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Arctic Tourism as a Driver of Sustainable Development of the Territory: Research of the Interest of Local Stakeholders in the Komi Republic

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Abstract. In recent decades, interest in Arctic tourism has been growing at a high rate all over the world. The relevance of this area is also increasing against the background of global climate change and the development of so-called “last chance tourism”. The Russian Arctic has unique competitive advantages in the Arctic tourism market, preserving vulnerable Arctic and tundra landscapes under various anthropogenic activities, a large number of national parks and historical and ethnographic heritage. At the same time, a number of single-industry towns are also concentrated there, which have practically no revenue base. According to many researchers, Arctic tourism can become a driver for the sustainable development of the territory and local communities of these towns. But to realize this scenario, the interest of local stakeholders — representatives of government, business and the population — is necessary. This article is devoted to the analysis of the results of a study of local communities’ interest in tourism development as a driver of sustainable development of the territory. The Arctic zone of the Komi Republic, namely the former mining town of Inta, was chosen as the area of study. The results of desk and field studies carried out within the framework of the research expedition in the Arctic zone of the Komi Republic are described. A comparative analysis of international studies on the topic has been carried out, a conceptual model of the attitude of local communities in the Arctic to the development of tourism in the region and the results of in-depth research and focus groups with key stakeholders of tourism in the Komi Republic have been described, limiting factors and potential for the development of Arctic tourism have been identified on the example of the selected territories.

Keywords: *sustainable development, sustainable tourism, Arctic tourism, ecological tourism, nature tourism, monotown, local community, sustainability of community, Northern Urals, Komi Republic, Inta*

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Introduction. Problem formulation

Sustainability is defined as an organized network of adaptive capacities related to the ability of people to function and adapt after disturbance [1, Norris F., Stevens S., Pfefferbaum B., Wyche K.], including social and environmental changes. We focus on the understanding of community sustainability proposed by McLennan and Moyle [2] as “the ability of a community to use its resources to adapt to change” [2, p. 432].

A large number of works related to tourism and community sustainability appeared in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including early conceptual work by Farrell and Twining-Ward [3], [4] as well as more recent work by Cochrane [5] and Strickland-Munroe, Allison and Moore [6].

Later, there have been a number of works that have explored the relationship between tourism, sustainability and the ability of communities to adapt to environmental changes, especially climate changes [7, Lew A., Cheer J.], [8, Hall C., Prayag G., Amore A.], [9, Lew A., Ng P., Ni Ch., Wu T.]. The authors note that the difficulty in understanding and assessing community sustainability and resilience is due to confusion, especially due to insufficient conceptual definitions and lack of distinction between the two terms [9]. In addition, the concept of sustainability is often applied using environmental sustainability theory. However, it is necessary to take into account the social causes and consequences of these changes. The Arctic should be considered as a socio-ecological system, since people simultaneously receive ecosystem services from the natural environment, and also influence this natural environment [8].

Polar regions are characterized by ice sheets, sea ice, glaciers, tundra and other cryospheric landscapes and associated cultural features of the indigenous people. This polar landscape contrasts sharply with the current human habitat and is attractive for tourists [10, Shijin W., Yaqiong M., Xueyan Z., Jia X.]. Arctic tourism has developed rapidly over the past decades. New parts of the Arctic are opening up for tourism due to sea ice melting, new airports and the promotion of the Arctic as a “last chance to see” it [11, Runge C.A., Daigle R.M., Hausner V.H.]. Tourism in the polar regions is a rapidly growing industry in terms of visitors, research and political interests [12, Lemelin R., Dawson J., Stewart E., Maher P., Lück M.].

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Tourists are increasingly eager to visit the world's most vulnerable places before they disappear or will be irrevocably transformed. In the media, this is called "last chance" tourism or "doom" [12]. The desire of tourists to see disappearing landscapes and endangered species can have important implications for tourism management.

Public concern about climate change in the polar regions has provided tour operators with the opportunity to promote their products as a last-chance tourism opportunity [12]. Indeed, the warming of the Arctic has contributed to a mini-boom in tourism as curious travelers rush to explore the regions before polar ecosystems are irreversibly transformed. This desire to visit the Arctic provides opportunities for communities in the polar north and tour operators to benefit economically from last-chance tourism, at least in the short to medium term.

