

# The impact of inclusive tourism on the sustainable development of the host community

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**Abstract:** The growth of domestic tourism in Russia, driven by geopolitical tensions, poses numerous challenges to the sustainable development of local communities. This study examines the impact of inclusive tourism, especially for people with disabilities, on host communities. People with disabilities, who make up a significant portion of domestic tourists, face unique barriers and stigma that impact their travel experiences and interactions with locals. This study aims to assess the impact of inclusive tourism on the sustainable development of host communities, focusing on the balance between the needs of tourists with disabilities and the sociocultural dynamics of residents. For this purpose, a comprehensive analysis was carried out using reviews of the legislative framework, statistical data, sociological surveys and expert assessments. The study used quantitative data from a household budget sample survey, as well as qualitative information from case studies and anecdotal evidence. Key findings suggest that unregulated domestic tourism growth can strain infrastructure and provoke conflicts between tourists and residents. Surveys show regional differences in local attitudes towards tourists, with some regions showing significant dissatisfaction. The study highlights the need to develop inclusive tourism, taking into account the local sociocultural context, reducing negative stereotypes and promoting positive interactions between hosts and guests. Implementing inclusive tourism policies that promote mutual respect and understanding between tourists and residents is essential for sustainable tourism development. The study highlights the importance of community participation in tourism planning to ensure equitable and harmonious development that benefits both tourists and locals.

## 1 Introduction

The significant increase in domestic tourism in Russia due to geopolitical tensions has created significant challenges to maintaining the sustainable development of local communities. The growing mobility of Russian tourists within the country affects both positively and negatively all spheres of life of the host country. As a powerful generator of economic development, domestic tourism stimulates economic activity in the region by providing employment opportunities, encouraging local producers and increasing tax revenues in tourism destinations. At the same time, a sharp and unregulated simultaneous growth of domestic

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tourism can lead to the overloading of infrastructure facilities, and the emergence of conflicts between visitors and the host community, bringing great discomfort to the latter and reducing the quality of life of citizens.

People with disabilities make up a large percentage of domestic tourists in Russia. As of 2023, more than 11 million people with disabilities live in Russia, accounting for 7.55% of the total population. This number includes 755 thousand children with disabilities. To stimulate tourism activity among people with disabilities, the government is implementing a number of programs to co-finance spa resorts and recreational tours within the framework of the social security system. More than 250 thousand people use this program every year.

Tourists with disabilities can be considered a vulnerable consumer group that faces numerous restrictions while traveling. The reception given to such visitors at a tourist destination enhances or detracts from the experience and influences the overall impression left by the tourist. Interpersonal issues of interaction with the host party are a decisive factor in determining the choice of a tourist with disabilities. The practice of negatively treating people with disabilities during their tour may hinder their future tourism activities (Fourie, Rosselló-Nadal, and Santana-Gallego, 2020). One of the main causes of conflicts that arise between hosts and tourists with disabilities is social stereotypes and labeling of both parties. Visitors with disabilities may experience feelings of stigmatization as disabled and economically disadvantaged. Members of the host community may view tourists as a threat to destroy their cultural assets, seize limited resources, overload the transport network and disrupt the habitual rhythm of life of residents.

Maintaining a balance between tourists with disabilities and the local community can be seen as a critical goal for policymakers who strive for the sustainable development of tourism destinations. It seems impossible to develop inclusive tourism in accordance with the principles of sustainable development without establishing long-term, respectful and sustainable relationships between tourists and locals regarding the socio-cultural authenticity of tourist destinations and equal opportunities for everyone to participate in recreation and tourism. activity.

