

Strategy development sea tourism in Euroarctic region

This article discusses strategic directions of the sea tourism development in the Euro-arctic region of Russia. We analyzed the current state and prospects of the development of the Arctic sea tourism as a tool for the development of the Arctic in order to achieve objectives of the maritime activities strategy in the region. We defined priority types and forms of sea tourism and substantiated a strategy for creating a system of specially protected natural areas in the Barents Sea region of Russia.

Sea tourism, the Arctic, the Barents Sea region, cruises, atomic icebreaker.



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Sea tourism is a type of maritime activities. Cruises, sea travel on ships became the main form of sea tourism. The cruise business is the most dynamic, growing and profitable sector of the global tourist market, but Russia ranks little in it. In addition to the sea tourism cruises include scientific expedition tourism, diving, sea excursions, walks in coastal zone, monitoring of marine animals. The object of the tourist interest is the maritime activities themselves, the maritime history (maritime museums, monuments, ships, etc.).

Despite the harsh climatic conditions the Arctic Barents Sea region of Russia possesses tourism attractions and recreational opportunities. The Murmansk region, bordered by two seas at once, has the longest coastline in Russia. Even the cold North Sea offers unique opportunities for recreation and travel.

Scientific expeditionary sea tourism and the strategy of creating a system of specially protected territories in the unique Barents Sea region

The Barents Sea region has a unique potential for exploration. Virgin natural landscapes of the Arctic Barents Sea region are unique

monuments of wildlife. The historic legacy of polar expeditions from different parts of the world has preserved in the region.

In 2008 the International Polar Foundation organized the expedition along Sevmorputi – "Arktika-08" on the research vessels "Akademik Fedorov" and "Mikhail Somov". In 2009 the results of the expeditions are planned to be issued in "the Atlas of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Russian Arctic" [1].

A flagship of the Arctic exploration in Russia is the Arctic Sea complex expedition (ASCE) of the Russian Research Institute for Natural and Cultural Heritage. Over the years ASCE has been working in close collaboration with the Murmansk Shipping Company (MSCo). This collaboration allowed them to make the complex exploration of historical and natural environment of the Arctic region.

After numerous explorations ASCE was asked to create by 2010 a single international system of protected areas of the Arctic region which will be called "The Arctic Circle". The Arctic Barents Sea region should be the first region of the system. Within this system some comprehensive measures were provided for

the creation of an international park "Willem Barents" in areas associated with the expedition of W. Barents: the northern coast of Novaya Zemlya, Vaigach, Matveev, Myasnoy Islands, the south of the Svalbard (Norway), and Bear Island (Norway) [2].

Also in 2010 a national park «The Russian Arctic» on the territory of the Russian Barents Sea region is proposed to be built. The main idea of the creation of the park is to take state custody and the protection of huge territory in the high Arctic latitudes which includes: the Franz Josef Land archipelago, Victoria Island, the north part of Novaya Zemlya and the adjacent waters of the sea. The park territory with an area of 6 million 200 thousand hectares includes the largest habitat of Atlantic walrus, polar bear, deer, Greenland whales and rookery in the Western Arctic region. A tourist center and environmental routes are planned to be developed. Up to 800 tourists are currently visiting this area annually [3].

The strategic goal of establishing a national park is an ecological balance in the major Arctic territory. This involves preserving the unique heritage of the Arctic territory and including it in the international system of ecotourism. Also important is the goal of the Russian presence in the Arctic region.

Arctic Cruises

Sightseeing cruises on icebreakers in the high latitudes of the Arctic have been organized during the transition to a market economy since 1990 on the ships of MSCo. The Arctic cruise to the North Pole is an exclusive Russian tourist product. Russia is the only country in the world which brings tourists to the top of the world by sea. All the tours to the Arctic are focused on rich tourists from Western Europe, America and Asia.

Since 1993 the main carrier of cruise tourists to the North Pole becomes the nuclear ship "Yamal". Each sea voyage with 70 – 100 foreign passengers on board took about two weeks and costs 20 – 25 thousand dollars per person. Service on board of the icebreaker is at the level of a five star hotel. Cruising is carried out on the

routes: Murmansk – Svalbard – North Pole, Murmansk – Franz Josef Land – North Pole with a call to Novaya Zemlya.

The diesel-electric icebreaker «Captain Dranitsyn» is often used for polar cruises. The ship of MSCo for 130 seats operates mainly to the Svalbard and Franz Josef Land.