The Russian Arctic is a single physical and geographical system of land and sea territories of Northern Eurasia, within which unique natural, historical and cultural objects are concentrated. The system of specially protected natural areas of the Russian Arctic preserves vulnerable Arctic, tundra landscapes under the conditions of various anthropogenic activities [13, Sevastyanov D.V.].

Russia has competitive advantages in the Arctic tourism market: the diversity of flora and fauna, a large number of national parks, historical and ethnographic heritage. The Arctic regional authorities are interested in the development of tourism; however, the development of Arctic tourism in Russia is complicated by the problems of infrastructure, logistics and high cost of the tourism product [14, Kikkas K., Sosnina M., Rubtsova A.].

From the point of view of state interests, Arctic tourism occupies an important place in the system of political, economic tasks and strategic priorities due to the fact that there have been rapid changes in the practice of developing high-latitude regions in recent decades: expeditions, tourism, cultural and environmental projects are types of socio-economic activities confirming the rights and opportunities of states to manage the sustainable development of territories [15, Golovacheva T.A., Tsvetkova Yu.S.]. In 2020, a system of documents was formed that outlined fundamentally new grounds and conditions for achieving the strategic goals and objectives of the development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation. The basic principle was changed — from the state as the main investor in the socio-economic development of the Russian Arctic to the state as the creator of institutional conditions that provide support for investors (from small businesses to corporations), including a series of preferences and tax incentives, which will ensure the development of the economy of the territory, then provide social development, increasing the level and quality of life of the population [16, Skufyina T.P., Korchak E.A., Baranov S.V.]. Arctic tourism of the Komi Republic was chosen as the object of research for several reasons.

Firstly, this region has a rich natural potential. There are 233 specially protected natural areas in the Komi Republic, two of which are of federal significance — the Yugyd Va National Park and the Pechoro-Ilychskiy Natural Biosphere Reserve, included in the UNESCO Natural Heritage List under the general name "Virgin Komi Forests".

Yugyd Va National Park is the largest national park in Russia. The largest peaks of the Urals are also located here: Narodnaya and Manaraga mountains, the purest mountain rivers, 16 types of ecosystems are represented in the vast territories of the park.

Secondly, the region has a high cultural potential. Currently, the ethnic composition of the population of the Komi Republic is represented by more than 120 nationalities. The indigenous population is the Komi, as well as the Komi-Izhemians — residents of the Izhma region, which is located in the northwestern part of the Republic, in the basin of the middle reaches of the Pechora River and its tributary — the Izhma River, and the Komi-Permyaks in the regions of the Komi-Permyak Okrug. The traditions, language and way of life of indigenous peoples can become a topic of attraction for tourists. Ethnographic tours aimed at learning the elements of folk culture, life and traditions of the people are relevant for both Russian and foreign tourists. Reindeer herders are a separate group, extremely interesting for tourism. Reindeer herding is a traditional occupation for the tundra and, in particular, for the Komi people. However, there are almost no tours related to it. Komi folk art, folklore: cosmogonic myths, epic tales and legends (about bogatyrs, heroes, famous sorcerers), ritual poetry, fairy tales, songs, proverbs and sayings, which can be very attractive for tourists, are not sufficiently reflected in tourism.

Nature tourism is a major driver of local community and economic development in many Arctic countries. For example, the community of Churchill, Manitoba (Canada), known for decades as the “Polar Bear Capital of the World”, is largely dependent on the income received as a result of tourists watching polar bears [17, Lemelin R., Fennell D., Smale B.], while residents of Nunavut in Canada rely on the population of polar bears both for food and for income from sport hunting [18, Schmidt J., Dowsley M.].

In Finnish Lapland, including the communities of Saariselkä and Kilpisjärvi, the development of tourism has led to tensions with Sami reindeer herders and local residents.

The above mentioned works emphasize the importance of researching the attitudes of local communities towards tourism development in the region.

Thirdly, tourism, in addition to the extraction and processing of raw materials and production, is one of the promising economic specializations for the Komi Republic.

The nearest town of the Komi Republic, located on the territory of the Russian Arctic near the Yugyd Va National Park, is the former mining monotown of Inta, the main source of income of which for a long time was coal mining. Coal reserves in the Pechora basin on the territory of the Komi Republic are in second place in terms of production in Russia. The gross value of all mineral resources is estimated at more than 660 trillion rubles. Currently, coal mining is frozen and the city is fully subsidized.

