

## Information support for development of rural green tourism enterprises in Ukraine in conditions of COVID-19 pandemic

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**Abstract.** The current state has been studied and the specificity of the development of rural green tourism in Ukraine has been determined. The problems of practical application of information support by business entities working in the tourism industry have been identified. The essence and necessity of large-scale information support of the rural green tourism industry have been substantiated and its features have been investigated. The analysis of information technology used today in the field of information support for the rural green tourism industry has been carried out. The impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the development of the tourism industry in Ukraine has been established. Measures to extend information support in the field of rural green tourism under conditions of adaptive quarantine have been identified. The proposals for improving the level of information support for the rural green tourism industry have been summarized

**Keywords:** rural green tourism, enterprises, development of rural areas, information technology, region, information support

**Problem formulation.** The relevance of developing rural green tourism in Ukraine is due to the urgent need to immediately address the problems of socio-economic development of rural areas, which, in most cases, are depressing. This will allow to diversify the directions of economic development of the Ukrainian countryside, to contain the demographic decline and, in combination with other spheres of activity, to solve urgent problems of the regions.

Rural green tourism worldwide is a developed and highly profitable sector of the economy. With further urbanization, the demand for this type of recreation in the world will grow, and therefore – will increase the need for rural estates and tourist attractions that these services can offer. Ukraine has a rather strong resource potential in this area, which has not yet received the appropriate level of information support, and therefore, as a result, is underused and remains in low demand by tourists. This is especially

true in rural areas, which have a rich cultural and historical heritage, a significant nature reserve and food base, but are located at a considerable distance from the known tourist routes [1].

In addition, surveys conducted by Ukrainian travel agencies among their clients in 2020 show that in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for travel products that provide recreation with a limited number of people around, but with minimal restrictions on their own freedom of action has increased [2]. Under such conditions, rural green tourism will be able to become an alternative in the organization of full recreation in both family and individual format.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** A wide range of issues of rural green tourism has been studied by such foreign scientists as Y. Ramanauskene, A. Harhasas, K. Dapkute, K. Dronh, R. Dapkus, A. Kennon, V. Kotlinskyi, S. Medlik, V. Midlton, M. Rosite, Y. Sikora, A. Steina, Y. Kholovei and others. Many domestic

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researchers have devoted their scientific publications to the general problems of tourism development. In particular, we are talking about such scientists as: B. Bartmann, M. Jordi, J. Kloeze, O. Beidyk, V. Kyfiak, O. Kolotukha, O. Korol, O. Liubitseva, M. Malska, A. Mokliak, G. Chernova, I. Yakovenko. Development and implementation of programs for the development of rural green tourism is the range of scientific interests of such domestic scientists as: A. Birkovych, V. Vasylieva, P. Horishevskiy, A. Zinchenko, V. Holovatska, T. Zinchuk, S. Illiashenko, S. Melnychenko and others. However, the active development and prospects of this type of tourism requires further research.

According to J. Kloeze rural green tourism is a concept that includes all tourism activities that develop in the rural environment [3, p. 15-16].

An alternative definition was given by B. Bartmann: "Rural green tourism is a concept that includes tourism activities organized and managed by the local population, based on close connection with the environment – natural and anthropogenic" [4].

The term "rural green tourism" is interpreted by Montaner X. Montehano as an activity that takes place in contact with nature, life in camps or settlements. This activity can be combined with agricultural work, acquaintance with life of small settlements, walking excursions, studying of fauna and flora [5].

The European organization Euroter gives the following definition: "Rural green tourism is tourism that supports the development of agricultural regions, preservation of cultural heritage and ecology of the village, the revival of local traditions and products. This type of tourism is characterized by regional identification and meets the needs of tourists in accommodation, food, leisure activities and other services that contribute to the sustainable development of the social sphere of the village" [6].

According to S. Kuzyk "... in the global economic crisis, rural green tourism can get a new impetus for further development, because many citizens of our country will choose for active recreation Ukrainian Carpathians, Podilsk or Dnieper regions, rather than too expensive foreign facilities on advertised international routes" [7, p. 264]. V. Fedorchenko and T. Dyorova note that "this type of tourism, by promoting the development of small business in agricultural regions, gives urban residents the opportunity to actively rest in private agriculture, and farmers to improve their financial situation..." [8, p. 152].

