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ECOTOURISM AS A MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LATVIA

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Abstract: Ecotourism in Latvia is still a novelty, thus making it a necessity to develop an effective ecotourism model, which will then serve as an important tool for protecting the environment and to promote the welfare of local residents. It will also serve to build awareness of ecotourism through further discourse.

Key-words: biodiversity, ecotourism, protected nature territories, Latvia



1. Aims and scope of the paper

The purpose of this research is to analyse environmental and tourism policy and practice of ecotourism, as it influences the impact on biodiversity caused by tourism - one of the most intensive social - economic activities on a protected nature territories and to propose recommendations for sustainable management in form of ecotourism as well as for a lessening of the impact of anthropogenic footprint for these territories.



2. Review of the Literature

The results of studies from around the world reveal that ecotourism, if properly planned and implemented, has a minimal impact and does not carry with it any long-term residue on the wildlife in protected nature territories.

The condition of welfare for local communities included in the definition of ecotourism is that quality which differentiates ecotourism from other related forms of tourism.

Environmental philosophy and ethics, as well as of cultural environment is at the core of ecotourism because of the close relationship between the values orientation of a consumer society that is also in accord with the principles of sustainability.



3. Methodology of research/ approach

- A content analysis of legal acts, policy and planning documents, statistical data;
- B seven case studies in the area of ecotourism in protected nature areas;
- C observation and evaluation of tourism impact;
- D survey of target groups and occasional respondents – 379 respondents, survey covered following areas of evaluation (a total of 53 questions):
 1. participation of various interested parties in ecotourism;
 2. tourism activities in the local surroundings;
 3. forms of tourism that could be developed;
 4. tourism entrepreneurship;
 5. the importance of tourism resources;
 6. factors affecting tourism as a business;
 7. types of tourism education;
 8. environmentally friendly approaches and technology proposals.



4. Findings and data

Ecotourism feasibility studies have been carried out at several *Natura 2000* sites in Latvia since 2001:

environmental risks:

air and water pollution, waste, soil erosion, timber industry;

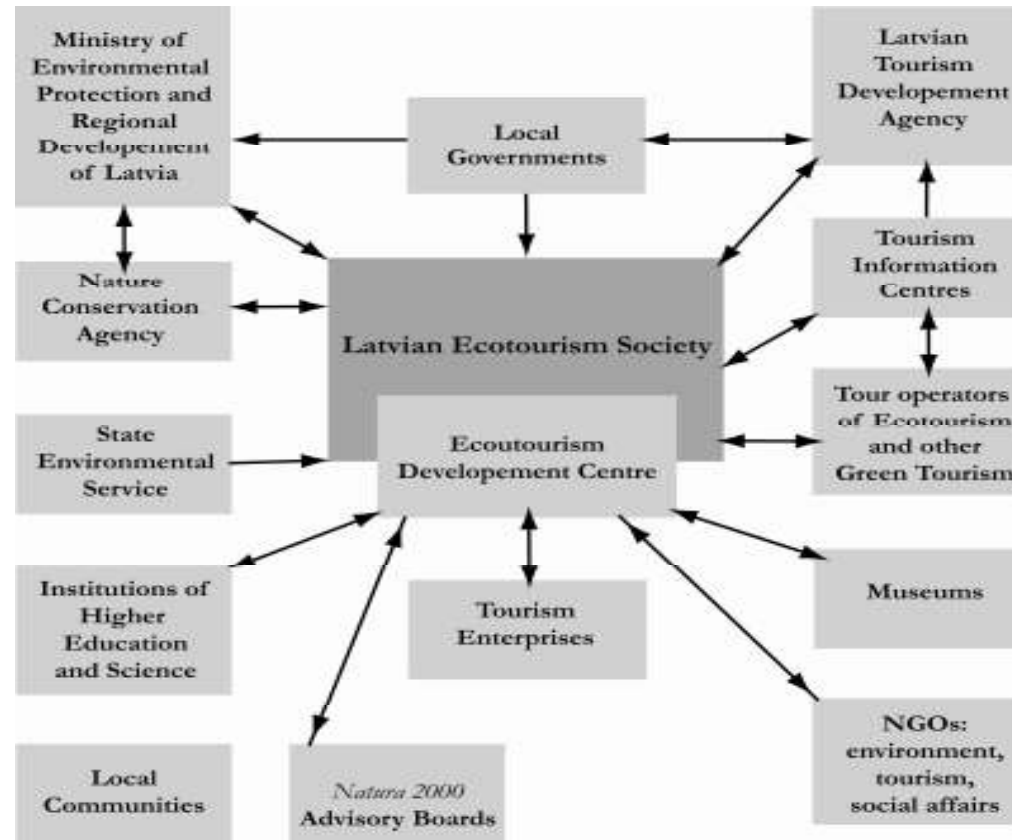
environmentally friendly solutions:

biological water treatment systems, eco-buildings, eco-villages,

environmentally-friendly mobility, renewable energy resources, energy saving,

bio-products;

5. Results and Discussions



Ecotourism Development Model for strengthening of sustainability in local communities



6. Concluding Remarks

1. Ecotourism model, with its particular emphasis on appropriate legal acts, on government and local government, on public, private and scientific sector co-operation and on environmentally-friendly technologies, should become a most effective tool in the development of a sustainable tourism industry;
2. Ecotourism promotes sustainable development in general and conservation of biodiversity in particular;
3. Exploration of ecosystem services is recommended and this should be included as a part of the ecotourism value system for protected nature territories.



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