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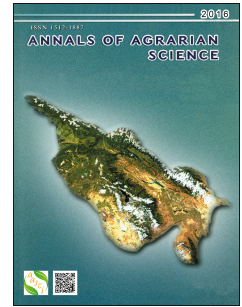
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Prospects of Ecotourism Development in Recreation Areas of South Georgia

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the opportunities of ecotourism development in South Georgia, in particular, in the Gujareti valley located in Samtskhe-Javakheti region which has a rich tourism and recreation potential. Recreation areas with unused potential are strengthening the tourism and recreation cluster of Samtskhe-Javakheti with new capabilities. For this purpose the example and experience of Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, natural conditions of the Gujareti valley, balneology resources and medieval cultural heritage of the valley have been studied. In the SWOT-table the supporting and obstructing factors of the development were analyzed.

The general concept for landscape planning of spatial zoning were worked out, which envisages the protection of natural diversity, prospects of cultural, educational, healthcare tourism and supports interests of local communities, in terms of ecotourism promotion and creates a positive environment for organic agriculture.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Recreation, Environment Protection, Sustainable Spatial Development.

Introduction

According to the National Tourism Strategy 2025, there are 87 protected areas in Georgia, including 11 national parks encompassing more than 8.62 % of the country's total land area, which create opportunities for the development of world-class eco-tourism/ nature tourism [1].

At the same time, there are several places in Georgia, which can additionally enrich and serve to the ecotourism development, protection of unique natural diversity of the country and to the well-being of the population of adjacent settlements.

Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of South Georgia is famous with its climate and balneology spa-resorts, also with a numerous tourism and recreation places. There are several natural protected areas: Borjomi Strict Nature Reserve, Borjomi-Kharagauli and Javakheti Natural Parks, Budgasheni, Tetrobi, Kartsaskhi, Madatafa, Nedzvi, Sulda, Ktsia-Tabatskhuri and Khanchali Managed Reserves; Goderdzi petrified forest natural monument [2]. As one of the first, Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park should be noted, which were created in 1995 around Borjomi Strict Nature Reserve and unified natural landscapes of six regions [3]. The establishment of the National Park played an important role in the protection of natural diversity [4]. At the same time there are less developed areas in this region, whose tourism and recreation potential is quite interesting for the economical support and additional development of the ecotourism in the region. Between them might be considered Gujareti valley.

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