**The purpose of writing the article** was to generalize the theoretical provisions, as well as to determine the specifics and problems of practical application of information support by businesses operating in the field of rural green tourism.

The main objectives of this study are:

1) analysis of the current state of information support of the rural green tourism industry in Ukraine;

2) identifying problems with the use of information technology by businesses operating in this field;

3) development of recommendations for improving the level of information support in the field of rural green tourism.

In the process of working on the tasks, the following methods of economic research were used: analysis – in identifying internal trends, problems and opportunities for the development of the object of study, comparative analysis – when comparing indicators in Ukraine with indicators in the world, abstract-logical – in substantiation of proposals and measures for further implementation of information support tools in the activities of rural green tourism entities, synthesis – when summarizing the results.

**Presenting main material.** Since the beginning of the XXI century and to date, rural green tourism, according to WTO experts, according to the pace of its development ranks first among the sectors of the world tourism industry, and is developing dynamically. The main driving force of its rapid development is the attempt of the progressive world community to restore nature, as the living conditions of modern man are characterized by the mismatch of the environment of his physiological and psychological needs. Therefore, in modern economic conditions to meet the needs of people living in urban areas, a significant role is played by rural green tourism, which is able to ensure economic and demographic stability in rural areas of any country and solve its socio-economic problems. The increase in demand for rural recreation is also growing due to increased incomes and the number of paid vacations, rising levels of education, development of transport infrastructure and cheaper services. Close interaction of city tourists with traditional rural cultural life allows to understand and respect national customs and traditions more deeply, develops the personality, promotes formation of national self-consciousness [9].

In Europe, the development of rural green tourism was associated with the industrialization of agriculture, which in the period after World War II underwent significant modernization changes. Increasing the manufacturability of agricultural work contributed to the growth of commercialization of agriculture, reducing the number of farmers and prices for agricultural products, the overall reduction of farm incomes. This has led to changes in agriculture as a sector of the economy. Based on limited conditions, farmers in European countries (France, Britain, Italy, etc.) began to look for alternative uses of their assets by diversifying their activities in order to ensure a sufficient level of income [10].

Statistics show that 68% of Western Europeans spend their weekends in their own country and 20% in other European EU member states. In general, about 90% of Western Europeans stay in Europe during the

holidays. Of these, 25% (ie, one tourist out of four) spend their weekend in the countryside, taking into account the economic point of view (low prices), as

well as guided by the quality of stay. Data on the type of tourist destinations living in the countries of the European Union are presented in the table.

**Table.** Distribution of recreation places of tourists-citizens of the European Union depending on the tourist area in 2019

Country	Area for recreation			
	rural	mountain	town	sea coast
Belgium	25	15	5	55
Denmark	25	14	19	42
Spain	27	9	11	53
France	24	17	13	46
Greece	8	11	12	69
Ireland	27	6	37	30
Italy	11	24	12	53
Luxembourg	19	12	17	52
Netherlands	39	13	12	36
Portugal	29	8	7	56
Germany	34	15	7	44
Great Britain	29	13	10	48

**Source:** [11]

The EU's main goal for the development of rural green tourism is to develop a tourism product that provides direct income to agriculture for the continuous improvement of life in rural communities, as well as the preservation of historical heritage.

The share of tourism in the general economy of Ukraine is a topic of in-depth discussions and as of 1 January 2021, according to official statistics, is about 3-4% of GDP, which is much lower than the international average (equal to 10%). Therefore, tourism is practically not taken into account in the formation of economic policy at the national level. However, the latest data from international structures (primarily the UN World Tourism Organization, UNWTO) confirm the calculations of domestic experts, who determined this share at about 9% of Ukraine's GDP. This gives reason to consider that this indicator is much more important for the Ukrainian economy than before [12]. According to expert estimates, in the case of full disclosure of Ukrainian tourism potential, revenues to the budgets of all levels may amount to 10 billion US dollars per year, so much is received by countries that are measur-

able with Ukraine in terms of tourism and recreation potential [13, p. 27].

