

## Perspective Tools of the Strategic Management of VFR Tourism Development at the Regional Level

Aleksandr P. Gorbunov<sup>a</sup>, Ekaterina V. Efimova<sup>a</sup>, Margarita V. Kobets<sup>a</sup>  
and Sofiya G. Kilinkarova<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, RUSSIA

### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at identifying the perspective tools of strategic management in general and strategic planning of VFR tourism (for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives) at the regional level in particular. It is based on dialectical and logical methods, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, the concrete historical and systemic approaches, which in their totality helped to reveal the key characteristics of VFR tourists arriving in the Stavropol region as well as to offer the author's model of the VFR tourism development strategy at the regional level. This paper substantiates the idea that VFR tourism is a very attractive and promising segment of the tourism market of Russia, despite the fact that the public authorities currently undertake no measures for its targeted development. This study is conducted in the framework of the project No. 2570 "Model of transformative (creative and innovative) management in self-regulating socio-economic systems including high school", performed in the context of the basic part of the public task in the field of scientific activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

### KEYWORDS

private purposes, conceptual strategy of VFR tourism development, balanced scorecard, technology foresight

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 July 2016  
Revised 25 September 2016  
Accepted 28 October 2016

## Introduction

Currently, the possibilities of the development of tourism for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives are underutilized because of the weak scientific elaboration of the issues related to the comprehension of its role as a promising segment of the tourism market. According to the World Tourism Organization, the share of international trips made for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives was 27% in 2014 and 2015 (UNWTO tourism highlights 2015-2016, 2015).

**CORRESPONDENCE** Sofiya Kilinkarova ✉ [kuz\\_sofia@mail.ru](mailto:kuz_sofia@mail.ru)

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Depending on the country and the region, the scope of the VFR tourism market varies significantly. For example, in Australia, arrivals for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives amounted to 27.6% in 2014, and 27.4% in 2015 (International Visitors in Australia, 2015). In the US, the share of trips, the main purpose of which was visiting friends and relatives, was 17.7% in 2014, while the share of trips, one of the purposes of which was visiting friends and relatives, was 30.1% in the same year, i.e. almost twice as much (in 2015, they were respectively 18.1% and 30.5%) (Profile of overseas travelers to the United States, 2014). The bodies of the UK official statistics recorded 28.39% of trips for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives in 2014, and in 2015 they accounted for 29% (Inbound tourism trends by market).

In Russia, the category of tourists traveling to visit friends and relatives, as such, is not highlighted and cannot be described statistically. However, in accordance with the List of "trip purposes", used in the processing of invitations and visas for foreign citizens and persons without citizenship, a trip with a private purpose is defined as a trip of a foreign citizen arriving in the Russian Federation with a guest visit on the basis of an invitation to enter the Russian Federation, issued at the request of a citizen of the Russian Federation, a foreign citizen who has received a residence permit in the Russian Federation or a legal entity.

According to the same document, an ordinary private visa is issued to:

- members of separated families, i.e. citizens of other states, who are close family members of a citizen of Russia (parents, spouse, son, daughter) and who live separately;
- citizens of the states with which the Russian Federation has concluded the relevant treaties on visiting the graves of relatives;
- foreigners arriving for emergency treatment, or in connection with a serious illness or a death of a close relative;
- foreigners entering the territory of a neighboring state, in accordance with the international treaty of the Russian Federation in the framework of a cross-border exchange for visiting a specific region.

Thus, a private visa in almost all cases is issued to a foreign citizen who enters Russia for the purpose of meeting friends and relatives, which allows us to equate a trip for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives to a trip for private purposes. At the same time, according to the Border Service of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, trips of foreign citizens to Russia for private purposes (in fact, trips to friends and relatives) rank first in the number of international arrivals: the share of such trips amounted to 64.7% in 2014, and 62% in 2015 (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose), 2014).

At the same time, trips of the CIS citizens to Russia for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives constituted 79% of all the trips to Russia in 2014, and 74% - in 2015 (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose), the CIS member states, 2015). At the same time, Russia received 6.3 million tourists from Ukraine, 3.3 million - from Kazakhstan, 2.1 million - from Uzbekistan.

