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Prospects for the Development of Ecological Tourism in Specially Protected Natural Areas of the Ulyanovsk Region

Elena V. PROVALOVA
Department of Land Management and Cadastre
Ulyanovsk State Agrarian University named after P.A. Stolypin, Russian Federation
provalova2013@yandex.ru

Marina N. LUKIYANOVA
Department of State and Municipal Administration
Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Russian Federation
komilfot@mail.ru

Olga V. SKROBOTOVA
Department of Tourism and Hospitality
Bunin Yelets State University, Russian Federation
skrolqa48@mail.ru

Raisa M. IVANOVA
Department of Tourism and Hospitality
Bunin Yelets State University, Russian Federation
elrmiv@mai.ru

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Abstract:

The development and improvement of the system of specially protected natural territories of the Russian Federation is considered to be among the main directions of the state environmental policy, which makes the study relevant. The article discusses the existing network of specially protected natural territories of the Ulyanovsk region, identifies problems of its existence and possible ways to eliminate them, as well as prospects for the development of a network of specially protected natural territories of federal, regional and local importance. The concept of eco-tourism is considered, the criteria by which tourism is defined as ecological are determined. It is concluded that protected areas are able to take over planning, management and monitoring functions of ecotourism activities. Ecotourism can be an effective means of environmental education and can draw the attention of the general public to environmental issues and increase public support for protected areas.

Keywords: specially protected natural areas; environmental protection; tourism; sustainable development; ecological tourism.

JEL Classification: Q26; Q56; Q57; Z32.

Introduction

Involving vast spaces in economic use, the transformation of ecosystems as a result of anthropogenic activity leads to disruption of natural balanced processes in the biosphere and the emergence of irreversible changes on a global scale. Economic activity affects not only directly, but also indirectly on the biosphere and the processes

occurring in it (Batyrova *et al.* 2018). Human economic activity has a particularly strong impact on the state of entire areas – deforestation, plowing of land, extensive reclamation work, mining, fossil fuel combustion, military actions, etc. Therefore, the protection of natural areas is considered as one of the ways to prevent the negative impact of human activity on the environment. Numerous conferences, forums, a number of normative legal documents and target programs adopted in recent decades, both at the global and regional levels, testify to the relevance of the above problem for humanity (Kupatadze and Kizilöz 2016; Anszperger 2017; Junevicius and Albrektas 2017; Kala and Abayeldinov 2016; Abayeldinov and Kala 2016).

Sustainable development of the Russian Federation, high quality of life, public health, and national security can be ensured only if the natural ecological systems are preserved and the environmental quality is maintained. One of the directions in this state activity is the development of a network of specially protected natural territories and the improvement of the legal regulation of relations arising in the process of organizing and operating their individual categories (Esina 2017). In accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the state policy in the field of the ecological development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030, the main mechanisms for solving the problem of preserving the natural environment, including ecological systems, flora and fauna, include:

- strengthening the protection and development of the system of protected areas of federal, regional and local importance in strict accordance with their intended purpose;
- creation of an effective system of measures aimed at preserving rare and endangered objects of the animal and plant world and their habitats;
- formation and maintenance of sustainable functioning of systems of protected natural territories of different levels and categories in order to preserve biological and landscape diversity (Fundamentals of state policy, 2012).

According to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 19. 04. 2017 No. 176, one of the priority areas in solving problems in the field of ensuring environmental safety is declared the expansion of measures for the conservation of biological diversity, including rare and endangered species of plants, animals and other organisms, their habitats, as well as the development of a system of specially protected natural territories (The strategy of environmental security of the Russian Federation, 2017).

This means that the development and improvement of the system of specially protected natural territories of the Russian Federation is considered to be among the main directions of state environmental policy. Specially protected natural territories are areas of land, water surface and airspace above them, on which are located natural complexes and objects that have special environmental, scientific, cultural, aesthetic and recreational value, withdrawn by decisions of public authorities in whole or in part from economic use with the establishment of a special protection regime (Rosa *et al.* 2018).

