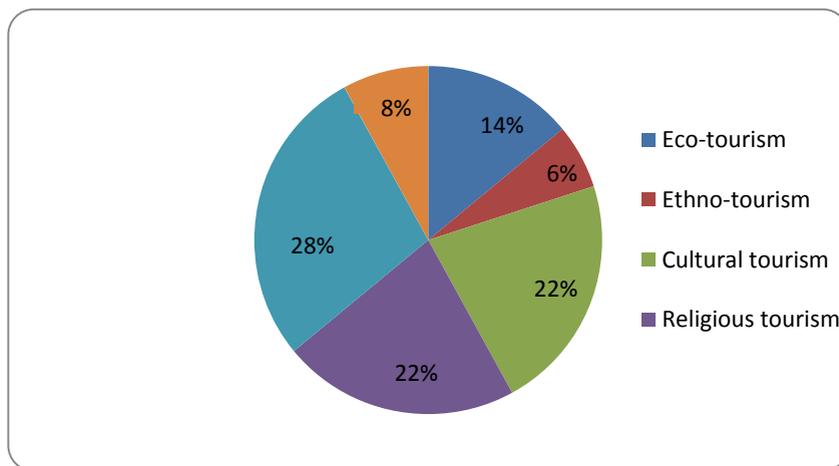


Figure 1. The most Preferred kind of tourism. [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge)

As per the results of interviewing the foreign respondents, 55% of them have arrived in Georgia to learn more about the culture of the country, while 18% of them are on their adventure tour. (refer with: Fig. 2).

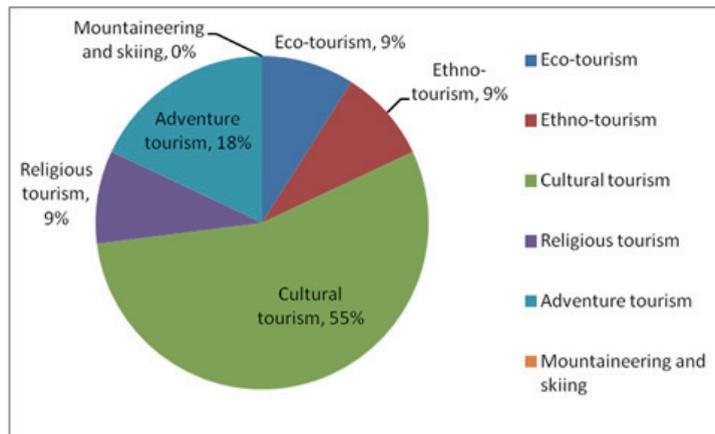


Figure 2. The most preferred kind of Tourism for foreigners. [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge)

70% of Georgian respondents and 50% of foreign respondents have been to the protected areas of Georgia. In addition, 84% of the Georgians and 90% of foreigners wish to visit the protected areas in the future what is a favorable fact.

The world statistics of eco-tourism should also be considered. Over 2/3 of the Americans and 90% of English visitors consider that the environment must be protected during their trips. As for Europe, this statistics is as follows: 20-30% of the respondents realize the necessity for sustainable tourism, 10-20% seek for “green” tours, and 70% of respondents from GB, USA and Australia agree to pay weekly extra 150 USD for the hotel with particular accent on the environmental protection.

As for the Georgian market, its consumers tend to be indifferent to ecotourism and the market is characterized by generally low developmental rates of local tourism. The poor tourist infrastructure (transport, roads, etc.) is the one of the most important deficiencies of modern eco-tourism.

The BCG study (of 500 tourists) clearly shows the dissatisfaction of the consumers with prices. It should also be noted that the results of our interview with 8 tourist companies by 2013 have not changed since the previous years. The heads of the tourist companies consider relatively higher prices of eco-tourism as one of the hampering factors for the local tourism to develop. The results of our study demonstrate that 58% of Georgian respondents consider the tourist service prices unaffordable, while 41% think they are acceptable. 60% of foreign respondents think that the prices are acceptable, while 39% of them think that the prices are low. Acknowledgements and Reference heading should be left justified, bold, with the first letter capitalized but have no numbers. Text below continues as normal.