The proportion of trips for private purposes from the non-CIS countries amounted to one third of all international travels. Over the past few years, there



has been a progressive increase in the number of arrivals to Russia for private purposes from far-abroad countries. For example, 32.95% - in 2013, (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose), 2013), 36.29% - in 2014 (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose), 2014), and 36.92% - in 2015 (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose)). Of the non-CIS countries the largest number of VFR tourists arrived in Russia were from Poland (1,766,612), Finland (1,476,412), China (1,353,051), Germany (58,260), Mongolia (505,429), Estonia (382,031), Latvia (348,338) and Turkey (323,039) (The number of trips of foreign citizens to Russia (by trip purpose), 2015 the non-CIS countries).

Despite such an impressive scope of the inbound segment of VFR tourism in Russia, the public authorities supervising the country's development of the tourism sector have not yet initiated the recognition and legal consolidation of VFR tourism as a full and promising type of tourism and a tourism market segment. They also do not pay enough attention to its targeted development through the elaboration and application of the relevant organizational and economic instruments. Both the Russian domestic VFR tourism market and the strategic management tools of its development remain unexplored at the regional level.

An analysis of the current economic and management literature also indicates that the subject of the strategic management of VFR tourism development has been poorly developed in scientific terms abroad. So far, scholars have addressed the issues of the relationship between VFR tourism and migration: G. Moscardo et al. (2000), P. Pearce & A. Morrison (2000), A. Seaton (1994), A. Seaton & S. Palmer (1996), specific characteristics of VFR tourism: S. Meis, Joyal & Trite (1995), S. Gurry (2005), economic benefits and financial aspects of VFR trips: B. King (1996), H. Lehto, Morrison & O'Leary (2001), M. MacEachern (2007), G. Lee et al. (2002). The features of the interaction of VFR tourists and the host were the subject of research by D. Corsun and S. Baloglu (2006), McKercher (1995), S. Boyne (2001).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze and assess the degree of the development of VFR tourism in one of the regions of Russia - Stavropol Krai, as well as to elaborate the conceptual model of its development strategy at the regional level.

The following objectives have been set in the course of the study:

- to conduct a survey of citizens coming to the territory of Stavropol Krai by air and rail;
- to identify the key characteristics of VFR tourists arriving in Stavropol Krai;
- to propose the author's model of VFR tourism development strategy at the regional level.

## **Materials and Methods**

The methodological framework of this research is formed, first of all, by dialectical and logical methods, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, specific historical and systemic approaches.

Due to the lack of official statistics on the domestic flows of tourists, in the period from March 2013 to December 2013, during the development of the

portrait of a VFR tourist arriving in Stavropol Krai, the authors carried out a survey of citizens coming to the territory of Stavropol Krai by air and rail. The survey was conducted using a fixed choice questionnaire with 12 questions about visit purposes, period, socio-demographic and other characteristics of tourists. The survey involved more than five hundred of the respondents (504 people), divided into the following age groups: under 18, 19-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-60 and over 60.

## Results and Discussion

The processing of the poll numbers made it possible to establish that 43% (217 people) of the respondents arrived in Stavropol Krai for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives, 40.7% (205 people) - for the purpose of treatment, 13.9% (70 people) - for business purposes, and 2.4% (12 people) came for other purposes. In other words, the share of the category of tourists under consideration turned out to be even a little higher than the share of the traditional category of tourists due to the development of health resort treatment in Stavropol Krai.

A more detailed study of the questionnaires of VFR tourists helped to divide them into those whose main purpose was to visit relatives (126 people), those who came to visit friends (18 people) and those whose purpose of "visiting friends and relatives" was combined with other purposes - rest, treatment (73 people) (Figure 1).