In addition to polar ice-breakers the passenger ship of ice class of MSCo "Polaris" with a high level of accommodation and services to passengers has been also used for cruises since 2004. The ship operates on time-charter contracts and is usually involved in sea voyages through the Kola Bay (a three-hour excursion to Sal'ny Island) and sea cruises to the Antarctic and the Svalbard [4].

A freighter of MSCo ships Moscow tourist company "Land Tour" now is a monopolist in the Russian Arctic segment of the international market of tourist services.

In 2008 we expect about 2000 visitors on the Arctic routes. This tourist flow has remained constant the last few years, due not only to high-cost tours, but also to the technical capabilities of carriers [5]. In 2008 we planned to implement seven Arctic cruises on ships of MSCo.

The ship "Polaris", with 70 passengers on board, carried out two cruises, which lasted 13 days, from the Norwegian port Longyear (the Svalbard) to the shores of Franz Josef Land. And among foreign tourists for the first time there were a few Russians. During the cruise tourists watch the polar birds and animals, land on the archipelago islands, where they see the unique landscapes of the Arctic. Also in 2008 the icebreaker "Yamal" complied two trips, with an average duration of 16 days, to the North Pole via Franz Josef Land.

In 2008 the newest and most powerful in the world atomohod "the 50 anniversary of Victory" built in 2007 debuted on the Arctic trail. This summer the new icebreaker carried out three trips to the North Pole with 100 tourists from the United States, China and Europe on board [4].

In late 2008 the atomic ice-breaking fleet which had been located on trust management of MSCo for a long time, was conveyed to the state structure of Rosatom Federal State Unitary Enterprise "Atom-fleet".

In future the passenger motor ship of MSCo "Klavdiya Elanskaya" can be re-used for sea tourism cruises which is currently performing passenger traffic along the Kola Peninsula. For example, the route of the ship can be extended to Kandalaksha through Umbu or the popular cruises in the past to Arkhangelsk and the Solovetsky Islands can be restored. Another vessel of MSCo "Vassily Kosyakov" continues to carry tourists and pilgrims from Kemi to the Solovetsky Islands. The cost of a three-hour trip in 2008 was 500 rubles.

The main competitor of Russia on the sea tourism market in the Arctic is a Norwegian company "Hurtiruten" which organizes cruises to the north of Norway and the Svalbard archipelago. In future the routes of the company, as a rule ending in Kirkenes, can be extended up to Murmansk and even to the Solovky and Arkhangelsk. And another management approach is to restore a direct passenger service over the Barents Sea from Murmansk to Norwegian Kirkenes.

Sea tourism development strategy in Murmansk

Since 1990s Murmansk has been developing as a center of the international sea tourism and the cruises starting point through the northern seas. It is here the world's largest nuclear ice-breaking fleet is based and used for summer Arctic cruises. Nuclear powered ice-breakers are federal public property which cannot be the subject to privatization. Two of ten Murmansk nuclear ships transferred in 2008 to the state corporation «Rosatom», ice-breakers "Yamal" and "the 50 anniversary of Victory", are involved in Arctic cruises in this period.

In 2008 the nuclear ship "Arktika" was taken out of operation. Among the possible ways of its further use is to alternate it into the floating hotel that will help to solve the problem of accommodation shortage in Murmansk.

The oldest in the world atomic icebreaker "Lenin", built in 1959, and decommissioned after 30 years of use, soon will be a key target of the marine historic and cultural areas, emerging in the area of seaport buildings. In 2009 the 50th anniversary of the atomic icebreaker and the 50th anniversary of the atomic fleet of Russia will be celebrated by opening a museum of history of the nuclear powered fleet in Russia and development of the Northern Sea Route on board of the "Lenin".

The ice-breaker is currently being prepared to putting it on eternal mooring near the seaport buildings. An information stand was installed on a formed embankment. 25 – 30 million rubles are spent on the maintenance of the "Lenin" annually [4].

In 2009 the design work on reconstruction of far lines pier and the seaport buildings, the further improvement and extension of the embankment are planned. The main passenger pier of the seaport buildings is in bad condition and can accept no longer modern cruise ships longer than 140 m.

In future foreign cruise ships could be accepted by the seaport buildings rather than by deep-sea terminal commercial and fishing ports. Moreover it is the regulated area to visit which requires the execution of a pass.

