

Recreational and health aspect of theme park activities

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Abstract. The paper examines the recreational and health aspect of theme park activities. This study substantiates the idea that theme parks in the modern tourism business should become an alternative to the prohibitive construction of hotels in resort areas and traditional recreation areas. This paper is also devoted to understanding the problem of fulfilling the ambitious goals formulated by the government of the Russian Federation to form a new domestic tourism industry by 2030. According to this project, the tourist flow should double, reaching 140 million tourists per year. By 2030, 300 thousand rooms will be built; this is approximately a third of the existing ones. However, there is an alternative solution to this problem. For the development of the tourism industry, today it is more important not to build new hotels, but to create an additional tourist flow in order to increase the occupancy and profitability of existing hotels. The most effective tool for this is the creation of year-round theme parks that can attract millions of tourists to the regions and thereby reduce the seasonality of tourism.

1 Introduction

Our initial thesis sounds unusual: those priorities in the system of state support for the tourism industry are not set accurately. The emphasis on subsidizing the construction of new hotels is the wrong vector. Over the past ten years, the number of rooms has grown at a faster rate than the tourist flow. There are harsh statistics: since 2014, the number of rooms has grown by 60 percent, to one million rooms, but the tourist flow has only increased by one and a half times. Why did it happen? Since 2011, various state support programs for tourism have been in place, all of them focused on hotels. If you want to receive government support, build a hotel. The idea of creating a hotel room stock had certain logic thirteen years ago, but is it relevant now? If demand grows slower than supply, then the economic performance of the industry falls. We see this: by 2019, hotel occupancy and average hotel revenue per room per day decreased. The profitability of the hotel business is low, and hoteliers are demanding new support measures. But this is a road to nowhere.

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The hotels themselves do not form the tourist flow; they only serve it. The fact that someone builds ten new good hotels in a city that has no obvious tourism potential will not increase the flow of tourists to this location. You can give an example of the “Azimut-Pereslavl” hotel, which is well known. There are 400 rooms in an open field, good, high-quality rooms - and, of course, low occupancy. The mass tourist does not travel to stay in a hotel. He goes to this or that area for impressions. The main thesis of the authors is this: today it is more urgent not to build new hotels, but to increase the flow of tourists in order to load the existing ones. For Russia, there is now an urgent issue of creating man-made objects of tourist attention that can attract hundreds of thousands and even millions of people a year. Theme parks perform this function all over the world. We have given average figures for the country, leaving out the Black Sea and ski resorts, as well as Moscow, which, as the capital, itself generates a large flow of tourists. There was a shortage of seaside hotels, and they, of course, benefited from the closure of borders. The sea and mountains themselves are natural magnets that attract tourists. But at the same time, these hotels suffer greatly from seasonality. On the Black Sea, many hotels are closed for the winter because there are no tourists. Topical parks could provide year-round occupancy in these locations as well.

2 The role of theme parks in tourism

What are theme parks and what types are they? Why shouldn't we build parks using foreign franchises? And what can we rely on when creating original domestic parks?

There are several types of theme parks. The first one is amusement parks. The well-known Disneyland belongs to this type. They line up around the rides. The second type is educational parks. Here the emphasis is on the impressions from viewing exhibitions and various kinds of shows. This includes the famous French park “Puy du Fou”, which receives two and a half million visitors a year, and the lesser-known Vulcania in the Auvergne region. Ethnographic parks, which grew out of open-air museums, are popular in Scandinavia. Among the most visited educational parks of a scientific and technical profile is the German "Autostadt", built by the Volkswagen concern in Lower Saxony, in the city of Wolfsburg. There are wildlife parks - landscaped country zoos. There are usually hotels located around theme parks.

3 What are the main differences between theme parks and museums or landscaped country zoos?

Unlike museums, theme parks are much larger in size; they are stronger like magnets and can attract tourists from other regions. Parks also have a different economic model. A museum usually involves only one cognitive function. It's hard to be there for a full tourist day, because the same areas of the brain work, and a person gets tired quickly. One of the principles of a good topical park is the balance of four functions: entertainment, education, gastronomy and trade. When a person can switch between these functions, he does not notice the time and can spend money calmly and happily. This is important from the point of view of the park's economy.

The size of the theme park is also important. It should contain exhibits that can hold a visitor for six to eight hours, or better, for a couple of weekends. At the same time, the park should have elements of interest to all family members, regardless of gender and age. Conventionally: the child goes on rides, the father can come in for a drink, and the mother can go shopping. It is also very important that the functions of the park are not chaotic, but are connected with the concept of the park and its storylines.