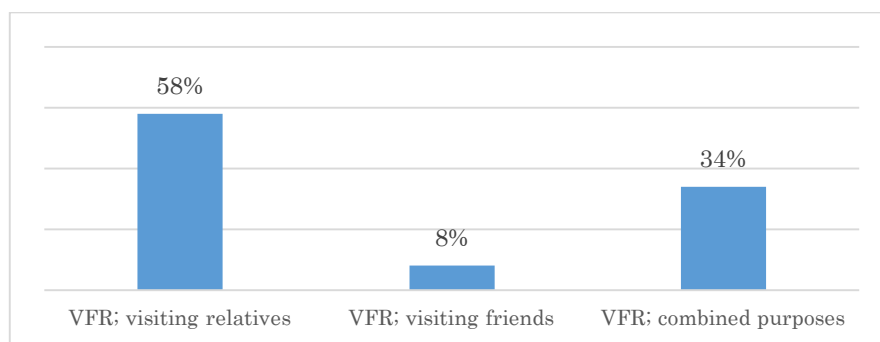


Figure 1. Structure of VFR tourists by main trip purposes

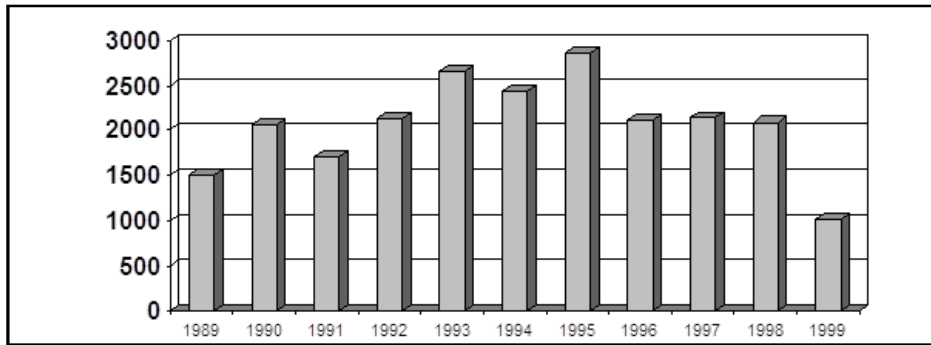
Figure 1 shows that more than half of all VFR tourists arrived for the purpose of visiting relatives.

There were more women than men among VFR tourists: 134 and 83 people respectively. The geography of places, from which VFR tourists arrive in Stavropol Krai, is wide enough. It includes not only the cities of Russia, but also the CIS and far-abroad countries. Among the Russian cities, such big cities as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg are in the lead, which is logical, since large cities attract people with their opportunities and prospects, encouraging them to move.

The survey showed that such cities as Pyatigorsk, Nalchik, Mineralnye Vody, Lermontov and Yessentuki are the leaders in the inbound flows of domestic VFR tourists. Foreign VFR tourists find the "non-resort" municipalities



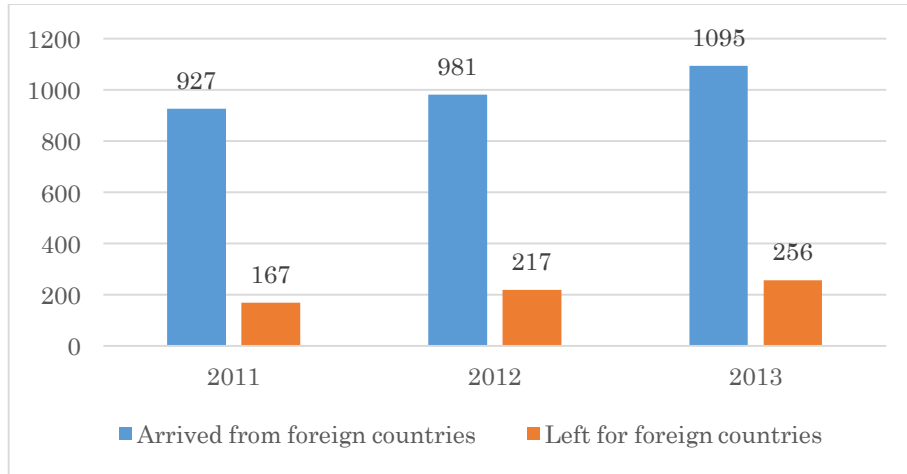
attractive (Suvorovskaya stanitsa (village), Konstantinovskaya stanitsa, Georgievsk, Budennovsk). This can be explained by the specifics of migration processes that took place here in the 90s of the XX century (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Number of the region's inhabitants who have received permission to move to the non-CIS countries for permanent residence (people)

According to Figure 2, the number of emigrants to the non-CIS countries was about 2-2.8 thousand people annually in the 1990's. Mostly ethnic Germans and Jews emigrated. It was no coincidence that 55% of all immigrants left for Germany, 19% - for Israel, and 16% - for the United States (Ryazantsev, 2014).