A tour operator company "Nordmorservis Travel" has been a monopolist in the sphere of incoming cruise tourism in Murmansk for many years. Annually it receives and serves 4 – 5 cruise liners with European tourists in Murmansk. A number of tourists on board of a ship varies from 160 to 1 000 people. Most of them are retirees from Germany and Great Britain. The ship moors in Murmansk on average for 9 – 12 hours. During this time the tourists manage to see the city sights, and spend tens of thousands of euro in museums, souvenir shops and restaurants of the city. The main problem in this kind of tourism is the lack of comfortable sightseeing buses of tour class. For one large cruise ship 15 – 17 buses are required.

The strategic direction of the sea tourism development in Murmansk is the creation of

new unique sea attractions and events. Since 2006 the city became the place of a bright sports festival "Murmansk mile" with a traditional race through the Kola Bay. Here it is advisable to build a comfortable sea quay with a length of 1500 m in the vicinity of a new bridge.

Small urban sculptures associated with the sea theme can decorate prospective Murmansk embankments, and the museum and exhibition of marine equipment in the open air as in Kaliningrad and Vladivostok.

The unique Oceanarium (a theater of marine animals) in the Russian North is the world class show object which can be supplemented by setting up on its base the museum and educational center "Life of the Northern Seas" with panoramic ocean aquarium.

Problems of the tourism development in the archipelago of Svalbard

One of the main centers of tourism in the Arctic Barents Sea region is the archipelago of Svalbard, which is visited by nearly 40 thousand tourists.

The major tour operator through Russian villages of the archipelago is a Norwegian-German company "Svalbard tour". The company has organized regular summer travel programs. These programs include residency of groups in the village Pyramid for several days, unlike other companies that have used Russian villages only as an exotic venue for tours during brief visits of several hours.

There are a lot of economic problems in Russian settlements on the Svalbard. They demand substantial government subsidies. A very limited tourism is unable to improve the economic situation.

Despite the great economic achievements in tourism of a nearby Norwegian settlement of Longyerbyen Russian settlements on the Svalbard are not paying proper attention to the development of tourism as an additional basis for their economic livelihoods.

While the tourism associated with the residence at the hotel plays an insignificant role in Barentsburg and Pyramid, in Longyerbyen from 1993 to 2006 beds in hotels increased from 0 to 500, which gives 70 000 person-days of stay per year, ensuring the work for over a hundred people. In 2006 tourists spent in Longyerbyen from 60 to 100 million Norwegian kroner annually, that is more than the total value of coal sold by "Arktikugol" [6]. This successful development was funded primarily by tourist companies. Taking into account the high prices and high standard of living in Longyerbyen, it should be noted that over the past decade economic changes have been successful. Tourism has played an important role as one of the main sources of employment, the development stimulant of diverse infrastructure (shops, restaurants, hotels), as well as the population growth, which would not have been possible without the additional funds brought by tourists in Longyerbyen. This raises the question: why is the tourism practically plays no role in the neighboring Russian villages, despite their dire economic situation and high demand for permanent government subsidies?

Summer tourism in the settlement of Pyramid was terminated in 2000 because of the unwillingness of "Arktikugol" to negotiate an agreement on a lasting basis, even though its opinion was a condition for the application of forces to the broad marketing, and thereby the attraction of the required number of customers that would balance the cost of maintenance of tourism infrastructure of a remote, abandoned settlement.

In Barentsburg annual income from tourism, according to our estimates, can reach about 1 million Norwegian kroner, which is just over 1% of the revenue brought by tourism in Longyerbyen [6]. Almost all tourism is a short hour and a half tour around the village, while the hotel is used little by tourists.

Tourism and coal output are completely different productions often with conflicting needs. Therefore, the transformation of tourism into the main economic pillar of Russian towns is unlikely until their leadership preference is given to coal mining. This is especially true for Barentsburg, where tourism development is particularly difficult because of the transport inaccessibility of the village.

Change of the "Arktikugol" leadership led to the replacement of nearly all personnel associated with servicing tourists, resulting in a loss of professionalism in dealing with foreign tourists. The Norwegian governor of the archipelago demanded the closure of the hotel in Pyramid, and the company "Svalbard Tour" had to exclude the settlement from travel programs

since 2000 [6]. Therefore leadership must save the village that would be much cheaper than the cost of subsequent recovery. We suppose:

– establishment of Russian towns governing body, receiving limited public subsidies and not depending on any local company;

– development of a long-term concept for tourism in each village, focusing on types of tourism, in which villages have advantages over Longyerbyen (especially the natural aspect, culture, science cooperation in tourism, etc.).

The Government of the Murmansk region offers Norwegians to create the joint industrial and economic zone on the archipelago. Russia and Norway could become strategic partners in the development of infrastructure and tourism business on the Svalbard.

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