Today, Inta is a town with a population that has more than halved from 1990 to 2020 (from 60 thousand to 27 thousand people), and there is a further downward trend. More than 10% of the population is on the waiting list for resettlement from the Far North. According to forecasts,

the population will decrease to 20 thousand people in the next five years². The “dying out” town of Inta, due to the closure of the city-forming enterprises and the increased outflow of the population, every year needs to find economic and social solutions for further existence.

However, the search for a solution has long been carried out in terms of exploration of new places for mining. Repeated attempts were made to change the boundaries of the Yugyd Va National Park for the extraction of gold on its territory, the first explored reserves of which were estimated at 2.3 tons, with exploration potential at 80.3 tons³. The conflict involved the commercial organization Gold Minerals, which has a license to develop a gold deposit, regional and federal authorities, public organizations and UNESCO. After many years of litigation, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that the Chudnoe deposit is part of a national park, and accordingly, gold mining cannot be carried out there⁴. Thus, environmentalists and local residents managed to defend the preservation of the park’s nature.

This fact confirms that there are sustainable communities in the region, capable of acting together, which, according to research, is a necessary condition for the development of tourism.

In addition to the natural riches, it is also possible to get acquainted with various ethnic features of the local population — the life of reindeer herders, including reindeer sledding, tasting venison dishes, local berries and drinks; with Komi folk art and folklore, including cosmogonic myths, epic tales and legends (about bogatyrs, heroes, famous sorcerers), ritual poetry, fairy tales, songs, proverbs and sayings, which can also be extremely attractive for tourists.

In addition, due to its geographical location and cultural and historical significance, Inta can be considered the capital of the Subpolar Urals. Some mountain peaks located here are a kind of “places of power”, objects of worship for the peoples of the Far North. The Arctic Circle begins 60 km from Inta, in the Subpolar Urals one can reach the border of Europe and Asia, since the Ural Mountains are this border.

The authors of the article have already made a research expedition to this territory. As we noted previously⁵, a branch of the Yugyd Va National Park is also located here, and the most convenient logistics are provided through Inta (about 100 km of dirt road by URALS or TREKOLs or by helicopter, with comfortable recreation centers along the way) for tourism in the Subpolar

² Porotnikova N.A., Antipov V.V. Issledovanie vliyaniya razvitiya turizma v osobo okhranyaemoy prirodnoy territorii na sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie monogoroda na Pripolyarnom Urale [Study of the influence of tourism development in a specially protected natural area on the socio-economic development of a single-industry town in the Subpolar Urals]. Otchet po nauchno-issledovatel'skoy ekspeditsii [Report on a scientific research expedition]. Moscow, NRU HSE, 2020, p. 3. URL: <https://foi.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/448129260.pdf> (accessed 24 February 2023).

³ U zapovednika izymayut zoloto [Gold is being confiscated from the reserve]. Kommersant, no. 111 of 28.06.2019, p. 4. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4013457> (accessed 06 January 2023).

⁴ Yagodina V. Sever pomnit. Poiski zolota v natsional'nom parke «Yugyd va» [Sever remembers. Searching for gold in the Yugyd Va National Park]. URL: <https://greenpeace.ru/stories/2019/08/29/sever-pomnit> (accessed 06 January 2023).

⁵ Porotnikova N.A., Antipov V.V. Issledovanie vliyaniya razvitiya turizma v osobo okhranyaemoy prirodnoy territorii na sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie monogoroda na Pripolyarnom Urale [Study of the influence of tourism development in a specially protected natural area on the socio-economic development of a single-industry town in the Subpolar Urals]. Otchet po nauchno-issledovatel'skoy ekspeditsii [Report on a scientific research expedition]. Moscow, NRU HSE, 2020, p. 3. URL: <https://foi.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/448129260.pdf> (accessed 24 February 2023).

Urals (for climbing Narodnaya and Manaraga, rafting on the rivers Kozhim, Kosya and others). More southern Pechora and Vuktyl are far away from the mentioned peaks without the possibility of access by road. All this creates the potential for the development of not only natural and ecological, but also sports, winter, ethno-cultural tourism. Thus, Inta is practically the only logistics center for traveling through the Subpolar Urals, through the territory of the Yugyd Va National Park, which has been unaffected by humans for many thousands of years.

It can be expected that the development of tourism in the paradigm of sustainable development in this region will ensure the preservation of cultural heritage and an increase in the income of the population.