Currently, there is a reverse trend (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Number of arriving and leaving inhabitants of Stavropol Krai for the non-CIS countries in 2011-2013 (The main migration flows in Stavropol Krai, 2014)

As it follows from Figure 3, the number of people leaving Stavropol region for the non-CIS countries is steadily increasing. However, in recent years there is also an increase in the number of inbound tourists: in 2011 there were 927 people, in 2012 - 981, and in 2013 - 1095.

A large part of VFR tourists (35%) arriving in Stavropol Krai, according to the survey, spend here quite a long time - two or more weeks. Of those surveyed,

44 people indicated a ten-day stay with relatives and friends, 20 people spent a week with relatives and friends and 17 people - 5 days. It should be noted that those who come to visit friends stay on average for 10 days, while those who come to visit relatives stay for a longer period.

In contrast to other categories of tourists visiting Stavropol Krai, trips of VFR tourists are regular. Thus, of 217 VFR tourists surveyed, 134 people responded that they "visit friends and relatives on a regular basis"; 14 respondents marked the option "I visit once a year"; 23 people indicated that they visited relatives and friends for the first time, from which it can be concluded that they are "newcomers" in VFR tourism. As such, it can be both those who have recently left Stavropol Krai and those who left long ago.

Concerning the answer to the question of accommodation types used by VFR tourists, the processing of their questionnaires showed that 207 respondents out of 217 chose "staying with relatives and friends", 4 people chose a hotel as a means of accommodation, 4 people - a private apartment, and 2 respondents – a health resort. These figures indicate that the majority of VFR tourists in Stavropol Krai prefer staying with relatives or friends, and almost nobody uses the commercial accommodation services.

By the age criterion, the tourists aged 26-35 dominate among VFR tourists (31.8%). This age group includes those who have completed their training, strive for independence and search for high-paying jobs, which encourages them to go to other regions of the country with higher levels of socio-economic development. It is followed by a group of VFR tourists aged between 46 and 60. The third is a group, which included young people aged 19-25. This group is dominated by students enrolled in universities of other cities based on the results of the unified state exam.

Thus, the survey findings indicate that Stavropol Krai has a fairly high potential for the development of VFR tourism in the following segments: VFR tourists from the non-CIS countries; VFR tourists from the CIS countries; VFR tourists from other regions of Russia (here, one should mention friends and relatives of young people studying in higher educational institutions of Stavropol Krai). The key features of VFR tourists visiting Stavropol Krai are as follows:

- the regularity of trips;
- a relatively long period of stay with relatives and friends;
- the presence of an international (inbound) segment (associated with emigration from the region at the end of the XX century);
- predominant young age of tourists, which significantly highlights the need to elaborate the conceptual foundations of the strategy of VFR tourism development.

With regard to the basic postulates of the strategic management of a tourism destination, formulated by the World Tourism Organization (Boyne, 2001), we suggest to distinguish the following stages in the strategizing process of VFR tourism differing in the degree of generality of the results:

- analysis and evaluation of the current situation;
- formulation of a strategy;
- development of an integrated, multi-year plan of the implementation of a strategy, including specific programs and projects of medium and short term;



— development of organizational, control and evaluation strategy implementation mechanisms.

The conceptual model of the elaboration of a VFR tourism development strategy can be represented as follows (Figure 4).

The first stage involves the analysis and evaluation of the current state of the VFR tourism market, as well as the determination of the prospects for its development in the light of exogenous and endogenous factors, which have an impact on it.

The realization of this stage suggests the analysis of the current state of the VFR tourism market through a systematic approach with regard to the results achieved and the inherent features. To analyze and evaluate the current state of the VFR tourism market it is necessary, first of all, to define the number of VFR tourists coming to the destination both from abroad and from other regions of the country.

To compose an objective portrait of an international and domestic VFR tourist, it is necessary to collect the information about their gender, age, the country from which they arrive (for the international segment), economic status, education level, marital status, primary and secondary trip purposes, type of transportation and accommodation, trip duration, its multiplicity, number of travelers, size and structure of expenses, leisure pursuits of VFR tourists in the destination, sources of information involved at the travel planning stage. An important task at this stage is to identify and compare the level of VFR tourists' expectations from the trip and the level of their satisfaction with the trip.