The concept of "rural green tourism" is a multi-functional, complex and systemic phenomenon that is actively spreading in the economic life of agricultural areas of Ukraine and contributing to their economic and social development. Leading economists identify this category with tourism based on rural estates or farms, or in rural areas in general, but does not include recreation in a kind of recreational areas. In a broad sense, rural tourism is understood as travel for the purpose of recreation and relaxation of the population, which involves accommodation in rural areas with the involvement of the private sector [14, p. 41-44].

The relevance of the development of this type of tourism in Ukraine is confirmed by global trends in the international tourism market. Thus, according to the Union for the Promotion of Rural Green Tourism in Ukraine, today the international tourism market is moving from the recreation model "SSS" (Sea – Sun – Sand) to the recreation model "LLL" (Lore – Landscape – Leisure) [15].

According to experts, the most priority regions for the development of rural green tourism enterprises in Ukraine are:

1. Western part: Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Khmelnytsky regions.
2. Southern part: Zaporizhia, Mykolayiv, Kherson regions.
3. Central and Northern parts: Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Poltava, Chernihiv regions [16, p. 15]. The least developed rural tourism is in Eastern Ukraine.

The creation of positive associations among tourists about recreation in the Ukrainian countryside was hindered by certain stereotypes, in particular about the unsuitability of rural housing, unattractive services, low level of staff. Over the last decade, the associative connections of tourists about the possibilities of rural tourism have changed in connection with their own experience of staying in the village during vacations, holidays and weekends using the services of agro-villages. Factors such as the socio-economic crisis of 2008-2009, the annexation of Crimea, quarantine measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the growth of vacationers in rural areas and, accordingly, gaining experience [17].

The experience of Ukraine's European neighbors, first of all Poland, is of great interest [18, 19, 20]. Rural tourism was especially active here in the 1990s and was aimed at creating modern comfortable living and recreation conditions in order to stimulate the influx of foreign tourists. For Poland, as well as for Ukraine, the most notable features of the development of rural tourism and its regional unevenness are: deep differentiation of natural geographical conditions and economic uneven development of regions, cities and rural areas; historical past of specific territories; leisure traditions that have developed over the past decades, etc. As a specific form of activity in Poland, rural tourism is called "economic hospitality" [21, p. 4-14].

The generalization of data from the analysis of monographs and periodicals of domestic and foreign authors, statistics and empirical research allows to form the main directions of improving the quality of rural green tourism services, namely: the need to develop a system for assessing the quality of services; organization of staff training in the field of improving the quality of services; development and implementation of a service quality management system, information support for the development and operation of rural green tourism enterprises.

When forming a quality management system in the estate of rural green tourism it must be guided by the following principles:

1) to ensure the high technical quality of service, it is necessary to develop appropriate rules that would provide for systematic training of staff employed in the service and provide the necessary level of service to tourists;

2) differentiation of rural green tourism farmstead services should depend on understanding the needs of the consumer and trying to meet them through an individual approach with maximum care;

3) the main task of ensuring the quality of service is to meet or exceed consumer expectations;

4) service quality assessment should be based on consumer criteria;

5) the task of the rural green tourism estate is to meet the expectations of consumers, and not to try to anticipate their expectations, which may reach a level that is difficult to fulfill;

6) operations management should divide each service into a series of sequential actions, where each of them contributes to other parts of the process of customer satisfaction;

7) consumers judge quality by the original data. The task of the rural green tourism estate is to identify and eliminate shortcomings as significant obstacles to the provision of quality services;

8) each farmstead of rural green tourism needs to create a system of encouraging the interest of employees in providing quality services on time, as well as personal communication with consumers;

9) appropriate quality of services promotes the emergence of "loyal" consumers in order to ensure contacts and increase the income of rural green tourism estates;

10) the main and most important form of control is to take into account the satisfaction of consumer needs.

Rural green tourism estates should not only guarantee the quality of services and the ability to meet customer requirements, but also reflect the needs of the estate in creating a system of quality that is constantly improving [22, p. 78-85].

However, in Ukraine, compliance with world standards of the tourism industry and high quality in the provision of tourist services is still an acute problem in the field of rural green tourism. This is primarily due to the insufficient level of information support in rural areas.

