

CO-CHAIRS' SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON
TOURISM AS AN ELEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
HELD IN ST. PETERSBURG, OCTOBER 06, 2011

The Conference was held as an outcome of the Working Group on Environment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, its Subgroup on Cleaner Production and Environmentally Sound Consumption.

The meeting gathered 51 participants including representatives from 5 countries, 1 international organization, 6 non-governmental organizations, 3 non-profit organizations, and 1 private sector association.

The meeting was kindly hosted by the Russian Cleaner Production and Sustainable Development Centre (Moscow) and supported by the Swedish Ministry of Environment, together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism and by the office of Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation in the North-West Federal District.

The Conference discussions highlighted that tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries and an important source of investment and employment for many countries. It also noted that tourism can have positive or negative impacts depending on how it is planned, developed and managed. Some key principles for the Russian Federation tourism development were brought to light, and the need to create sustainable tourism strategies and policies to promote positive impacts and minimise the negative of the sector. The experience of some key Russian initiatives, the French Government and the Barents states in the sectors of ecotourism, and sustainable tourism were presented as well as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism's contribution to green economy development, and increase of resource-efficiency of touristic industry.

Much attention was paid to discussion of the main principles of the national tourism development in the Russian Federation, identification of sustainable tourism development trends, and the primary tasks and measures needed for the Russian Federation to cultivate effective finance and touristic services systems.

Issues, linked with development of regional strategy for sustainable tourism in Barents region, investment and financial instruments for sustainable tourism, and perspectives of ecotourism development at securing its profitability and possibility of adapting foreign experience to the Russian conditions, were also highlighted.

Special attention was paid to resource-efficiency in hotel infrastructure, criteria of providing "green" tourist services, and control improvement and coordination in tourism as factors increasing its sustainability.

As the result of the fruitful discussion on priorities and essential measures for the Russian Federation in further ensuring development of tourism as the element of sustainable development several points were recognized as follows:

1. Participants recognized that tourism as an element of sustainable development leads to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while preserving cultural integrity, essential ecosystem services, and biological diversity and improve local livelihoods.
2. Participants highlighted that to mainstream sustainability in tourism services and products a resource efficient tourism industry is needed. To achieve this there is a need to improve the knowledge and capacity building of key stakeholders working on tourism, this includes engaging the local communities actively in this development process.

3. The necessity of further improvements in legislation for tourist sector to achieve its sustainability goals was underlined. The Conference specially emphasized the importance of environmental education of population to form sustainable tourism development process in Russia.
4. Special accent for effective tourism development was made on the need to strengthen the influence and responsibility of local and municipal authorities for increasing environmental awareness, and bring a quality tourism services for local people for tourist business.
5. The Conference noted that ensuring the sustainability of tourist development is much dependent on “greening” tourist economy, introducing energy and resource efficient technologies, and minimizing negative impacts on the environment.
6. The need to understand factors influencing the development of sustainable tourism in Russia, creation of conditions for SMEs participation in it, requires elaboration of new approaches to coordination of activities of all stakeholders – public and private sectors, and civil society; development of strategies and mechanisms, providing equal access to modern tourist industry in Russia.

The Conference especially underlined the importance of international and regional cooperation and exchange of good practices for further development of tourism as the element of sustainable development.

The Co-Chairs’ summary will be distributed to all participants, who are encouraged to share it with their colleagues.

With this brief summary the Co-Chairs would like to express their gratitude to the organizers of the Conference while stressing the urgency to continue multi-level cooperation on the issues mentioned above.

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