Review of research on sustainable development of Arctic communities and tourism, development of research methodology

According to Richard Butler's life cycle model of a tourist destination [19, Butler R.; 20, Goncharova N.A., Kiryanova L.G.], we can refer tourism development in Inta and the nearby part of the Yugyd Va National Park to the "exploration" stage, when tourism development is just beginning, social and economic benefits from tourism in the region are small, tourist attractions are nature-oriented.

The exploration stage is the main phase when governments and local people begin to think about tourism and how to maximize opportunities in this industry. During the exploration phase, a small number of tourists arrive, they do not have a significant impact on the environment and are treated favorably by local people.

Studies on this topic indicate that the outcome of tourism development in any destination depends largely on the local people's perception of the impacts of this development and their attitudes towards tourism [21, Lepp A.]. Attitudes play an important role in human behavior as a decisive link between person's thoughts and actions [22, Ajzen I., Fishbein M.].

That is why, we take the attitude of local stakeholders towards tourism development as indicators of the prospects for tourism development in the Komi Republic and directly in the Arctic single-industry towns.

As a general conceptual framework, we focused on research of the sustainability and impact of tourism on protected areas and society [6], as well as on methodology for studying the relationship between tourism and local communities [23, Kaján E.].

The approach of measuring the sustainability or vulnerability of Arctic communities depending on tourism development was chosen as the most relevant research model [24, Sisneros-Kidd A.M., Monz C., Hausner V., Schmidt J., Clark D.].

In previous studies on the attitude of local communities towards tourism, the following groups of stakeholders were identified: 1) residents (local residents); 2) entrepreneurs; 3) officials; 4) tourists [25, Byrd E.T., Bosley H.E., Dronberger M.G.]. As entrepreneurs, we will consider representatives of the service sector: tour operators, owners of guest houses and hotels, local cafes and restaurants, souvenir manufacturers, etc. It makes sense to divide the public sector into

several levels: regional authorities, who have the greatest strategic power in terms of tourism development, local (municipal) authorities and state budgetary organizations.