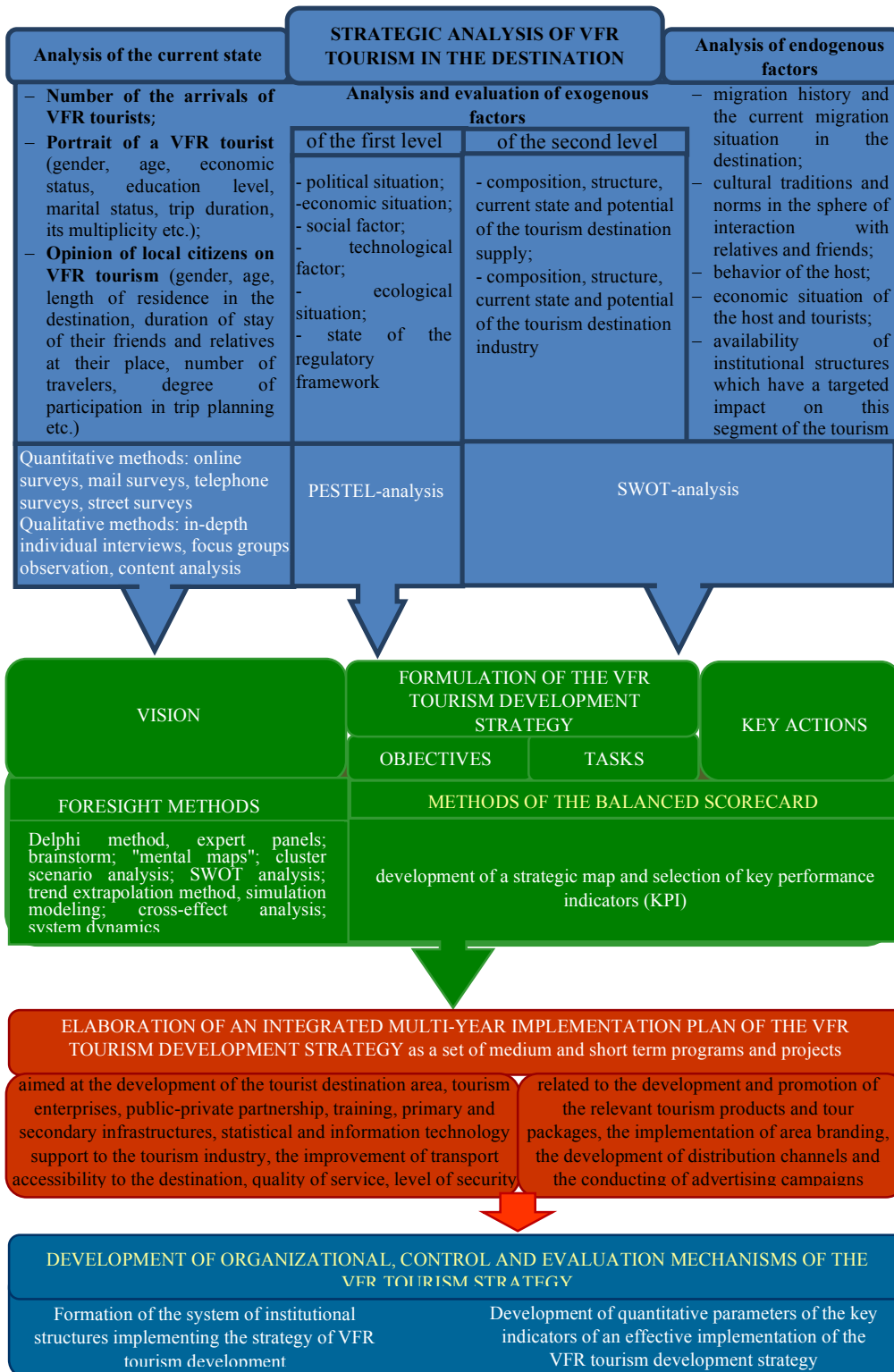


Figure 4. Conceptual model of the VFR tourism development strategy





As part of the analysis and evaluation of the current state of the VFR tourism market, with regard to the key influence of the host on the existence of this type of tourism, it seems advisable to suggest studying the host by such criteria as: gender, age, social status, marital status and type of household, length of residence in the destination, duration of stay of their friends and relatives at their place, number of travelers coming, degree of participation in trip planning, sources of information used in trip planning, events organized by the host, size and structure of expenses carried out by the host due to the arrival of relatives and friends, degree of satisfaction of the host with the tourist destination potential.