#### 4. Discussion/conclusions

Simultaneously with the social and demographic challenges, the diversity of the protected areas in Georgia leaves space for many different tourism marketing arrangements (info- and press-tours, presentations, organizing festivals, publishing new printed materials and improving the awareness of tourism infrastructure among target groups), which must be implemented on a regular basis. The tourism potential of Georgia in the international market is advertised in an irregular and non-coordinated manner. Presenting Georgia in potential markets is not based on systemic market ranging or approved methods of the market penetration. The study also showed that the system guaranteeing the medical and rescue safety for foreign tourists is incomplete and the problem of language barrier is also severe. Speaking poor foreign languages at the agencies serving foreign tourists hampers the communication with foreign tourists.

The potential of Georgia to become one of the important European countries of eco-tourism is quite huge. This is evidenced by the growing number of eco-tourists since 2005 as per the data of the Ministry of Environmental Protection. Generally, the growing number of visitors to Georgia and its protected areas was caused by different phenomena and actions, including the following facts: (1) in recent years (2005-2012), the government of Georgia aimed at promoting the tourism in Georgia (providing security, visa-free regime, tourism marketing, favorable investment environment, etc.), (2) the tourist infrastructure (airports, roads, border checkpoints, hotels, catering objects, protected areas, winter resorts, sea resorts, etc.) is being developed in the country, (3) owing to the joint efforts of the National Tourism Agency (formerly, the Tourism and Resorts Department) and private sector, in recent 6-7 years, Georgia was presented at a number of international exhibitions: (Holland / Utrecht: Vakantiebeurs; Norway / Oslo: Reiseliv; USA / New York city: Adventure Expo; Finland / Helsinki: Matka; Spain / Madrid: FITUR Madrid; Germany / Berlin: ITB Berlin; Japan / Tokyo: World Tourism Congress & World Travel; UK / London: WTM London; Israel / Tel-Aviv: IMTM; France / Paris: SMDT, TOP RESA; Italy / Milan: BIT; Latvia / Riga: Baltur; Italy / Rome: Globe; Ukraine/Kiev: UITT, etc.), (4) the marketing actions of the neighboring countries (Armenia and Azerbaijan) in favor of their own states helped Georgia to establish itself in the combined tours of the South Caucasus. Georgia has unique and rare eco-systems and bio-diversity; before 2012, the branch of tourism was acknowledged a priority by the state; the degree of endemism is high in Georgia; there is intact and wild nature and bulk of historical and cultural monuments found in Georgia. If considering the above-mentioned, one can state that Georgia has quite good prospects in the field of tourism. For this purpose, it is necessary to make Georgia one of the most attractive, highly demanded and important objects internationally. This is possible by cooperating with foreign eco-tourism agencies and continuing participating in the international conferences and press-tours and meetings. It is also necessary to popularize the high degree of endemism of Georgia worldwide. It is similarly important to set a system of the following measures: increasing the number of rangers and equipping them with necessary tools, implementing the programs aiming at preserving the wild nature (increasing the number of the parks of fraternized countries), familiarizing the wide society with the results of the study of eco-tourism potential, planning eco-camps, prioritizing the monument protection and environment protection.

The analysis shows that neither non-commercial state advertisements, nor private commercial advertisements are perfect, but they are quite poor failing to show the rich and diversified eco-tourist potential of Georgia. Even more so, there is no a single concept to advertise the eco-tourist potential of the country, there is no a single logo, colors or principal and necessary advertising attributes of eco-tourism developed so far (the tourism generally is not concerned, as the advertisement attributes for Georgia are developed). Poor awareness of the consumers of eco-tourism can be considered as one of the greatest deficiencies in the field of tourism significantly reducing the consumption rate of eco-tourism and promoting other fields of tourism, such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, ethno-tourism, etc.

The cultural arrangements organized abroad (concerts, days of culture, TV shows); achievements of Georgian sportsmen; arrangements organized by the diplomatic missions in foreign countries; running trailers, Ad videos and TV documentaries on international TV channels will improve the awareness of Georgia as that of a touristic country all over the world. Informing the educational establishments, tour-operators, media and other organizations and expanding communication channels with wide society is also necessary.

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