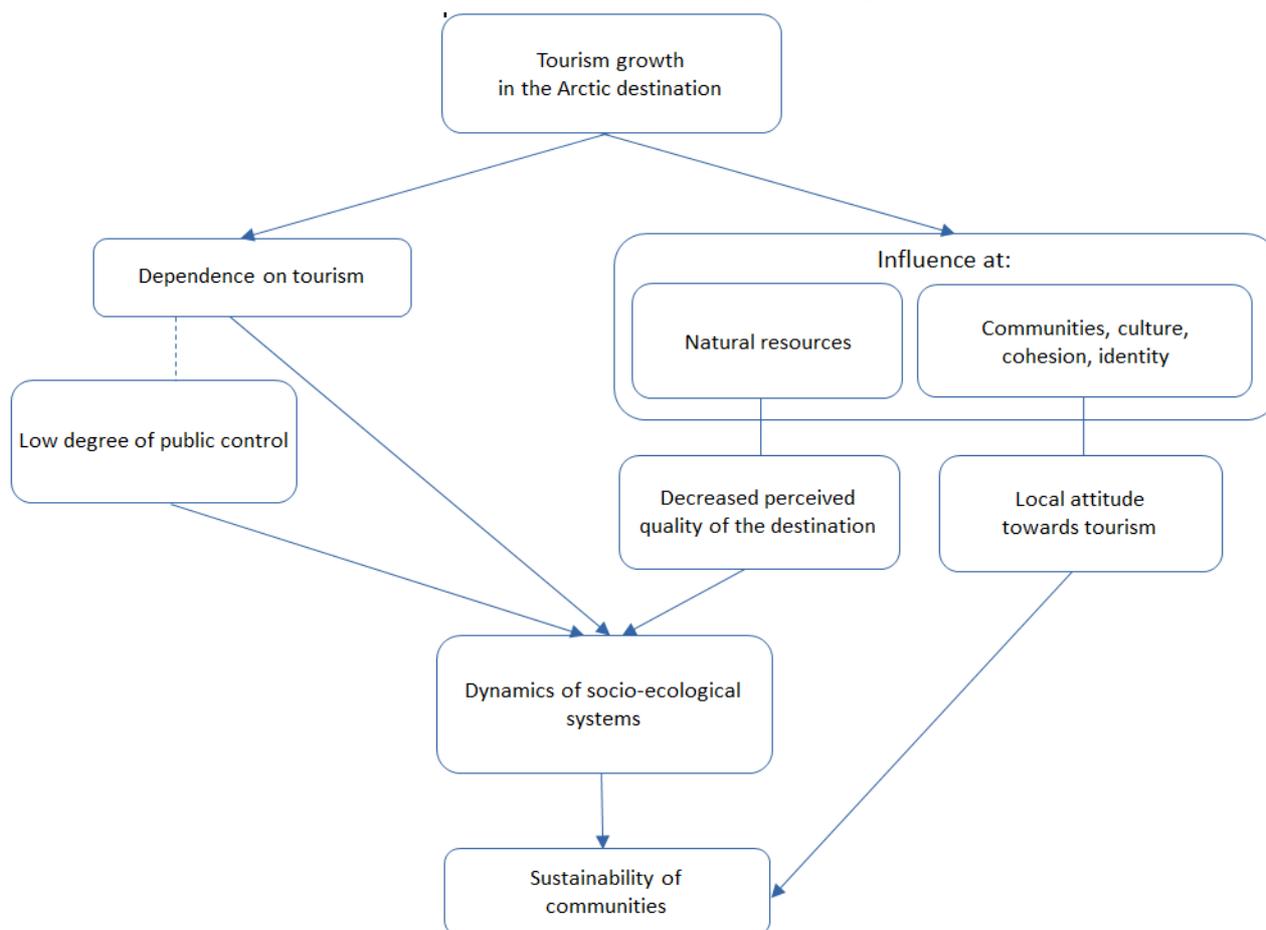


Fig. 1. Nature tourism and sustainability factors of Arctic communities [24].

Each group of stakeholders has its own set of needs and expectations [26, Getz D.], which can lead to different perceptions of the region's development and even conflicts between stakeholders. Thus, for effective tourism development, it is necessary to reach a compromise between stakeholders [27, Sautter E.T., Brigit L.]. Now we gradually approach the topic of relationships between the main stakeholders. Relationship networking is a useful framework for studying the management of public-private relations and understanding tourism management structures [28, Palmer A.; 29, Tyler D., Dinan C.; 30, Pforr C.].

The study, analyzing stakeholder networks in tourism, identifies three types of potential benefits from stakeholder cooperation [31, Presenza A., Cipollina M.]:

- Reducing the costs of resolving conflicts between stakeholders,
- Legitimization of collective actions when making strategic decisions,
- Improving coordination of policies and related activities.

Thus, this concept reflects in detail the network of relationships (collaboration) of stakeholders, and, therefore, allows us to understand which relationships could contribute to tourism development by establishing or strengthening them. In addition, these relationships between stakeholders directly influence their activities and perceptions of tourism and, therefore,

should also be taken into account when developing a conceptual model for the sustainable development of Arctic communities.

In a number of studies of Arctic tourism, the authors identify the following aspects that should be taken into account when calculating its impact on the development of the region: *accessibility, destination image, human resources, indigenous culture, marketing, policy, tourist experience, Arctic specifics and others* [32, Chen J., Wang W., Jensen O., Kim H., Liu W.].

We also examined the attitudes of stakeholders towards the above-mentioned aspects of tourism development by forming relevant blocks of questions in the research guides. Additionally, we planned to study the image of destinations from the perspective of the local population by creating a kind of mental map of local sightseeing and attractions. This will allow us to understand the vision of local stakeholders regarding the development of tourism in the region, and will also create a base of certain visual images for further tourism development in the region.

Development of a conceptual model for sustainable development of Arctic communities

Developing the ideas of the above studies, we supplement the conceptual framework for understanding the factors influencing the sustainability of Arctic communities dependent on nature-based tourism with a set of indicators that will allow us to describe this dependence in more detail. As a result, we form a model of Arctic communities' attitudes towards tourism development in the region.

