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**RURAL GREEN TOURISM BRAND IN UKRAINE:  
ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT  
AND FUNCTIONING STAGES**

**Abstract:** The article describes the problem of formation of the national rural green tourism brand of Ukraine during more than 20 years. The main stages of its formation were identified: introduction, formation and active development. The article analyzed the basic factors (regulatory-legal, informative, communicative, public-entrepreneurial) and tools of the national brand formation. It emphasized the important role of NGO Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine in ensuring the functioning of the brand of the same name. On the basis of statistics, results of various sociological surveys of tourists and monitoring of rural tourism entities, the degree of formation and expressiveness of certain elements of brand equity by consumers and producers was estimated. The article describes the practice of functioning of the regional Carpathian sub-brand as the most recognizable and attractive for domestic and foreign clients. It considers modern problems related to the support and management of the national rural green tourism brand. The strategy for further development of the brand focuses on improving communication with consumers, expanding the range of products and services and actively supporting rural tourism entities in promoting the brand in the national and international services market.

**Keywords:** Carpathian sub-brand, national brand, rural green tourism, Ukraine.

**JEL codes:** 1105, 1409

## Introduction

Issues related to the development of tourism brands are relevant to the tourism industry of Ukraine. In recent decades, the main focus has been on the promotion of territorial tourism brands –tourist centres, regions (mainly oblasts). In the program document “Tourism and Resort Development Strategy until 2026” [*Strategia...* 2017], considerable emphasis is placed on marketing policy to promote the national tourism product to foreign markets and to develop the tourism brand of Ukraine. First of all, it concerns the functioning of brands of such national products as culture-related, health-recreational products, and recently – business and extreme tourism, in particular “Chornobyl”, which have already gained popularity in the international tourist market and have their consumers.

However, the country has considerable resource potential and experience in forming national brands related to other types of tourism and tourism products, in particular rural tourism. On the economic map of Europe, Ukraine is perceived as the “bread basket of Europe” – with significant agricultural and forest land, a developed network of rural settlements with significant opportunities for the rural tourism development. According to the research of the Insti-

tute of the Economy and Forecasting of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine [Kyryziuk 2018, p. 110], in Ukraine there are about 1 million 250 homesteads (households that can provide rural tourism services). In turn, according to the same research, rural tourism services are advertised online by about 2,000 homesteads [Kyryziuk 2018, p. 110]. Rural tourism as a national tourism brand can successfully position Ukraine in the international tourism market in the near future.

Marketing research on rural tourism in Ukraine still does not sufficiently address its brand as a product and territorial offering. Particular attention is paid only to the development of a brand of individual rural tourism entities – farmhouses [Trylis, Semenenko 2009], as well as regions specializing in rural tourism [Malska *et al.* 2018, pp. 59-74]. At the same time, the experience in developing a specific Ukrainian national brand – rural green tourism (RGT), which has been under development for more than two decades, has not yet become the area of focus of rural tourism scientists, experts and practitioners.

The presented study analyzes the main stages of the national rural green tourism brand development in the context of developing its main attributes [Chow *et al.* 2017]. It deals with the basic factors and tools of development, problems and prospects of this national brand, and also describes the successful experience in creating of the Carpathian sub-brand.

## **1. Methodological and procedural approaches to the research of the Ukrainian national rural green tourism brand**

In the tourism brands formation, it is important to characterize the types of services (tourist products) and destinations. In most cases, the concept of brand image is used to study tourism services and products as brand objects [Pereira *et al.* 2012]. In this concept, such components as image, perception (awareness), reputation, impressions, which are focused on enhancing the status of the brand itself, in this case tourism services (products) play a significant role. The specificity of rural tourism as a branding object is related to the fact that it clearly defines the destination – the countryside and the potential consumer – urban dweller.

In the rural green tourism branding, consumer focuses on its components such as imagery (rural landscapes), perception (getting to know authentic rural lifestyles), and a reputation for eco-friendly and affordable leisure activities. In doing so, one should bear in mind the role of personal factor in the brand image where a particular product can serve as the basis of a consumer's lifestyle

[Ekinci 2003]. In this respect, Ukrainian urban dwellers often are 1st or 2nd generation urban dwellers and are still closely psychologically and socially connected to the countryside, making them potential consumers of rural green tourism services.