The same applies to landscaped zoos. What is a zoo? It is a municipal cultural institution with a developed scientific function. Animals are studied there and at the same time shown a little bit to visitors. The zoo is not aimed at making people interested. Animals in cages behave unnaturally, one feels sorry for them. It is clear that it is much more interesting to watch them in a wildlife park.

Unlike theme parks, landscape planning is the theory and practice of implementing the environmental prerequisites and limitations of the development and placement of productive forces inherent in the landscape features of regions. In this study, we are interested in it as the basis for the creation of theme parks, since this activity is aimed at achieving maximum adaptation of economically functioning areas of the territory to its landscape structure and creating new optimal anthropogenic and cultural landscapes.

It would also be a mistake to identify the activities of theme parks with the functioning of specially protected natural areas, since these are areas of land, water surface and airspace above them, where natural complexes and objects that have special environmental, scientific, cultural, aesthetic, recreational and recreational significance are located, which are withdrawn by decisions of state authorities in full or partially from economic use and for which a special protection regime is established.

4 Disneyland theme park development experience

It should be noted that amusement parks were not invented by Disney. They emerged around the world as early as the late nineteenth century. Some parks still exist today. What makes the Disney experience so interesting? He combined the amusement park with the film industry. He stylized mechanical attractions in the spirit of his films and thereby added the effect of deep immersion into the atmosphere of the plots. It is also important that the plots were not new, but already familiar to people. Thus, Disney extended for children and their parents the moment of happiness from contact with their favourite masterpiece. As a result, he got a new product that became successful. Later, according to the behests of Jack Trout, Disney attacked itself at the product level in each new project: each subsequent project provided an increasingly greater immersion effect.

Later, followers followed this path. Thus, the French created the “Asterix Park”, where visitors find themselves in the world of their national film characters. The “Port Aventura” park was opened in Spain, where the immersive effect involves travelling through different regions of the planet: the Mediterranean, the Wild West, and so on.

5 Efficiency of theme park development.

There is a common opinion that theme parks are planned unprofitable projects that are needed to generate tourist flow, and that they cannot be profitable. This opinion is erroneous; it is based on the experience of some erroneous projects. Such parks can be profitable. Moreover, their profitability is higher than that of hotels. We can talk about a payback period of seven to ten years. A large amusement park with attractions will cost 50–60 billion roubles. An educational park is much cheaper. It can cost up to four to five billion roubles.

When designing theme parks, it is necessary to take into account the experience of unsuccessful projects. So, several years ago in Moscow an attempt was made to create a bright amusement park. The “Island of Dreams” was built. The developer failed to reach an agreement with strong film brands, but in the end, the largest indoor park in Europe was built. Why do the authors consider this project a failure?

Firstly, this is a very expensive project. The developer, the “Regions” group, knows how to build shopping centres. And they built a shopping centre with a large entertainment area. If we talk about mistakes, the first one is location. “Dream Island” is located in the city. Let's take a list of the world's most visited parks. All of them are located outside the city limits. The German “Europe Park” is generally a hundred kilometres from a big city.

There is a misconception that location in the city is a plus, being closer to consumers. The studies conducted convincingly prove that this is a minus. Being in a city always limits the territory. “Dream Island” is very small for a full-fledged theme park. Its area is 300 thousand square meters (30 hectares), and this includes the retail part. European, Asian and American successful parks range from 50 to 100 hectares. In fact, there are no unique attractions there.

Almost all of those presented are familiar to us from the Gorky Central Park of Culture and Rest, there is no deep stylization. A good park should have 40–60 only modern mechanical attractions, correctly balanced by type. A family comes to the right park for a full tourist day or even for a weekend. They won't mind for that to travel 40–50 kilometres from Moscow.

“Dream Island” is a closed park. The attractions are not outdoors, but indoors. This creates two problems. Technical: it is impossible to cover an area of 100 hectares for a reasonable price. Therefore, “Dream Island” has too few attractions and they are located too closely. The second problem is financial: such an approach still increases the cost of the project several times. And, what's a shame, the main budget was spent not on creating the effect of deep immersion in the world of fairy tales, but on monolithic structures and utilities. Perhaps a more correct option would be not to create a single compact heated space, but to distribute a dozen or two pavilions over the adjacent territory, which protects from wind and precipitation and in which a moderately positive temperature is maintained. The budget would have been cut sharply and the project could have been made larger in scale. And at the same time, the all-season functionality of the complex would be preserved.