Especially protected natural territories as territories with limited use and, as a rule, intact ecosystems are the basis for the conservation of natural resource potential and stabilization of biological diversity indicators by protecting species of flora and fauna “in situ” (in habitat). A necessary condition for the existence of the living is the maintenance of the diversity of the habitat. In this regard, specially protected natural areas, especially those of considerable size (reserves, national and natural parks), are the most valuable. Theoretical and methodological issues of legal regulation of optimization of regional networks of specially protected natural territories and the formation of their systems are still debatable (Esina 2017).

Taking into account the peculiarities of the regime and the status of environmental protection institutions located on them, the following categories of these territories are usually distinguished:

- state nature reserves, including biosphere reserves;
- national parks;
- natural parks;
- state natural reserves;
- monuments of nature;
- dendrology parks and botanical gardens;
- medical and recreational areas and resorts.

Researchers consider the first two groups of the above areas as territories of particular importance for the protection of nature of the Russian Federation (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005). State nature reserves are environmental protection, research and environmental education institutions, with the aim of preserving and studying the natural course of natural processes and phenomena, the genetic foundation of flora and fauna, certain species and communities of plants and animals, typical and unique ecological systems. The status of

state-owned natural “biosphere” reserves is held by natural reserves that are part of the international system of relevant reserves that carry out global environmental monitoring (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005).

National parks are environmental, environmental education and research institutions, territories (water areas) of which include natural complexes and objects of special ecological, historical and aesthetic value, and which are intended for use in environmental, educational, scientific and cultural purposes, as well as for regulated tourism (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005). In the Russian Federation, national parks began to be created only in 1983 (the national parks Sochi and Losiny Island were organized) and were a new form of territorial nature protection for Russia. The idea of creating them is connected with combining a wide range of tasks: the protection of natural and cultural heritage, the organization of tourism, the search for sustainable development of the territory. A new form of protected areas allows preserving both unique natural complexes and objects of historical and cultural significance. At the same time, national parks (unlike nature reserves) provide for the possibility of visiting them by a large number of people, getting acquainted with natural and historical-cultural sights, and relaxing in picturesque landscapes (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005).

Recreational opportunities of a specially protected natural area (even areas of the national park specially allocated for this purpose) can only be used as additional and subordinate to its environmental protection functions. The development of tourism infrastructure here can occur only with the priority consideration of environmental restrictions, and the level of satisfaction of tourist needs should be determined by these restrictions. The only way out here is seen in the development of not mass, but alternative types of tourism, which would contribute to the fulfillment of the main task of specially protected natural territories – protection of natural complexes – and at the same time would help to achieve the goals related to environmental education and to obtain a recreational effect. Consequently, the tourist specialization of specially protected natural areas should be serving tourists, for whom the main types of recreation are activities based on the minimum consumption of ecological resources and live communication with nature (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005).

1. Current State of Specially Protected Natural Areas of the Ulyanovsk Region

The region is home to a number of rare species listed in the Red Book of the Russian Federation. At present, a network of specially protected natural territories has been formed on the territory of the Ulyanovsk region; largely reflecting the natural diversity within the region under consideration. Now in the region there are 142 specially protected natural areas of regional importance. They occupy about 180 thousand hectares. This is about 5% of the total area of the region. Well-preserved protected areas of federal, regional and local importance with their protected areas prevail.

Relations in the sphere of organization, protection and use of specially protected natural territories of regional importance in the Ulyanovsk region are governed by the Law of the Ulyanovsk region “On legal regulation of certain issues in the field of organization, protection and use of specially protected natural territories of regional significance in the Ulyanovsk region and on the establishment of categories of specially protected natural territories of local importance” (On legal regulation of certain issues, 2007). Protected areas of federal significance in the Ulyanovsk region are represented by state natural reserves (Table 1).