In recent years, inclusive tourism has become the subject of active scientific research. Key scientific works that have made significant contributions to the theoretical understanding of the impact of inclusive tourism on host communities include research papers by Rubio-Escuderos L., García-Andreu J. and De La Rose J.V., Gillovich, B. and McIntosh A, Darcy, S., McKercher, B., and Schweinsberg, S.. The authors found that the development of inclusive tourism helps to increase income and create jobs in regions that adapt their infrastructure for people with disabilities. The importance of the host community in tourism development is raised in the works of Prakoso A.A., Pradipto E., Roychansia M.S. and Nugraha B.S., Dolezal, K. and Novelli, M., and Darcy, S., McKercher. B., & Schweinsberg, S. Authors such as Qiao G., Zhang J., Pabel A. and Chen N., Perangin-Angin R., Tavakoli R. and Kusumo K., Rochman G.P., Xiaodi E. and Aji. R. R., Ozcan E., Gücan Topçu Z. and Arasli H. analyzed the impact of various barriers, stereotypes and prejudices on the perception of inclusive tourists in local communities. Researchers have identified key factors influencing the formation of a negative or positive image of a destination among inclusive tourists. The work of Carlisle S., Ivanov S. and Espeso-Molinero P. analyzed the sociocultural aspects of the interaction between inclusive tourists and residents. The determinants of successful host-guest interaction were identified in the studies of Casanova S., Ozanne L.K. and Prayag, G., Pu, P., Chenga, L., Samaratungi, W.H. & Walls, G. [1-16].

The research work aims to determine the quality of inclusive tourism' impact on the sustainable development of the host community. The relevance of the topic being studied is due to the need to minimize the negative impact of the increasing volumes of Russian domestic tourists on maintaining the functional integrity of the environmental and social systems that support the economy of tourist destinations.

## 2 Materials and methods

The data used in this study was obtained from several sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of inclusive tourism and its interaction with host communities in Russia: legislative framework and policy analysis; statistical analysis, including data from a sample survey of household budgets; quantitative analysis of the participation of persons with disabilities in subsidized tourism activities. To explore social attitudes and community views on inclusive tourism, the study used sociological methods to conduct surveys and expert assessments. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative information was obtained from case studies and anecdotal evidence collected from various regions. Historical perspectives on perceptions of tourism during the Soviet era and current socio-economic influences were examined to contextualize contemporary attitudes and behaviors towards inclusive tourists.

## 3 Results

Regulation of issues related to the provision of state social assistance, including subsidized tourist services, is currently carried out in accordance with the Federal Law “On State Social Assistance”. The provision of spa-resort vouchers to certain categories of citizens is included in the range of social services and is carried out in accordance with Chapter 2 of this Law. Article 6.1 contains a list of population groups entitled to receive a spa-resort voucher and compensation for travel expenses to the place of treatment and back. These categories include war invalids, participants in the Great Patriotic War, combat veterans, disabled, children with disabilities, family members of deceased participants in the Great Patriotic War, as well as victims of radiation at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

At the same time, according to the results of a Sample Survey of Budgets of Households, in 2022 the share of expenses on tourist and resort services for households with disabled ranged from 0.2% to 0.5%, and expenses on hotels, cafes and restaurant services ranged from 1.1% to 1.7%. It is also interesting to note that the share of expenditures in categories such as the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products exceeds the share of expenditures on tourism (from 1.8% to 2.9%) for the households in question.

Information on the number of elderly people who exercised their right to receive a range of social services in the form of spa-resort treatment from 2015 to 2022 is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** - Number of elderly people who exercised the right to sanatorium treatment from 2015 to 2022

| Category / Year   | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022    |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| Total number  | 309284 | 245609 | 233002 | 250242 | 268445 | 173172 | 286598 | 255981  |
| War veterans  | 10058  | 6479   | 4759   | 3288   | 2244   | 1203   | 808    | No data |
| Participants of WWII  | 2361   | 1210   | 1182   | 681    | 696    | 379    | 440    | 368     |
| Veterans of combat operations   | 2987   | 3107   | 3194   | 2848   | 3512   | 2575   | 3498   | No data |
| Holders of the sign “Resident of besieged Leningrad”; awarded the badge “Resident of besieged Sevastopol.”  | 1854   | 1563   | 1265   | 918    | 1007   | 787    | 374    | 505     |
| Family members of deceased war veterans, participants in the Great Patriotic War, combat veterans; deceased | 3646   | 2430   | 2027   | 1825   | 2299   | 1509   | 1770   | No data |