A number of quantitative and qualitative methods can serve as the main methods of collecting the necessary information. Quantitative methods include online surveys; mail surveys; telephone surveys; street surveys. The following qualitative methods of collecting the information on VFR tourists are used in practice: in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, observation, content analysis. Preference is given to the first of these methods.

With regard to the fact that in the context of a systematic approach one cannot accurately determine the variables that affect the function of VFR tourism development, the next step is the implementation of a situational analysis. A central role in the situational analysis is played by situational variables (factors) that have a significant impact on the development of the situation, and the rejection of the factors that cannot have a significant effect (Gukasova, 2014).

To analyze the exogenous and endogenous factors that have an impact on the development of VFR tourism, SWOT-analysis is usually used. It helps to identify and assess the current or future internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and external threats, which take place at the present moment or just began to develop. The internal strengths and weaknesses relate to those factors which can be controlled by the tourism industry and its structure, while the external opportunities and threats relate to those matters which are slightly affected by the tourism industry and business or cannot be controlled at all. We, in turn, find it appropriate to combine the use of the SWOT-analysis and the PESTEL-analysis. This analysis method helps to develop a probabilistic scenario for the development of tourism macro-environment factors, i.e. political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal. Depending on the hierarchical level of a destination, for which the development strategy is elaborated (country, region or municipality), the PESTEL-analysis is carried out on each of them. The SWOT-analysis, in turn, focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of a destination, as well as the opportunities and threats, revealed in its external environment of direct influence.

The results obtained in the analysis and evaluation of the current situation in the VFR tourism market, as well as the factors that have an impact on its development, form the basis for the implementation of the second stage associated with the formulation of a strategy. To formulate a strategy means:

1. To develop a vision of the state of the VFR tourism market in a specific destination in the long term;
2. To define strategic objectives;
3. To concretize strategic objectives in tasks;
4. To formulate key actions to achieve them.

The implementation of this stage requires the involvement of a wide range of people: the officials of public authorities, who are in charge of the development of tourism, representatives of the enterprises of the tourism industry and supporting industries, experts and members of the local community, investors. In this regard, it seems appropriate to adapt foreign experience of organizing the procedures for the formulation of a strategy, involving the use of technology foresight, to the domestic practice.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization interprets 'foresight' as "the process involved in systematically attempting to look into the longer-term future of science, technology, the economy and society with the aim of identifying the areas of strategic research and the emerging generic technologies likely to yield the greatest economic and social benefits" (Unido Technology Foresight Manual. United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2005).

P. Becker (2003) believes that foresight should be understood as "a participatory, future intelligence gathering and medium-to-long-term vision-building process that systematically attempts to look into the future of science, the economy and society in order to support present-day decision-making and to mobilize joint forces to realize them".

Therefore, technology foresight involves the realization of five essential principles:

1) Anticipation. Foresight is a structured way to anticipate and project long-term social, economic and technological development outcomes and perspective needs in these areas.

2) Vision. Foresight involves the elaboration of a guiding strategic vision, which shares a sense of social commitment about a certain issue.

3) Action. Foresight helps to develop and implement strategic visions through detailed action plans, which enable present actions to face the future successfully.

4) Participation. Foresight involves the intensive incorporation of interactive and participatory methods that support debate and analysis with a wide variety of stakeholders.

5) Networking. Foresight forges new social networks for the exchange of ideas, experiences and specific knowledge (2014).

We share the position of A.A. Avtsinova & V.I. Menshchikova (2012), who believes that foresight has two fundamental differences from other tools of scientific prediction: 1) the participation of many interested sections of civil society not only in shaping the image of foresight, but also in active actions on the implementation of predicted changes; 2) it does not relate to forecast, as far as foresight is based on civil society's behavior, while forecast - on the ideas of intellectuals.

The implementation of technology foresight requires the involvement of a number of methods, show in Table 1.



**Table 1.** Foresight methods (A Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management, 2014)

Criteria	Methods
1. Methods based on the identification of expert knowledge for the development of long-term strategies	- Delphi method; - expert panels; - brainstorm; - “mental maps”; - cluster scenario analysis; - SWOT analysis;
2. Quantitative methods using statistics and other data	- trend extrapolation method; - simulation modeling; - cross-effect analysis; - system dynamics
3. Methods for identifying the key action points to determine strategic planning	- critical technologies; - objectives tree; - morphological analysis

The definition of objectives, tasks and key events in the course of foresight should take into account the postulates of the balanced scorecard (BSC), which helps to develop not only objectives, but also the criteria for their achievement – indicators, their target values and actions (A Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management, 2014).