Table 1. List of specially protected natural areas of federal significance in the Ulyanovsk region

No.	Name	Category	Location (municipal district, city district)	Secured territory
1	Sursky State Nature Reserve	State Nature Reserve	Ulyanovsk region, Sursky district	Yes
2	Starokulatkinsky State Nature Reserve	State Nature Reserve	Ulyanovsk region, Starokulatkinsky district	No

The protected areas of the Ulyanovsk region, put on cadastral registration in 2015, amounted to 34 specially protected natural territories, in 2016 – 27 specially protected natural territories, in 2017 – 52 specially protected natural territories. Existing specially protected natural areas of regional importance are located in all municipal districts of the Ulyanovsk region. For example, the total area of the natural reserve “Sengiley Mountains” is 36,156 thousand hectares. It is located mainly on the lands of the forest fund of the Sengiley district. The combination of various relief forms of the right bank, covered with forest vegetation, with the vast expanse of the water area of the Kuibyshev reservoir, forms here unique natural landscapes of historical, recreational and ecological value. The basis for the creation of specially protected natural territories and its significance lies in:

- the fact that here lies a picturesque forest on the bank of the Kuibyshev reservoir;

- preservation and restoration of disturbed natural and historical-cultural complexes and objects in this unique natural area;
- a developing category of specially protected natural areas created to preserve the environment, species and landscape diversity, the organization of recreational use of conditions, environmental education, research and monitoring.

The objects of protection are the following:

- forest cultures – 19.4%;
- natural plantings – 80%;
- water area of the Kuibyshev reservoir;
- forest coastal stripes up to 200 m;
- pond in the Smorodinka river valley;
- steppe "berry slopes";
- rare animal species (Environmental Code of the Ulyanovsk Region).

The Federal Law of March 14, 1995 No. 33 "On Specially Protected Natural Territories" provides that the subjects of the Russian Federation may establish different categories of specially protected natural territories of regional and local importance (On specially protected natural territories... 1995). So, according to the Law of the Ulyanovsk region dated July 9, 2007 N 96-ZO "On specially protected natural territories of regional significance in the Ulyanovsk region" the following categories of specially protected natural territories of local importance can be organized (On specially protected natural areas of regional significance in the Ulyanovsk region, 2007):

- specially protected water bodies;
- natural recreational complexes;
- natural reserves;
- wildlife monuments.

Entering information into the state real estate cadaster according to outdated documents entails problems in establishing boundaries, mode of use, possibility of restoration of specially protected natural territories, and maintaining them in a favorable condition. It should be noted that in the world the idea of territorial nature protection at the present time is not limited to the planning of isolated specially protected natural territories, but provides for the complex formation of an ecological network or ecological framework of the territory. The practice of recent decades has shown that in the area of functioning of specially protected natural areas there are problems caused by the lack of reliable information about their borders and the mode of use of land, as evidenced by numerous facts of violation of the regime of special protection, and in some cases the destruction of objects of protection.

The main reason for the existence of problems in the field of nature conservation in the Ulyanovsk region is the lack of updated documentation (the existing passports and the provisions of the majority of the specially protected natural territories of the Ulyanovsk region created between 1966 and 1992 are outdated and contain an incorrect description of the boundaries). The creation of new specially protected natural territories is complicated by the length of design periods, coordination, and departmental inconsistency.

In 2017, the inventory of all specially protected natural areas of regional importance was completed in the Ulyanovsk region. Such work is carried out with the aim of studying specially protected natural territories, analyzing the regime of ecosystems, and identifying problems of sanitation. According to the results of the inventory, 37 specially protected natural areas were recognized in good condition, as meeting all the requirements, and 104 in a satisfactory condition. Only one specially protected natural area is recognized in an unsatisfactory. The inventory made it possible to identify 25 specially protected natural areas of the region as sites for active scientific research and tourist attraction. Specialists of the Ministry of Environment of the region together with activists of the cycling movement laid eco-routes in the territory of Sengileevsky, Terengulsky and Kuzovatovsky districts. Eco-routes for cross-country clubs "Run with me" and "We run together "Ulyanovsk" have been developed (Nikitin 2018).

2. Prospects for the Development of Ecological Tourism

One of the factors contributing to the socio-economic development of the region and the preservation of natural resources is tourism. In the context of globalization, encompassing not only a wide range of economic, political and sociocultural integration processes, but also the unification of urbanization and industrialization, the world community is increasingly trying to focus on living nature and those of its territories that have retained their identity. According to the researchers, these processes can explain a kind of boom in the development of ecological tourism and all kinds of ecological routes (Indyukova *et al.* 2015). The global surge in attention to

environmental issues has led to "pressure" from both local residents and tourists themselves on companies involved in the tourist business in order to ensure the development of tourism in such forms, volumes and standards that would prevent environmental pollution and other negative environmental impacts.