Separate mention should be made of the possibility of using the concept of Brand Personality in the study of rural tourism brand, where the focus is on the personality and psychological characteristics of consumers. This approach compares consumer features with destination staff [Aaker 1997]. In this regard, consumers of rural tourism services and products compare their personal characteristics with the owners of the rural home and their hospitality.

According to the Polish Brand Institute, the national brand should be considered as a single whole, a combination of image, goodwill and reputation, any functional and emotion-provoking values that the state conveys around itself [Kotarski 2018, p. 76]. Regional brands play a significant role in the formation of the national brand. National and regional brands, being territorial type brands, combine tangible and intangible elements [Kotarski 2018, pp. 65-80]. In the tourism industry, territorial brands, including those of the national and regional level, can be seen as an offer that is identified with the tourism product [Panasiuk 2013, pp. 21-30].

As Kamińska notes [Kamińska *et al.* 2018], the process of creating a tourism brand is long, multidimensional and complex. There are certain steps involved in creating a brand that are associated with the formation of attributes of its equity – brand awareness, perceived quality, associations and loyalty [Chow *et al.* 2017]. In the presented study of the national (Ukrainian) brand of rural green tourism, the main attention was paid to the stage of its formation with a view to ensuring the development of its core values. These stages are determined on the basis of the analysis of more than 20 years of organizational, regulatory, legal, awareness-raising and advertising activity of the brand partners – the All-Ukrainian Union of Rural Green Tourism, state and self-governing authorities, rural tourism entities – owners of homesteads (farmhouses) and organizers of recreation in villages. The models that were tested in developing the Carpathian territorial brand ‘Carpathia’ were used to analyze the problem of rural green tourism brand management [*Marka Karpacka...2018*].

Brand studies in tourist destinations always require a combination of different research methods. In this context, the study relied on two groups of research methods. The first group was associated with the choice of characteristics that identify certain attributes (values) of brand equity. These include farmstead attendance, assessment of the level of satisfaction with the area and the services provided, “benefit basket” and the degree of loyalty (repeated visits,

recommendations to other people). These characteristics can be qualitative or quantitative. They represent the identification and evaluation group of brand research methods.

The second group of methods that perform ancillary and instrumental functions are primarily statistical and sociological methods that allow obtaining objective data on the selected characteristics of the brand attribute. For example, consumers' assessment of RGT national brand and regional sub-brands was made on the basis of statistics on tourist accommodation in farmhouses [Stavska 2018, pp. 84-91] and various surveys of tourists in rural areas, implemented within national and regional, in particular in the Carpathian region, sociological international studies [Potencjal ... 2005; Zinko *et al.* 2008, pp. 32-40; Zinko *et al.* 2016, pp. 16-18; Zaburanna 2012, pp. 6-10]. Questions answered by tourists had a scale or ranking for rural attractions (natural, historical and cultural), the level of service provision (accommodation and food, leisure programs) and the likelihood of re-visiting the rural area.

The study of tourists' awareness of rural tourism offers, in particular the number of advertised residences, was carried out on the basis of an analysis of a database of Internet resources for the fixed periods for the administrative regions of Ukraine [Zinko *et al.* 2008, pp. 32=40; Zinko *et al.* 2016, pp. 16-18; Zinko & Levchuk 2019, pp. 262-265].

## **2. Stages of the rural green tourism brand formation in Ukraine and development of its equity elements**

The problem of the stages of formation and functioning of the national rural green tourism brand should be considered in the context of the history of rural tourism in Ukraine and the main factors of its development. Rural tourism in Ukraine as a form of recreation in rural areas has undergone several basic stages of formation [Rutynskiy & Zinko 2006]:

- 1) as a form of summer vacation in the village for urban dwellers (late nineteenth – mid-twentieth century);
- 2) as a form of private accommodation use for tourists in the seaside and mountain recreation centres (60-90s of the twentieth century);
- 3) as a legalized form of recreation in rural areas in the form of rural green tourism with a specific range of services and recreational and tourism activities (the last two decades). The formation of the national rural green tourism brand is connected with this stage.

At each of these stages, rural tourism had its own purpose, in particular: summer holidays in the rural homesteads of the Carpathians and Podillia were defined as “resort” and the use of private rural housing for tourists was treated as “private accommodation”.