The capacity of the Moscow market is quite large, plus there are neighbouring regions. If the product was on par with Disneyland there wouldn't be a problem. And so there is a discrepancy between price and quality. And instead of the well-known Mickey Mouse, it is not clear who. The park does not provide emotional immersion; there is no through-line storyline. There is a set of attractions that are not united by an idea.

6 Theme eco-parks as a special direction of recreational tourism activity

In our study, the theme eco-park is considered not only as a self-sufficient natural and educational complex, but also as a part of the urban planning system and urban landscape, as a component of an integrated environmental approach in the strategic project of a water-green urban framework, taking into account the landscape-ecological situation and social significance.

At the moment, the creation of eco-theme park spaces is very important. In Russia there are eco-theme parks that are run not only by government agencies, but also by individual entrepreneurs. Ecological theme parks are operated in the same way as regular theme parks, but with minimal disturbance to the natural environment, so the biodiversity in such parks remains unchanged or gains additional varieties.

In most cases, a certain area of forest is allocated for such parks. Sometimes forest areas with special natural features are chosen as eco-theme parks. Local flora and fauna are given preference as their conservation is of paramount importance.

Also, the main difference between eco-theme parks and traditional ones is the interaction between man and nature. Most often, in ordinary parks, a person is an observer, he tries not to interfere with the environment, but in eco-parks a person interacts with nature, studies and implements new eco-technologies to improve it. The system of environmental technologies in the field of educational activities, in business and production is a distinctive feature of ecological parks from traditional reserves. The ecological theme park is economically self-sufficient, adaptable and flexible in terms of climatic and environmental conditions; the social identity of this park is a hallmark of the local subculture. Artificial materials are used only in emergency situations, infrastructure buildings and landscaping elements are carried out in accordance with environmental “green” standards.

Theme eco-parks also have differences in functional content and priorities; in some ones the main goal is ecotourism, while others are formed on the basis of museums, research centers and other business projects in this area.

Examples of the experience of foreign countries, including China, can be cited as analogues: "Weiliu Wetland Park Wetland Park" (Fig. 1), "Minghu Wetland Park / Turenscape Wetland Park" (Fig. 2).



Figure 1. Weiliu Wetland Park Wetland Park General Strategy (source <https://landezine.com/weiliu-wetland-park-by-yifang-ecoscape>)

The main features of these parks are the creation of urban green infrastructure through a range of strategies including adaptive flood control, storm water management, water quality improvement, wastewater reuse and biodiversity restoration. Recreational areas, water play areas, urban farms and fitness areas were incorporated using local cultural elements and using water as the main theme of the design code.



Figure 2. Minghu Wetland Park / Turenscape Wetland Park (source <https://www.archdaily.com/590066/minghu-wetland-park-turenscape>) reconstructed natural floodplain wetlands

The Eco-Theme Park provides new opportunities that align with today's community values of ecosystem conservation, benefiting the urban environment by reducing the impacts of climate change, increasing environmental sustainability and livability of cities, and facilitating access to natural and water resources in urban settings, offers a variety of recreational benefits.

It goes without saying that an eco-theme park represents a different way of thinking and a new opportunity to create a sustainable economy, creating jobs and ecosystem services that benefit society. Particular attention is paid to the contribution of thematic eco-park space to cultural ecosystem services, such as outdoor recreation, tourism, educational complexes for all ages and people with different physical abilities.

7 Problems of organizing theme parks in Russia

As the study shows, there is not a single full-fledged theme park yet in Russia. There are amusement parks “Sochi Park” and “Divo Island” in St. Petersburg. But they are both very small. But at least they have such an element of a modern amusement park as a single entrance ticket. There is “Ethnomir” in the Kaluga region. This is an interesting project; it generates 700–800 thousand visits per year. But it is quite empty for now, the owner is gradually developing it, there is not enough money for rapid development. The project that has the most features of a theme park is, oddly enough, “Patriot Park”. Not all the required elements are present, but the concept is there and the development potential is good. An interesting theme wine park has been created in Crimea on the basis of the tourist complex “Mriya Resort” (Figure 3). Unfortunately, it is also not designed for large tourist flows.