At present, due to the mass tourism, the anthropogenic load on natural and cultural and historical tourist resources is increasing. It increases in direct proportion to the growth rate of tourist visits. Considering the projected WTO indicators of tourism development in the 21st century, an increase in contradictions in meeting the demand and rational use of tourist resources becomes evident, and since tourism will continue to develop rapidly, it is necessary to pay attention to its types that can minimize the negative impact on environment. Therefore, today the most important task is to develop new approaches to solving problems of restoring the natural environment, introducing a special form of organization into tourist practice, the purpose of which is to use natural ecosystems in a conservation mode. The important directions of this activity in the implementation of the tasks set are the creation of an effective legal mechanism for the preservation of the natural environment and its scientific support, as well as the creation of a highly efficient system of state management of environmental protection corresponding to the democratic structure and market economy of the Russian Federation. Today, anthropogenic impact is observed in all sectors of the tourism industry in most tourist areas, which primarily affects the environment and its components. Small populations of rare animals and plants or slowly reproducing species suffer most from this (Esina 2017; Juvan and Dolnicar 2016; Adongo *et al.* 2018).

Thus, the main negative environmental consequences of mass tourism include the following:

- the weakening of the share of biologically active territories due to intensive development and road construction;
- water and air pollution due to the intensity of traffic;
- destruction of flora and fauna due to habitat change (Esina 2017).

The emergence and development of eco-tourism is closely related to the history of the selection of natural territories, especially attractive from an aesthetic and recreational point of view and the development of standards for their protection (Esina 2017). Despite the popularity and widespread use of the term "ecotourism", its definitions differ greatly in the interpretation of different authors. At present, there is a wide variety of similar terms in the sources: "nature-oriented", "sustainable (or eco-friendly)", "gentle tourism", "non-technological tourism", "close to nature", "adapted tourism". In addition, there are a large number of terms that are very close, identical or even replace it: nature tourism, wildlife tourism, adventure tourism, green tourism, mild tourism, alternative tourism, etc. All these terms are in one way or another connected with the powerful impact of the ecological imperative on modern society, reflecting the trend of increased interest in nature, based on increasing the level of environmental awareness of people, as well as on concepts of sustainable, balanced development and preservation of biological diversity (Esina 2017; Liu *et al.* 2012; Viña and Liu 2017).

The diverse definitions of eco-tourism emphasize its main characteristics:

- the rest of people in direct contact with the natural landscape;
- lack of technicality;
- compliance with standards of behavior in the natural environment;
- involvement in the traditional culture, life, customs of the indigenous population;
- respect for the social structure of local communities;
- mutual understanding between tourists and locals;
- the direction of the profits to eliminate the inevitable violations in the natural landscape, as well as the economic development of regions in which ecotourism develops (Esina 2017; Ghosh and Ghosh 2019).

Here, ecological tourism is understood as a type of travel made by small groups along routes laid among protected natural landscapes, during which tourists get acquainted with unique objects, phenomena and inhabitants of nature for the purpose of environmental education (Esina 2017). In the Russian legislation there is no legally accepted definition of the term "ecological tourism". The federal law on specially protected natural territories establishes the term "cognitive tourism", which is now allowed on specially protected natural territories of all categories, including nature reserves (On specially protected natural territories... 1995). In this form, educational tourism is considered as one of the specialized types of ecological tourism, the main purpose of which is to familiarize with natural and cultural sights, while regulating the minimum consumption of ecological resources and lively communication with nature (Indyukova *et al.* 2015).

According to scientists, first of all, ecotourism is a journey and a visit to well-preserved natural areas represented throughout the world, as a rule, by national and natural parks, reserves and other types of protected natural areas. Secondly, ecotourism implies the existence of certain, rather rigid rules of behavior and their observance is a fundamental condition for the successful development of the industry itself. Thirdly, ecotourism

has a relatively weak negative impact on the natural environment and therefore it is sometimes called "mild tourism". For this reason, it has become almost the only type of use of natural resources within the specially protected natural territories (Kuskov and Feoktistova 2004; Buckley 2009; Nonthapot 2017).