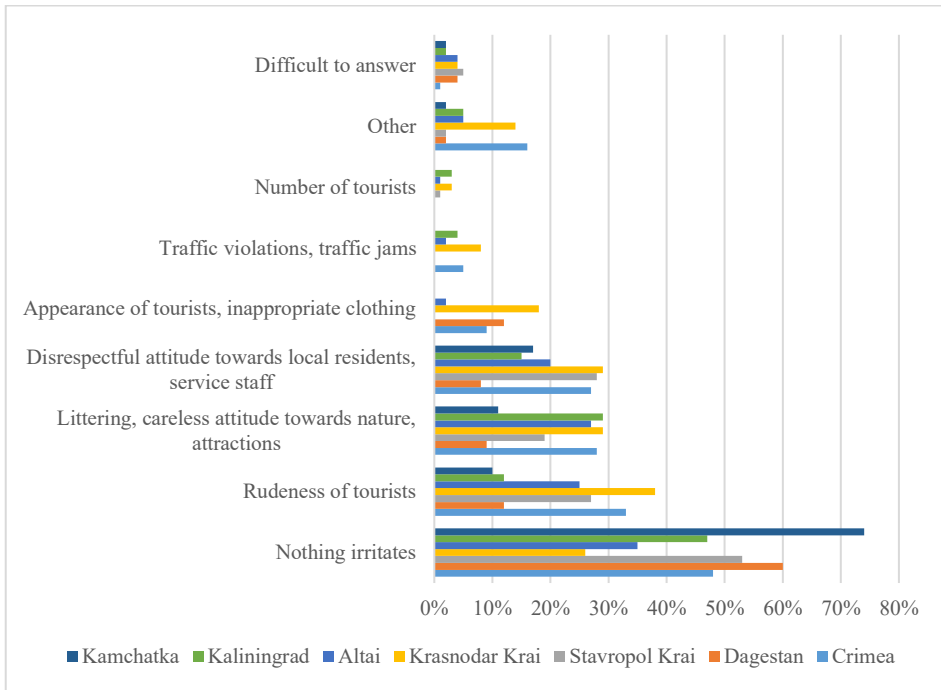
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| workers of<br>hospitals and<br>clinics in Leningrad |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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The presented statistical data indicate a low level of tourist activity among socially vulnerable groups of the population, such as pensioners, disabled people, and veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Only a small portion of citizens from these demographic categories can afford to travel regularly.

It is necessary to pay special attention to the problem of social stereotypes that arise in the interaction between inclusive tourists and the host community. Conflicts between residents and travelers limit the potential use of various tools to increase the accessibility of tourism services, such as the sharing economy (Moreno-Gil, & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020) for rental accommodation, vehicles and amenities.

The specific attitude of host communities toward tourists was set up in many Russian resorts. It usually manifests itself as ironic and neglectful connotations of local dialect. Such words as "kefirnik", "bzdykh", and "kurapachi" are widely used by locals towards arriving travelers, expressing their irritation due to the constant noise, defiant behavior, and disrespect of local traditions. Introducing the word "kefirnik" relates to the common use of kefir (traditional Russian fermented milk drink, improving digestion) by the resort guests in the spa hotels of the Caucasian Mineral Waters. As many spa-resort tours are co-financed by the state, the prejudice is formed that resort tourists are low-income and save a lot on food and accommodation, seeking affordable but uncomfortable overnight options. Such preconceptions often become the reason for numerous conflicts and disagreements between residents and travelers, which damage the image of tourist destinations, spoiling the tourists' experience. This leads to a decrease in tourism flow to the particular resort area, hurting the local economy. Moreover, considered to be "Soviet heritage", spa resorts are regarded as tourism institutions with poor quality of service and facilities (Analysis of the spa services market of Russia // Strategy Partners URL: <https://strategy.ru/research/research/37> (accessed: 25/04/2024)). Being unattractive for investors, spa resorts face some financial problems with upgrading equipment, and renovating buildings. All these factors prevent tourists from visiting Russian spa resorts and serve as a barrier to regional tourism development.

To define, how the attitude of the local population toward inclusive tourists varies in Russian regions, a sociological survey was conducted in 2023. The respondents were the economically active population over 18 years old, residing in the Krasnodar region, the Republic of Dagestan, Kaliningrad Oblast, Kamchatka region, the Republic of Altai, the Republic of Crimea, and Stavropol region. The suitable sample size was 2100 respondents, with 300 from each region. The survey results (Figure 1) indicated what tourist behavior is the most annoying for the locals.