Figure 3. General view of the Crimean theme wine park (photo taken by the authors).

Several attempts were made to build Disneyland in Moscow, but all of them were unsuccessful. The reason is that none of the developers understood the economics of a theme park, and it's a tough business. The difficulty of transferring such a product to other soils was underestimated. It was not possible to successfully copy Disneyland even in France. The Paris project is the most unprofitable and least visited Disneyland in the entire Disney group. It turned out that Anglo-Saxon and French attitudes are very different. There are a lot of nuances. The first of them is different tax system. The US does not have a value added tax, but France does. In France, the burden on the wage fund and on the employer is completely different. And, accordingly, operating costs turned out to be much higher. And the American concept involves the active use of cheap volunteer resources. The lowest unit revenue per hectare in the world is due to the clearly excess territory that must be maintained in a harsher climate compared to Florida or California. And there are a lot of such inconsistencies. It becomes clear that if the American model did not work in France, how will it work in Russia?

But the socio-political aspect is more important. The topic of national cultural codes is important. Entertainment content is a powerful tool for influencing children and adolescents. Modern entertainment technologies, widely used in the amusement park industry, along with

cinema and animation, make it possible to form the necessary ideological attitudes in children and adolescents and help them choose appropriate role models. In this way, long-term models of social behavior of the younger generation can be set. Moreover, the impact is carried out in a soft, unobtrusive form and does not cause rejection. Russia they often try to copy someone. Even Nikolai Danilevsky wrote in the nineteenth century that for some reason we feel secondary in relation to the “enlightened” West. To be honest, the author doesn't understand why. It is very strange that the state in the current situation is missing the ideological aspect. The relevance of projects based on the Russian cultural code has increased sharply after 2022. There is no doubt that Russia can and should create its own original theme parks. After all, the world's first full-fledged educational theme park appeared back in the 1930s in the USSR. It was called VDNH.

8 Proposed concepts for the construction of a Russian theme park

In the study, the authors examined several possible options. You can enter through the film industry. There are, for example, “Soyuzmultfilm” and “Mosfilm”, which own the copyrights to a serious line of characters. When the authors communicated with a well-known producer, he proposed a number of very interesting solutions that have not been implemented anywhere in the world. It is at the intersection of cinema and attractions, using well-known stories and creating strong emotions. The solutions are cheaper than those used by the Americans, but they are much more effective. You can make cool educational parks. For example, in Ulyanovsk there is a Museum of Civil Aviation. There is a unique collection of aircraft that stands in the open air. Well, we need to turn the museum into a park. Give another 30-40 hectares of land, place these planes around the territory, make stylized pavilions, add virtual attractions and strong catering. People from other cities will go to such a park with great pleasure. Car factories could create a science and technology park dedicated to their line of cars. They may be with test drives, attractions, but at the same time with a deep immersion in the topic.

Finally, we can create ethnographic parks. For example, combining them with the folk arts and crafts industry. Yes, there are already a lot of such museums, but a powerful park of 60–80 hectares, where you travel throughout our country in a day or a weekend, is a completely different story. And for each region represented, the park may have its own gastronomy, specific activities and handicrafts, and so on. Miniature parks can be made as an element of decoration for a separate region. In France, there is a unique historical park that puts on grand performances, but has problems with figurants for these shows. And we have a lot of historical reconstruction clubs all over the country. People pay money to put the Battle of the Ice somewhere. So let's create the scenery for them, give them the opportunity to express themselves and earn money by entertaining the audience.

9 Conclusions

Who could become the driver for the construction of theme parks in Russia? We should be talking about public-private partnerships. These should be private objects made with state support. A consortium of a talented entrepreneur with “Soyuzmultfilm” or “Mosfilm” is possible. This could be a win-win story. For cinema, this is both financial support and prolongation of the life of film plots. The state still gives money for filming, and this would extend the life of the film's plots. Through constant contact with park visitors, the ideological effect would be enhanced.

Another possible configuration is that “Rostec” and commercial partners could create a park related to science and technology. It is extremely difficult for an enthusiast to implement such a project: banks will not give money. But it is important to build the entire park in order to immediately obtain a certain critical mass that will generate income.

Considering the above, it is legitimate to assume that theme parks could be built in Moscow, St. Petersburg, cities with a population of over a million, and on the Black Sea coast. We must

be able to take into account the potential of the Russian market. It allows you to create and successfully operate three to five federal and up to ten interregional theme amusement parks.

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