The main criteria for ecological tourism (Tourism. Investing in energy and resource efficiency):

- nature-oriented tourism forms, in which the main motivation of tourists is to observe and understand nature, as well as the traditional culture prevalent in this natural area;
- includes elements of education and upbringing;
- mainly organized for small groups of tourists by small specialized local tourist enterprises;
- minimizes the negative impact on the natural and socio-cultural environment
- supports nature protection through:
 - a) bringing economic profits to local society, organizations and authorities that manage natural territories in order to protect them;
 - b) providing local people with jobs and earnings;
 - c) awareness of the need to protect the natural and cultural environment, both by local people and tourists (Esina 2017).

I.N. Panov believes that ecotourism differs from traditional tourism in the following features:

- predominance of natural objects;
- sustainable nature management;
- less resource and energy intensity;
- direct participation in the socio-economic development of territories;
- environmental education of tourists;
- support of specially protected natural areas;
- promoting the protection of cultural and historical environment;
- need for the functional planning of recreational areas specializing in the provision of ecotourism services. (Panov 1998)

In order for eco-tourism could actually have a positive impact on the economy and social sphere of the country, as well as be a real priority for tourism, its concept should incorporate three main aspects:

- orientation of tourists to the consumption of environmental resources;
- preservation of the natural environment;
- maintaining the traditional lifestyle of the population in peripheral regions (Kuskov and Feoktistova 2004).

Ecotourism is a broad and growing trend in modern tourism (Gössling 1999; Balmford *et al.* 2009; Job *et al.* 2017). Priority should be given to educational forms of tourism, the development of which will help attract educated people to rest and popularize ecological and cultural-historical knowledge among the population. One of the priorities for the development of cognitive forms of tourism are tourist routes or ecological routes and paths that increase the knowledge of the processes and phenomena of the surrounding nature among tourists. Another important task is to cultivate an ecological culture of human behavior as part of the general culture of the relationship of people with each other and the relationship of man to nature. Ecological routes and trails, in addition, are regulators of the flow of recreants, distributing them in different directions throughout the protected areas, reducing the recreational load on the environment.

Ecotourism (especially in the form of biosphere tourism) is the most environmentally friendly type of nature management. Within its framework, knowledge can go in line with either the educational process or a simple familiarization. The difference of the first type of knowledge from the second is that the educational process is connected with purposeful and thematic obtaining of information about the elements of the ecosystem, and the familiarization is connected with the process of non-professional observation of nature. Improvement of health can occur in a passive (stationary stay in the natural environment), active (associated with the tourist's transitions from one natural object of interest to another) and sports (overcoming natural obstacles when passing routes) forms (Sokolov *et al.* 2017).

It is advisable to differentiate the forms of ecotourism, depending on the intensity of recreational activities in its practical organization in nature conservation areas, where functional zoning provides for various modes of environmental management. Moreover, such differentiation is carried out taking into account two possible positions. The first is based on the fact that the realized form of ecotourism is the more aggressive the more intensely the tourist moves in the natural space. The intensity is determined by the time and speed of active movement of a tourist in order to satisfy recreational needs. The second position is based on the principle of rational use of natural recreational resources. Its essence is as follows: scientific and educational information,

which carries the object of nature, must be used as fully as possible. Therefore, if this object or ecosystem is particularly valuable, then their potential should not be used in exploratory forms of tourism. It is better to replace them with less valuable objects, the involvement of which in the recreational and resource cycle will not worsen the quality of tourist services, but will reduce the burden on unique objects of nature. In contrast to the first position, the rational use of cognitive potential allows intelligent distribution the tourist flow in the natural area used (Arsenyeva and Kuskov 2005; Butzmann and Job 2017).

Specially protected natural territories are the most important link in the development of ecological tourism, as they have a number of advantages:

- located in the most picturesque, attractive, interesting from an educational point of view places;
- have an established service system for tourist groups, a developed system of tourist routes, experience in organizing educational work;
- have a certain infrastructure and trained personnel;
- form the attitude of the local population to a specific natural reserve and the environmental restrictions on economic activity existing on its territory (Kuskov and Feoktistova 2004).