The BSC in the classic version contains six essential elements:

1. Perspectives – components which help to decompose the strategy for its implementation. There are four basic perspectives:

- Finances (obtaining consistently growing profits - how the company's shareholders see us);
- Customers (improving knowledge of each client - how customers see us);
- Processes (internal processes of the company - how we stand out among competitors);
- Staff (training and development) and innovation (how we create and increase value for our customers).

2. Objectives defining the areas in which the strategy will be implemented.

3. Measures - achievement metrics, which should reflect the progress in moving towards the objective. Measures imply certain actions needed to achieve the objective, and to indicate how the strategy will be implemented at an operational level.

4. Targets – quantitative level concepts, which should correspond to a particular measure.

5. Cause and effect linkages, which must bind the company's objectives in such a way that the achievement of one of them contributes to the achievement of another (relationship of the type "if-then").

6. Strategic initiatives - projects or programs, which contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives.

In procedural terms, the use of the BSC concept includes the specification of strategic objectives and their unification by cause and effect linkages, which is reflected in the strategic map. Then the key performance indicators (KPI) are selected and their targeted, planned and actual values are determined. The implementation of strategic actions serves to ensure the achievement of the

objectives developed. Each strategic action defines its timeframes, budget and clear responsibility (Development of the balanced scorecard, 2014).

An adaptation of the classical BSC model to the strategic management of VFR tourism development involves changing the place of the perspective "Finances" in the structure of the strategy map: it moves to the lowest level, being replaced by the perspective "Clients". It, in turn, is interpreted broadly: it includes tourists, tour operators and travel agents, other tourism industry organizations, local people and public authorities. In fact, the perspective "Clients" turns into the perspective "Key stakeholders" (Avtsinov & Menshchikova, 2012).

Thus, the BSC concept helps at the strategy planning stage to develop a comprehensive system of indicators holistically describing the target characteristics, the prospective change of their values, as well as the permissible deviations from the set strategic indicators, which will form the basis for the formation of the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the effective strategy implementation at the fourth stage.

The third stage involves the development of an integrated multi-year implementation plan of the VFR tourism development strategy, including specific medium- and short-term programs and projects. With regard to a specific tourist destination, these programs and projects may be divided into two major sections:

- medium- and short-term programs and projects of the development of the area as a VFR tourism destination;
- medium- and short-term programs and projects of the promotion and marketing of the area as a VFR tourism destination.

The first set may include programs and projects aimed at the development and improvement of the following categories:

- destination tourist space;
- tourism enterprises;
- public-private partnership;
- staff of the tourism industry and supporting industries;
- primary and secondary infrastructure;
- statistical and information technology support to the tourism industry;
- transport accessibility to the destination;
- service quality;
- safety level;
- investment attractiveness;
- sustainability.

Programs and projects of the second set are related to the development and promotion of the relevant tourism products and tour packages, the implementation of area branding, the development of distribution channels and the conducting of advertising campaigns.

The final stage – the development of organizational, control and evaluation strategy implementation mechanisms – determines the composition of the authorities and organizations that will participate in the implementation of the



strategy, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of its implementation.

## Conclusions

The advantages of the proposed conceptual model of the VFR tourism development strategy in a particular area are dependent on the following circumstances. Firstly, the proposed model is based on the basic postulates of the strategic management of a tourist destination, formulated by the World Tourism Organization. Secondly, it integrates their implementation stages, procedures, methods and tools in a single system. Thirdly, it involves the use of a number of innovative tools of strategic planning, positively proven in other sectors of the economy. This refers to the combination of the SWOT-analysis with the PESTEL-analysis for carrying out an independent analysis of the VFR tourism macro-environment factors and the factors of direct influence; the study of the attitude of local citizens to VFR tourism; the realization of technology foresight at the stage of vision formulation; the use of the balanced scorecard concept to determine strategic objectives and to concretize them in tasks; the determination of key actions and the development of a set of key performance indicators of the strategy.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Aleksandr Pavlovich Gorbunov** - Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russia.

**Ekaterina Vladimirovna Efimova** - Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russia.

**Margarita Vyacheslavovna Kobets** - Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russia.

**Sofiya Georgievna Kilinkarova** - Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russia.

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