**Fig. 1** – The most irritating behavior of tourists in different regions of Russia

As a result of the survey, Kamchatka, Dagestan, and Stavropol Region are the most "hospitable" regions, whereas residents of Krasnodar Region and the Republic of Crimea most frequently complain about tourists' behavior.

In order to describe locals' attitudes toward consumers of subsidized spa-resort services, most of which are disabled, another sociological survey was conducted in 2023. A specific questionnaire was developed for employees of spa-resort facilities, interacting directly with inclusive tourists, whose tours were subsidized by the state, and for other spa-resort guests. The sample size was 3730 respondents, with a sampling error of 8.1%. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** – Employees' attitude toward inclusive consumers of subsidized spa-resort services

| Questions   | Top answers, %   |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | Employees of spa-resort facilities   | Guests of spa-resort facilities   |
| Are you uncomfortable with the presence of subsidized spa-resort guests?                                  | Sometimes – 44,2 %<br>Rarely – 27,5 %<br>Never – 19,7 %<br>Often – 8,6 %   | Rarely – 48,8 %<br>Never – 23,9 %<br>Sometimes – 18,0 %<br>Often – 9,3 %  |
| Were you in conflict with subsidized spa-resort guests?   | Rarely – 53,1 %<br>Sometimes – 30,2 %<br>Never – 10,4 %<br>Often – 6,3 %   | Sometimes – 34,9 %<br>Rarely – 31,7 %<br>Never – 23,2 %<br>Often – 10,2 %   |
| What qualities and behaviors of subsidized spa-resort guests mostly irritate you? (choose up to 3 points) | Stinginess, excessive economizing – 41,8 %<br>Untidy appearance, sloppiness – 35,6 %<br>Obsessive communication – 22,6 % | Obsessive communication – 34,3 %<br>Alcohol addiction manifestations – 20,8 %<br>Untidy appearance, sloppiness – 20,4 % |
| Overall, how would you characterize your attitude toward subsidized spa-resort guests?                    | Positive – 46,5 %<br>Neutral – 41,0 %<br>Negative – 12,5 %   | Neutral – 47,3 %<br>Positive – 37,4 %<br>Negative – 15,3 %  |

The results of the sociological survey confirm that interaction between locals, employees, and spa-resort guests sometimes leads to conflict situations. The sarcastic image of inclusive tourists at spa resorts, formed in the Soviet period, prevails nowadays, causing the problem of social stereotyping.

People with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups among tourists. Despite the tendency of decreasing social differentiation among the disabled, some cases of inappropriate behavior toward this group take place in host-guest interactions, even toward children with disabilities.

The researchers from the Higher School of Economics conducted a study on the ability of visually impaired people to navigate the urban environment thanks to the implementation of the “Accessible Environment” program in 2021. Numerous discrepancies were revealed between the official reports and the disabled’ personal experience. Visually impaired people have not only to overcome physical obstacles in an urban environment, but also to deal with outside risks, such as irrelevant help, excessive concern or, vice versa, extreme indifference (Sinitsyn, & Zaporozhets, 2021).

Undoubtedly, such barriers prevent people with disabilities from tourism, making their comfortable stay at the holiday destination almost impossible. This causes negative tourist experiences that they would hardly be able to repeat at least once. Therefore, in order to develop inclusive tourism, it is crucially important to take into account the characteristics of consumer groups that create comfortable conditions for each of them.