For the development of ecotourism in protected natural areas, special infrastructure should be created, which consists of ecological centers and ecological routes. For protected natural areas, ecocenters play the role of information nodes, and eco-routes – information corridors combined into a single information system. Ecocenter develops and organizes hikes, excursions within the boundaries of specially protected natural areas, is engaged in information support for visitors (Esina 2017; Yorov *et al.* 2019). Ecotourism can develop on specially protected natural areas of all kinds, however, the regime of reserves, the most stringent compared to other types of specially protected natural territories, imposes maximum restrictions on the organization of ecological tourism. The specifics of nature reserves, created for solving a number of research tasks, makes it possible to use them for scientific ecological tourism. However, its development requires the allocation of special zones, strict adherence to the adopted environmental protection system and a clear rationing of the number of visitors (Kuskov and Feoktistova 2004).

To prevent the negative impact of ecotourism (in the world practice such examples are known), in our opinion, it is necessary to implement a set of organizational measures on specially protected natural areas, which include:

- carrying out continuous monitoring of the impact of ecotourism on the state of nature;
- developing mainly eco-cognitive and scientific types of ecotourism;
- creating ecological routes with the help of which it is possible to carry out environmental education, regulate the flow of tourists in different directions throughout the protected areas, reducing the recreational load on the environment;
- directing the financial income received from ecotourism towards the restoration and development of natural and cultural-historical objects involved in eco-tourist activities;
- encouraging the development of volunteering among the local population (Esina 2017; Chung *et al.* 2018).

Each of the ways of developing tourism potential has its own distinctive features – both positive and negative. The positive aspects of eco-tourism include: continuous monitoring of the status of protected areas by responsible government organizations; accessibility of recreation to all segments of the population; regulation of tourist flows in the specially protected natural areas; use of specially protected natural areas for environmental education. However, there are also negative aspects of ecotourism, mainly related to marriage financing: insufficient funding of organizations responsible for ensuring the functioning of specially protected natural areas on the part of authorities at various levels; poor financial return from the use of the tourist and recreational potential of protected areas.

The advantages of unorganized (wild) tourism include the fact that it is a factor in the economic development of the territory bordering the specially protected natural areas due to the involvement of the local population in the service of vacationers. However, this method of tourism also carries risks: the spontaneous, uncontrolled exploration of the tourist and recreational potential of protected areas; degradation of the protected landscape; deterioration of the ecological condition of the territory (Pocebneva *et al.* 2018).

Controlled tourism with the attraction of private capital is considered by some scientists the best option, since it involves the expansion of the tourist and recreational potential of protected areas and has a positive social and economic effect achieved through the development of infrastructure. The risks of tourism with the attraction of private capital include, in particular, obtaining the maximum benefit in a short period of time with an insufficient number of security measures. Another negative effect may be a decrease in the availability of

recreation in the sidelines of the protected areas, which primarily affects the interests of the local population. Thus, the formation of an attractive ecotourism product is possible only under the condition of properly planned and developed ecological routes to specially protected natural areas, which do not harm the environmental tourism resources and contribute to the restoration and preservation of the biodiversity of the protected natural area (Esina 2017).

Conclusions

On the basis of the conducted research it is possible to form recommendations for the effective functioning of protected natural territories. It is necessary to carry out a set of works for each of the protected areas, namely: to establish the boundaries of protected areas and their protection zones on the basis of title documents, to conduct special field work to clarify the passage of boundaries; carry out geodetic work to determine the coordinates of characteristic points of the boundaries of protected areas and their protection zones; update the information contained in the passports of the protected areas, based on the collection and processing of information on natural complexes.

Based on the analysis of the status of specially protected natural areas in the Ulyanovsk region, it is possible to make the following conclusions. Entering data on protected areas to the state cadastre of real estate will officially put landowners, land users and tenants of land plots in front of facts of the relative position of the boundaries of protected areas and land plots, the presence of restrictions and burdens in their use. Actualization, in turn, will allow for timely taking them into account when designing construction objects and taking measures to preserve natural complexes and objects.