The main and most accessible element of information support of business entities working in the field of rural green tourism in Ukraine is information technology, among which the Internet plays a major role.

In the world 2/3 of the tourist product offered by rural green tourism is realized through global information systems. Today, the governments of many countries, including the United States, Finland, Britain, Sweden, Germany, fund research in the field of communications [23, p. 191-193]. The potential tourist does not need to spend a lot of time on the selection and booking of a particular tourist product: just enter the parameters, and the computer system itself provides all the necessary information about the tourism service.

According to research by the Institute of Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, there are about 1 million 250 farmsteads (households) in Ukraine that can provide rural

tourism services, while about 2 thousand farmsteads advertise their proposals on the Internet resources [24, p. 113]. At the same time, in Ukraine, as of July 1, 2021, about 15.5 thousand villages are registered, where about 3.5 million Ukrainians live who do not have a high-speed fixed Internet connection. Therefore, there is a number of problems that slow down the process of implementing this technology, namely:

Low level of digital literacy of the rural population. It is believed that the low level of digital literacy of owners of rural green tourism establishments is the main reason for the lack of information about these establishments among tour operators and potential consumers of domestic tourism services.

Low financial capacity of the population. The market cost of connection to fiber-optic networks in rural areas for individuals is 2-3 thousand UAH, and for individuals – business entities and legal entities – an order of magnitude higher.

Excessive level of bureaucracy. Often, telecom operators are unable to build infrastructure due to unclear and formal failures by local governments and landowners where the infrastructure needs to be located.

High cost of renting electric poles.

In order to form a credible own marketing strategy in the global network, which would meet the generally accepted global requirements for tourism entities operating in the rural green tourism sector, it is also necessary to implement the following measures:

a) to study carefully and deeply the competitive behavior of other entities, consumer demand for tourism products, as well as analyze their own tourism resources;

b) to constantly update their knowledge of the existing legal framework in the field of tourism services, using business and legal servers;

c) to create a site for a tourist facility that is developed, promoted and maintained on an ongoing basis;

d) to constantly update advertising materials related to the activities of the tourist facility;

e) to assess the market situation, draw adequate conclusions and make decisions in accordance with the analysis [25, p. 329-335].

The updated website of the Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine (hereinafter - the RGT Union) (<https://www.greentour.com.ua/>) plays a significant role in information, advertising and communication. There is a program modernized under European requirements for categorization of services “Ukrainian hospitable estate”, which lists the benefits that tourists receive while vacationing in categorized homes. Homeowners here use their personal offices to communicate with potential tourists. A special section of the site is addressed to tourists, which provides recommendations for organizing a trip to the countryside and offers activities. The network of information-advisory and agrotourism centers (IAATC), which started its activity in 2015 on the basis of successful rural

tourism estates, plays an important role in conducting training events for owners and at the same time informing potential visitors of rural areas [26].

As for the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of rural green tourism, Ukraine, on one hand, is in a relatively better situation than most countries, as the share of such tourism product, along with other types of domestic and outbound tourism is much lower than inbound one. On the other hand, Ukrainian rural green tourism enterprises have not received a rapid systemic response and protection from the government in the form of possible measures to support the tourism industry compared to the average response and types of measures implemented by the governments of neighboring countries and EU member states. This has further complicated the situation of small and medium-sized businesses operating in this field [12].

It is worth noting the foreign experience of organizing information interaction of national nature parks with the local population engaged in rural green tourism and production of environmentally friendly products, which is especially relevant for Ukraine and for our study region. Given the high share of private farms in agricultural production, it can be argued that Ukrainian farmers have the potential to grow environmentally friendly products, but with the support of public authorities, national nature parks, or non-governmental financial organizations [20].

Global digitalization is fully penetrating the field of rural green tourism, where it almost completely changes many business processes, ranging from the technology of forming tourism products, including new distribution and promotion systems. One of the most promising digital technologies is blockchain technology.