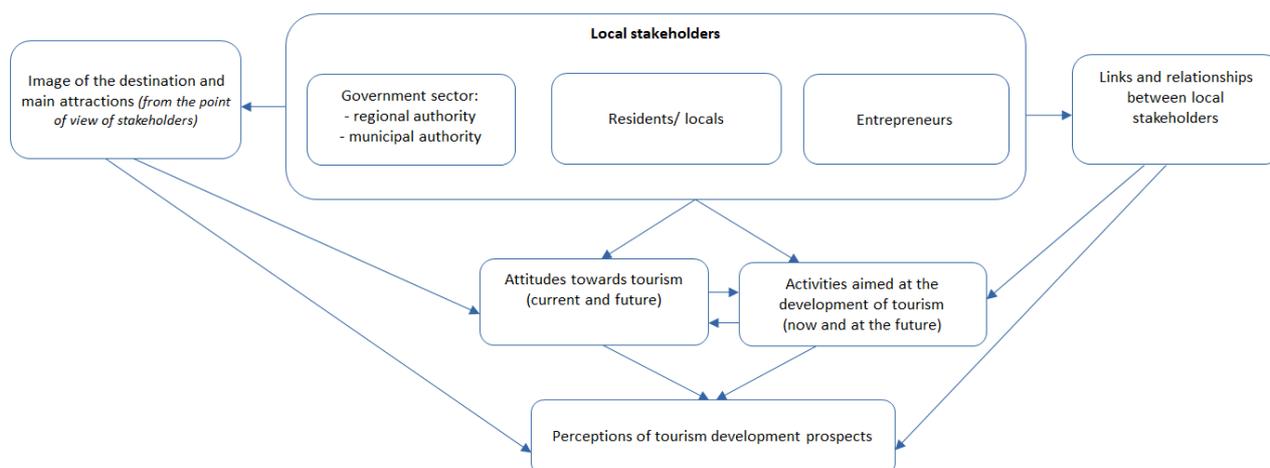


Fig 2. Conceptual model of Arctic communities' attitudes towards tourism development in the region.

This model was tested during the research process on the example of the single-industry town Inta in the Komi Republic.

The purpose of the study is to identify the attitude of key stakeholders in the region to the development of tourism as a driver of sustainable development of the territory.

Research objectives:

- identify key factors and barriers affecting the development of tourism and local communities, and the relationship between them;
- identify the main attractions highlighted by stakeholders for tourists through the creation of a mental map of the region;

- describe the relationships and connections between local stakeholders;
- test a conceptual model of Arctic communities' attitudes towards tourism development in the region.

Research assumptions:

- government authorities consider natural resources as an opportunity to “revitalize” a single-industry town, predominantly in terms of mining;
- due to insufficient development of infrastructure, lack of jobs and increased migration from the towns under consideration, local residents have little interest in developing tourism in their region;
- local residents' ideas about the most attractive attractions in the region coincide with the ideas of entrepreneurs, regional and local authorities.

Data collection methods are in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with the following categories of local stakeholders:

- Civil servants (in-depth interviews)
- Entrepreneurs (in-depth interviews)
- Local residents (focus group)

The study involved civil servants — heads of specialized departments of the Government of the Komi Republic and the administration of the city of Inta, with at least 5 years of work experience; experts — employees of specialized research institutes with at least 5 years of research experience; entrepreneurs — representatives of the tertiary sector in Syktyvkar and Inty, with at least 5 years of wholesale activity; local residents — active citizens who responded to the invitation to participate in the study and have been living in the Komi Republic for at least 5 years.

The main methods of data processing were descriptive statistics and content analysis.

Research results

There were:

- in-depth interviews with the heads of relevant departments of the Government of the Komi Republic (Syktyvkar) — the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Archives, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Nationalities, the Finno-Ugric Ethnopark Eb (8 people);
- in-depth interviews with the heads of specialized departments of the Inta Administration — economics, entrepreneurship development, culture, representatives of the administration of the Yugyd Va National Park and the Severyanka State Hotel (6 people);
- focus group with heads of local tourism companies, guest houses, cafes, souvenir manufacturers and other tertiary sector companies (8 people);

- focus group with local residents of Inta (different age groups from youth to pensioners, 8 people).

The results of the study are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Results of the study of key stakeholders of the region for tourism development in the Yugyd Va National Park