To assess the level of host community involvement in the development of inclusive tourism in Russian regions, we used the method of expert assessments. The expert group included 30 tourism industry specialists with more than 5 years of experience in the field of tourism and academic degrees of candidate or doctor of economics. Each expert was to assess the involvement of the host community in the development of inclusive tourism, the level of balance between the interests of inclusive tourists and the host community, and the effectiveness of managing the cultural heritage and natural resources of Russian tourist destinations. Based on expert assessments, a rating table has been developed with a rating from 1 to 10, where 1 corresponds to the minimum value, and 10 to the maximum. The average values of the expert assessment results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** – Experts’ assessment of the host community’s involvement in inclusive tourism development in Russia

| Region                 | Average value of expert scores according to criteria:                                   |   |  | The overall average score |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---------------------------|
|                        | The level of balance between the interests of inclusive tourists and the host community | Participation of the host community in the development of inclusive tourism | Effective management of cultural heritage and natural resources of a tourist destination |                           |
| Kamchatka region       | 4,8   | 6,5   | 6,7  | 6,0                       |
| Krasnodar region       | 8,2   | 7,5   | 6,3  | 7,33                      |
| The Republic of Crimea | 6,7   | 6,4   | 4,8  | 5,97                      |
| The Republic of Altai  | 6,8   | 5,9   | 5,5  | 6,07                      |
| Stavropol region       | 6,5   | 6,2   | 4,7  | 5,80                      |

## 4 Discussion

The results highlight the significant challenges and complexities associated with inclusive tourism in Russia, especially with regard to the interaction between inclusive tourists and the host community. This discussion examines several key themes emerging from the findings and considers implications for policy and practice in promoting sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

The emergence of social stereotypes and conflicts between residents and inclusive tourists can become a significant barrier to stimulating tourism among people with disabilities. The attitude of the local population in popular resort towns reflects derogatory stereotypes towards tourists, which arose under the influence of historical and socio-economic factors. Terms such as “kefirniki” illustrate the social divide and cultural clashes between inclusive tourists and locals. Such negative perceptions can negatively impact the attractiveness of a destination and exacerbate tensions, potentially inhibiting future tourism development.

Opinion surveys conducted in different regions show different degrees of acceptance and hospitality towards tourists. Regions such as Kamchatka and Dagestan show more favorable attitudes, while regions such as Krasnodar and Crimea report higher levels of local dissatisfaction with tourists. These results highlight the importance of understanding local sentiments and integrating community perspectives into tourism planning and management strategies.

The discussion also touched upon the problems of managing inclusive tourism, in particular those relating to the interaction of health resort institutions’ employees and guests receiving subsidized tourist services. A survey of host-guest interaction revealed recurrent conflicts and discomfort, primarily related to perceptions of behavior and appearance among subsidized spa-resort guests. Such tensions highlight the need for sensitivity training and improved communication strategies to achieve mutual understanding and respect.

An expert assessment of the participation of the host community in the development of inclusive tourism in Russia gives an idea of the effectiveness of existing practices. Although some regions show higher ratings for community involvement and balance of interests, there are global challenges to the effective management of cultural heritage and natural resources. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that prioritize community participation, sustainable resource management, and equitable tourism development.

## 5 Conclusions

In the context of the current surge in domestic tourism in Russia, it is crucially important to implement measures for the sustainable development of host communities against the background of the growth of inclusive tourism. The increased influx of tourists creates risks for the preservation of cultural heritage and the quality of life of residents. The survey results show that many residents experience conflicts with inclusive tourists, potentially damaging the destination's image.

Conflicts often arise due to differences in cultural norms and behavior. Inclusive tourists, especially those unfamiliar with local customs, may unintentionally disrespect traditions or sacred sites, leading to tension with residents who hold these traditions dear.

The strain on local infrastructure and resources may exacerbate existing problems. Small communities may struggle to cope with a sudden influx of tourists, leading to overcrowding, increased waste generation and strain on amenities such as water and sanitation. This not only disrupts the daily lives of locals, but also threatens the ecological integrity of the area.

Economic inequality may arise as a result of tourism development. In some cases, inclusive tourism can lead to gentrification, where rising property prices and rents displace

long-term residents or force them to adapt to the tourism economy, often at the expense of their traditional livelihoods.

To mitigate these conflicts, proactive measures are critical. This includes promoting responsible tourism practices among visitors through educational and information campaigns, enforcing regulations to protect cultural and natural assets, and promoting dialogue between tourists and locals to achieve mutual respect and understanding. Sustainable tourism planning that involves local communities in decision-making processes is also vital to ensure that tourism development benefits all stakeholders while maintaining the integrity of the destination and enhancing the quality of life of residents.

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