The use of blockchain technology opens new opportunities for rural green tourism enterprises [27, p. 135-141]. Blockchain technology is a distributed digital database that allows you to do business in a trusted and transparent way without the need for centralized management. Blockchain is a fundamentally new method of organizing big data, structuring, recording and storing information in blocks that can be verified. Platforms based on blockchain technology ensure the consistency of data and a high level of security. Blockchain technology has a number of advantages, which include the following:

Distributed agreement – the database is decentralized, which means the absence of centralized blockchain management. This allows you to completely get rid of intermediaries.

Transaction verification is performed using a specified set of rules and must be confirmed by all users.

Uniqueness – all transactions are unique and there are no duplicates.

Invariance – it is impossible to change the records added to the blockchain.

To achieve positive results and gain competitive advantages, rural green tourism enterprises must seek modern high-tech means to attract their customers and adapt their offer to the target audience, and blockchain technology is one way to obtain these competitive advantages [27, p. 135-141].

At the end of 2019, at the initiative of the EBRD and with the participation of external partners, a document "Roadmap for competitive development of tourism in Ukraine" was prepared, which was the result of intensive work of all major stakeholders in the tourism sector in Ukraine. Given the new circumstances of the global pandemic, we believe that it is necessary to make appropriate changes to the proposed Roadmap action plan for 2021 and include immediate measures to respond to the crisis COVID-19 and maximize the tourism economy of Ukraine. In the current situation and in terms of adaptive quarantine, the following areas are a priority in the information support of rural green tourism:

- creation by public authorities of an official and reliable information portal, where all the necessary data will be posted;
- use of sociological and marketing research to obtain objective statistical information in the field of rural green tourism;
- optimization of tourist statistics;
- creation of high-quality content about rural green tourism facilities and their tourism opportunities with further promotion through modern communication channels in the national and international tourism markets;
- organization of excursion work online among student youth and the population;
- support for rural green tourism through the introduction of travel vouchers and credit lines for this type of tourism products;

– continuous optimization and updating of work instructions for the rural green tourism sector for the pandemic period.

As the global COVID-19 pandemic ends, it is necessary to initiate the implementation of the steps and follow-up actions outlined in the "Roadmap for competitive development of tourism in Ukraine" as recommended, as well as to monitor and adapt to possible irreversible changes in the global tourism caused by this crisis.

#### **Conclusions and prospects for further research.**

Modern tourism is an extremely information-intensive field of activity, in which the accumulation, exchange, processing, transmission and use of quality information ensure the daily smooth functioning of the tourism industry. Ukraine has all the prerequisites for the intensive development of rural green tourism, but there are a number of factors that hinder the effective development of this type of activity. An important role for the development of tourism is played by the information support of rural green tourism facilities.

It is due to the effective use of information support and increasing the level of use of information technology that high competitiveness of rural green tourism as a highly profitable sector of the economy is possible. Therefore, the current stage of informatization of rural green tourism as a sector of the economy is characterized by a tendency to increase information flows and the introduction into practice of such modern information tools and technologies that radically change information processes. Over time, the informatization of rural green tourism facilities will provide consumers with free access to the full range of necessary information about the relevant tourism product, as well as provide the relevant government agencies with the necessary control over compliance with legislation in this area of tourism.

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## **Інформаційне забезпечення розвитку підприємств сільського зеленого туризму в Україні в умовах пандемії COVID-19**

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**Анотація.** Розглянуто сучасний стан та визначено специфіку розвитку підприємств сільського зеленого туризму в Україні та закордоном. Встановлено проблеми практичного застосування інформаційного забезпечення суб'єктами господарювання, що працюють у цій сфері туризму. Обґрунтовано сутність та необхідність масштабного інформаційного забезпечення галузі сільського зеленого туризму та досліджено його особливості. Здійснено аналіз інформаційних технологій, що застосовуються сьогодні у площині інформаційного забезпечення сфери сільського зеленого туризму. Встановлено вплив світової пандемії COVID-19 на розвиток туристичної галузі в Україні. Визначено заходи з продовження інформаційного забезпечення у сфері сільського зеленого туризму в умовах адаптивного карантину. Узагальнено пропозиції щодо покращення рівня інформаційного забезпечення галузі сільського зеленого туризму.

**Ключові слова:** сільський зелений туризм, підприємства, розвиток сільських територій, інформаційне забезпечення, інформаційні технології, регіон, інформаційна підтримка

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