	Development factors	Development barriers
Regional authorities of the Komi Republic	<p>“Virgin forests of Komi” — UNESCO site, rich natural resources</p> <p>Federal park (great possibilities for financing the park)</p> <p>High tourism potential, tourists from large Russian cities are the most attractive</p>	<p>Bad road to the park</p> <p>Difficulties in accommodating tourists (many independent travelers)</p> <p>Insufficient level of development of accommodation, parking, transportation and entertainment facilities in the park</p> <p>Low popularity of the park in Russia and abroad</p> <p>Limited qualified personnel</p>
Local authorities, Inta	<p>The unique nature of the park</p> <p>Availability of the necessary infrastructure for development of nature tourism</p> <p>Federal, regional and municipal measures to support tourism and entrepreneurship in the Arctic</p> <p>Development of local food production, hotels and restaurants</p>	<p>Bad road to the park, logistical difficulties</p> <p>Limited funding for the construction of comfortable hotels in the park</p> <p>Low city taxes from tourism</p> <p>Outflow of qualified personnel and youth</p>
Entrepreneurs, Inta	<p>Growing popularity of the park</p> <p>Reindeer Herders' Festival as a basis for ethnic tours and winter tourism development</p>	<p>Bad road to the park, logistical difficulties, limited number of vehicles</p> <p>Lack of mobile communications in the park (=security issues)</p> <p>Limited winter tourism</p> <p>Low popularity of the park in Russia and abroad</p> <p>Short tourist season (July - August)</p>
Local residents, Inta	<p>Growing popularity of the park over the past five years</p> <p>Hotels, restaurants and entertainment are actively developing in the city</p> <p>Unity of residents and love for their place of living</p> <p>Tourism development can reduce out-migration and increase incomes of local residents</p>	<p>Bad road to the park, logistical difficulties</p> <p>Tourists do not stay in the city, they go straight to the park</p> <p>Outflow of local population</p>

As the results of the study show, the research assumptions were partially confirmed:

- Government authorities consider natural resources as an opportunity to “revitalize” a single-industry town, mainly from the point of view of mining — *partially confirmed*.
- This view is prevalent mainly among regional and local authorities dealing with economic issues; the majority of respondents support tourism development and

see it as an opportunity to increase the region's income while preserving natural resources;

- Due to insufficient infrastructure development, lack of jobs and increased migration, local residents have little interest in developing tourism in their region — *not confirmed*.
- Local residents' perceptions of the most attractive sights in the region coincide with the perception of businessmen and state authorities — *confirmed*.

The main attractions identified by stakeholders for tourists through the mental map of the region are generally coincide among different stakeholders at the regional and city levels.

The difference is that entrepreneurs and local residents of Inta additionally highlight the Kazhym, Lemva and Shaman-Gora rivers, Sanovozh as attractions, as well as wooden houses on Kirov Street, a monument to L. Tchaikovskiy, miners' park and a number of other objects in the city itself.

The majority of respondents have a positive attitude towards the prospects for tourism development in the region.

Moreover, local residents and entrepreneurs of Inta see much greater prospects for the region and themselves personally in the development of tourism compared to resource scenarios. Local residents say that there are opportunities for a variety of leisure activities; hotels, restaurants and the entertainment sector are actively developing in the city. Entrepreneurs confirm that they use government support measures, receive grants for the purchase of equipment and the development of social entrepreneurship.

Both groups note that various types of tourism, permitted in the national parks, are developing, including hiking, cycling, rafting, but mainly unorganized tourism is growing, with a proviso that the flow of tourists has significantly decreased during the pandemic. They see prospects in the development of educational tourism for school groups from all over the Republic, geological and historical tours about miners and coal mining, ethnic and event tours with reindeer herders.

Most respondents identify logistics and infrastructure problems as the main limiting factors for the development of tourism in the republic.

As the main constraint to tourism development, many respondents note the poor quality of the road to the park and of regular air service. The same reasons are the main weaknesses of the Komi Republic in competition with other Arctic regions, through which federal highways and regular flights of major air carriers pass.

Both groups of respondents also cite the limited number of vehicles allowed for use in the park (TEKOLs and other types of vehicles with low-pressure tires, currently no more than 10 units in Inta) as an important limiting factor for the development of tourism in this territory. This factor will significantly limit the flow of tourists even with growing interest in the park — in fact, the only available type of tourism (if all vehicles are busy) will be only hiking or helicopter transfer.

Important infrastructural constraints include a small number of accommodation sites and equipped camping areas, as well as limited tourist equipment for rent.

Entrepreneurs named ensuring the safety of tours as another important barrier, primarily the lack of stable communications in the park, insufficient tourist stations, rising prices for transport and equipment, lack of qualified personnel, a short summer tourist season (July–August) and almost complete underdevelopment of the winter tourism due to the high cost of machinery and equipment.

