The Problem of Touristic Cluster Identification in Economics

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Abstract

In the recent researches of the regional tourism economic aspects so-called cluster approaches are gaining importance. Hence, having a look on the strategic development plans of tourism specialized countries both on national and regional basis, we see that the main accent stands for the support and promotion of the touristic cluster. Consequently, the problem of its identification, evaluation of the influence on the regional economy and the management problem of the cluster formation development becomes more and more discussable.

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Foreign (mostly European and American) specialists were the first authors working out and implementing the theoretical fundamentals of economic cluster formation and development. These issues were closely studied by E. Duhan, E. Limerom, M. Porter, I. Tolenado, P. Fisher and many others. The interest towards the clusters and related matters is highlighted by the articles of Georgian scientists like E. Baratashvili, N. Nadareishvili, I. Gagnidze and others. The information regarding this topic can be found in the reports of WTO and other research centers.

Cluster is a complex concept and it implies the group of industrial, geographically interrelated companies and other organizations working in a specific sphere and characterized by the unity and replenishment of the operation, or "it is the group of companies and organizations working out and cooperating for the common issues" [Портер М. 6: 602].

As for the classification, touristic-recreational cluster belongs to the industrial (branch) and therefore, it represents a traditional sphere in economics [Bergman E.M., Feser E.J. 1 : 19]. Based on the studies of the separate researchers and conclusions of the leading authors focusing on the discrete aspects of the touristic-recreational clusters, we can discuss the immanency of the cluster approach to tourism sphere. That can be explained by the specific peculiarities of the tourism activities and its results (tourist product/service) on the one hand and important positive effects due to the cluster project realization on the other. Therefore we can discuss several promoting factors of the cluster system formation:

- Technological specifications of formation and realization of the touristic product, stipulated by the complementary character of the tourist activity;
- Spatial localization of the touristic product;
- Territorial organization of the tourism route;
- Share of the small and medium businesses involved into the formation of the touristic flows and service spheres.

The above-mentioned features determine the formation of the touristic cluster structure. Regarding this, two forms of impacts can be distinguished: horizontal and vertical [Donald N. Stengel. 2:14-17]. The horizontal line implicates the functional integration of several independent parts into one unity. For example: competing organizations operating in identical sphere (Lodging, entertainment, transport, public food), as well as the enterprises oriented on the same segment, though offering consumers separate products (additional touristic services). The vertical line implies companies joining the cluster's technological cycle at the various stages „supplier-entrepreneur-consumer'' and relations between them is defined by chain principle of the price determination for the consumer.

For sure, it would have been wiser to have tried and identified touristic cluster from the joint position used by the various authors in their conclusions. It's important that in every research with detailed study of cluster, it's structure and composition is unevenly mentioned that it represents open and difficult self-organized and not linear system, the separate elements of which are united by material, informational and financial flows. The system approach implicates its perception as of the systemic formation consisting of the several influential elements and subsystems. In addition, one of the most important issues is the analysis of organizational mechanisms specifying new integrating processes in the joint system. The somewhat result of economics' integrated processes is the formation of synergetic influence of the cluster systems aimed to develop the relations

among economic actors through realization of private and general interests.

The existence of systemic characteristics in the touristic clusters gives an opportunity to review it as the effective instrument for development of regional economics. Though there are some impartial difficulties directly related to the identification of touristic cluster structure and borders. This aspect is practically unexplored in the regional economics of tourism [Author Remark].

Taken into consideration that the theory of economic clusters is a new one, the absence of joint, universal approach of cluster identification in the region is easy to explain.

The two forms differentiated while diagnosing the clusters are as follows: 1. Based on the studies of specific cluster. The cluster diagnosing itself belongs to this first form. Given form is purposed to confirm or deny the existence of the cluster. 2. The general form implicates diagnosing the potential clusters. It is supposed to analyze region or country according to the existence of the clusters. Initially, the geographical concentration of the branch is defined and only after their degree of influence. At the modern stage, there are three approaches of economic cluster identification in the region: the concept of industrial clusters from the competitiveness position, industrial clusters as the result of economic impact on agglomeration, identification of technical-economic methods of cluster.

The first form was developed and approved by the initiator of the cluster concept M. Porter and it implies a variety of testimonies: the scale of internal effects, the chain of additional price, competence, technological innovation. The basic elements of this approach are:

- Analyzing large firms or similar concentration;
- Revealing the interrelations of firms and organizations from the bottom to the top;
- Horizontal detection of the branches developing the line and creating the additional product/service;
- Defining the organization that provides the cluster with special skills, technologies, equity and infrastructure.
- Determining the governmental and legislative structures that directly of indirectly influence cluster participants.

According to Porter, the main signs of potential cluster existence are: concentration of cluster participants on the geographically defined territory; existence of the competitive advantages of base region, existence of the leader companies promoting the concentration.

The porter algorithm of the cluster identification has developed in the sphere of regional tourism cluster identification. Only qualitative analysis and experts' evaluation can be considered as an essential flaw of this algorithm.

The second form implies the detection of regions clusterization potential. It is based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the regions competitive steadiness. In this case the specialists use the different methods for the evaluation of regional specialization and agglomeration. Among them can be underlined:

- Quotient of localization;
- Macroeconomic indicators, quotient of Gini [Dixon, P. M.; Weiner, J.];
- Analysis of the shifts – analysis of the regional systems in which the economic growth is stratified on the growth of the state, regional and private economic factors.

The third form is based on the identification of industrial clusters and their economic indicators. As we know the connection between organizations and enterprises is the second important sign in economic cluster. The „expense-production'' matrix represents one of the most widespread methods for defining the influence among the participants [Леонтьев В.B. 5: 315]. It helps to clarify the connection between expenses of one branch and production of the other. This method gives an opportunity to reveal and evaluate the share of cluster participants and define its place. But there's a tiny nuance: given method delineates the level of „consumer-seller'' relation but gives no information regarding collective impact, the degree of involvement from the side of government, associations, educational and research establishments.

Simultaneously to the „expense-production'' method, the „shift analysis'' can be used for evaluation of the impact in the potential cluster [Houston, David B. 6: 577-581]. It assists in monitoring the degree of separate regional involvement, though it is not widely used yet.

I think that for identification of the touristic-recreational cluster should be used the complex method of identification – both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

From the methods based on the cluster identification principle can be distinguished: method of experts evaluation, questioning the focus groups, Delphi method, reports of the branch associations and so on. The weakness of the last three methods is the unreliability of the data. The popularity of the cluster theory leads to the false results of the statistical researches.

Despite the cluster theory popularity, both inbound and outbound of Georgia there is no joint, universal method for determining its borders, as well as the criteria which would help to distinguish the cluster from general geographical concentration.

Overall, we can conclude that for the identification of touristic cluster at the modern stage, should be worked out the universal and complex method. It should be based on both quantitative and qualitative indicators. It is necessary to carry out the analysis regarding the touristic cluster evaluation – in the tourism sphere including the degree of linkages between the geographical concentrations of the organizations, which is the future research topic for our study.

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