Eco-tourism can have a positive impact on nature protection and management of specially protected nature areas. Ecotourism can be an effective means of environmental education and can draw the attention of the general public to environmental issues. Through educational activities, it can strengthen public support for protected areas. Protected areas are able to take over the planning, management and monitoring of ecotourism activities and be more actively involved in environmental education. Developing eco-tourism, protected areas can make a significant contribution to the development of the local economy, help attract international attention and investment in the region, and create new jobs for the local population.

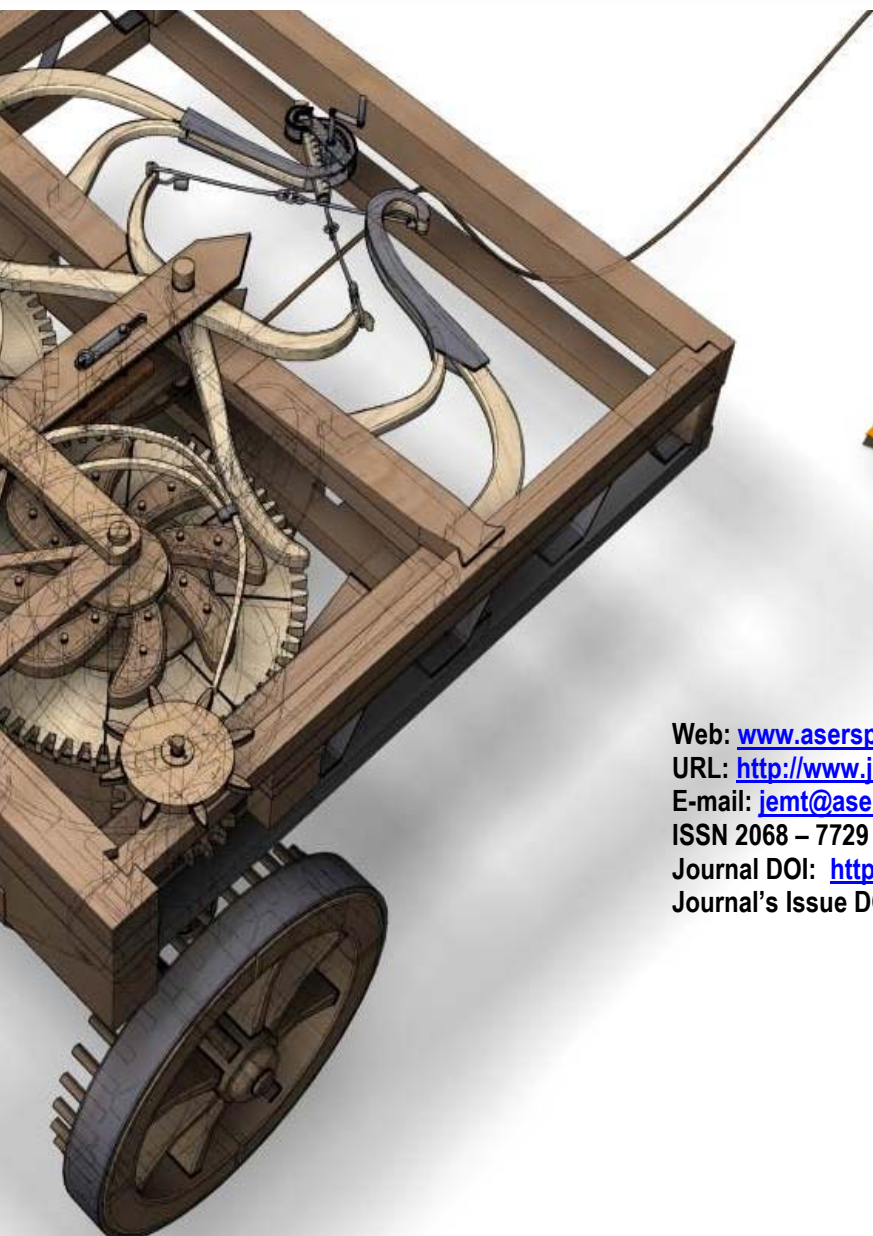
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