Local residents also note logistical difficulties. “Tourists are not a problem, on the contrary, it’s nice. Yes, the city can come alive, but the city can turn into a pigsty. But as long as the road to the park is bad, there is nothing to worry about.” Local residents also noted that mostly pensioners and school-age children live in the city, the rest move to other places, “anywhere, just not here”.

Relations and connections between local stakeholders can be described as rather stable.

Representatives of the Inta administration and government organizations have a great similarity of opinions regarding positive scenarios for tourism development.

Entrepreneurs and local residents also express similar views, talking about joint holidays and free time spending (attending concerts, watching films, etc.), going to the forest, creativity, and mutual assistance. “We are northerners, we have a slightly different psychotype. Our people are responsive. It is customary to help. In such cities, a lot is built on mutual assistance.”

Regarding development scenarios, local residents note: “Realistic approach: further reduction of population. The villages will be closed, only the city will remain. There will be just a point where to go out to go to the city. One hotel will be left. Freelancers are coming here, there is cheap housing and it’s a great place to live. It’s really convenient here for remote work.”

They see risks regarding population migration and difficulties with the development of logistics. But they say they love their region and have no plans to leave in the next five years. “This is home. I like it here. Someone has to stay.” “I left, but I came back. Everything is fine there, but Kozhim is not there. And there are enough people here who think like that.” “It’s good to live in a small, quiet town. I have my own circle of acquaintances. People are more responsive and kinder.”

In general, it can be considered that the conceptual model for identifying the attitude of local stakeholders to tourism development has shown its validity. The majority of local stakeholders see prospects in the development of tourism and believe that tourism can really become a driver of sustainable development of the territory.

The conclusions of this study became part of the application materials of the Komi Republic “Tourist and recreational cluster “Virgin Forests of Komi”” for participation in the All-Russian competition for the development of ecological tourism, organized by the Agency for Strategic

Initiatives, as a result of which the Republic reached the final among the top 34 best tourism projects in Russia⁶.

Conclusion

As international studies show, the interest of local communities is an important factor in sustainable tourism development. In recent years, there have also been works exploring the relationship between tourism, sustainability and the ability of communities to adapt to environmental changes, especially climate change. This area of research is especially relevant in relation to Arctic tourism due to global climate change, melting ice and the transformation of Arctic landscapes, which has led to the emergence of so-called “last chance” tourism.

Arctic tourism of the Komi Republic was chosen as the object of the present study because of its high tourist potential, including due to the location of the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Virgin Komi Forests”, the cultural heritage of the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, as well as the relevance caused by the socio-economic reasons for the transformation of the single-industry town of Inta.

Desk research and a series of in-depth interviews and focus groups with the main stakeholders — the population, government and business representatives — allowed us to draw the following conclusions.

All stakeholder groups confirm their interest in the development of tourism; most of them believe that tourism can really become a driver of sustainable development of the territory. Nevertheless, it is noted that the probability that tourism development will change the existing scenario of “compression” of the single-industry town Inta is extremely low.

Government officials note limited federal funding as the main constraint for the development of tourism in the Republic; most respondents among entrepreneurs and local residents highlight logistics and infrastructural problems. First of all, the lack of quality road surface from Inta to the park, the lack of regular air service, the limited availability of specialized vehicles for transportation to the park. Respondents also point to a small number of accommodation places and equipped camping areas, as well as limited tourist equipment for rent.

However, despite the continuing outflow of population from the Republic, the existing restrictions for further development of the single-industry town Inta, the majority of respondents do not plan to move to other regions, they love their region and actively travel around it, have a positive attitude towards the growth in the number of tourists, and see it as an opportunity to increase the income of the local population.

Thus, the majority of local stakeholders see prospects in the development of tourism and believe that Arctic tourism can become a driver for the sustainable development of the territory.

⁶ Agency for Strategic Initiatives. URL: <https://asi.ru/news/150964> (accessed 14 January 2022).

Limitations and directions for future research

As part of this study, it was not possible to conduct a sufficient number of interviews with an important group of stakeholders — reindeer herders, due to their dispersion throughout the territory of the Republic. It seems advisable to conduct interviews with them during the celebration of Reindeer Herder Day, which is attended by hundreds of representatives of this group.

Interviews with representatives of indigenous peoples living on the territory of the Komi Republic are also necessary.

If the research is extended to these groups, in general, it can be considered that the conceptual model of identifying the attitudes of local stakeholders to tourism development has shown its validity. In the future, it is necessary to verify the model using quantitative methods.

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