The name and, accordingly, the emergence of a modern rural recreation brand in Ukraine – *rural green tourism* – was initiated by public activists, who used the brand of one of the Hungarian agritourism organizations, in the mid-1990s. For more than 20 years, the term “rural green tourism” has been dominant in various regulations on tourism and agriculture and in the practical activity of rural tourism entities and users of their services in various modifications.

In recent decades, rural green tourism in Ukraine has demonstrated a wide range of occupational activities and expansion of territorial development.

The most popular types of tourist activities in rural areas are: short and long-term rest in rural homesteads and cottages, services for the specialized tourists (skiing, hiking, water activities), comprehensive provision of cultural (ethnographic) and natural (ecological) tourism services. Such types of rural tourism as agritourism at farms, culinary tourism with the development of wine and cheese routes and participation in culinary festivals, as well as visits to thematic (Cossack hamlets, artisan workshops) complexes in rural areas are developing [Zinko *et al.* 2012, pp. 16-17].

Private residences (> 70%), cottages and cottage settlements, as well as rural guesthouses, hotels and complexes within traditional public catering establishments (huts, taverns, guesthouses) and accommodation establishments are used as lodging for tourists. Expert evaluation shows that, for example, in the Carpathian region, the number of beds in homesteads varies from 3 to 25, with an average of 7-9 beds [*ibidem*, pp. 16-17].

The most developed centres of rural tourism and agritourism in the Carpathian region (Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Chernivtsi Regions), on the Black and Azov seas, the Dnipro River banks, Polissia, Podillia highlands.

There is a problem of accounting for the number of homesteads receiving tourists in the rural area and the number of tourists vacationing there, which remains not fully resolved at the regional and national level. Recently implemented statistical reporting on farmhouses remains incomplete. Publications on this topic reflect the activities of only entrepreneurs in rural areas, in particular 285 homesteads were recorded in all-Ukrainian level in 2015, 233 homesteads – in 2016, and the number of tourists accommodated was 49,948 and 39,311, respectively [Stavska 2018, pp. 84-91]. At the same time, analysis of the online resources of state authorities, marketing agencies and own websites of individual farmhouses held in 2019 showed that in the Carpathian region alone

(Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi Regions) there are more than 2.2 thousand homesteads and in the printed catalogs of Ivano-Frankivsk and Zakarpattia Regions, there are approximately 750 homesteads [Zinko & Levchuk 2019, pp. 262-265].

The intensification of the rural green tourism development in Ukraine has exacerbated the problems of its brand, which reflects a particular form of recreation and is an important tool for communication with a potential consumer. The dominant rural green tourism brand (national and regional level) has undergone certain stages in its formation. Initiated in the mid-1990s by NGO Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine, the brand of the same name gave impetus to the legalization of accommodation services for tourists in rural settlements. Semi-legal on a national scale, the “private sector for tourist accommodation” in rural areas has acquired the legal status of tourism activities as rural green tourism at the national level, in research and academic as well as tourist environment.

At the same time, it should be noted that the interpretation of this brand in the public, business and educational fields, as well as among consumers, is ambiguous. The initiators of the rural green tourism brand in Ukraine emphasized in its name that the recreation in a village has an environmental focus [Rutynskiy & Zinko 2006]. At the same time, with the introduction of this brand associated with recreation in the countryside, the concepts of “rural tourism” and “green tourism” were often used interchangeably and were often used as synonyms. In this case, the marketing component of the brand (“green”) extended to the traditional form of rural recreation. Over time, the concept of “green tourism” in regulatory documents and research began to be associated solely with eco-tourism. However, homeowners, service consumers and rural tourism promoters still use the concept of rural tourism and green tourism interchangeably.

Currently, the relation between the terms “rural” and “green” in the name of the Ukrainian national brand has the below interpretation options:

- 1) The term “green” reflects the complementary feature of “rural tourism”, emphasizing its environmental friendliness. This interpretation is mostly used by rural tourism scholars and experts.
- 2) According to another interpretation, the term “rural green tourism” is seen as a type of eco-tourism in rural areas and dominates among ecotourism practitioners.
- 3) Rural recreation promoters and marketers use the phrase “rural green” instead of “green” as more appealing to consumers.

In the present study, the authors support the first version of the interpretation of the “rural green tourism” concept.

The conducted research of the national rural green tourism brand development allow identifying a certain stage in its formation with the corresponding consistent provision of the basic attributes of its equity. In particular, over the twenty-year period of this brand development, we can consistently identify three main stages:

Table 1

### Stages of the Ukrainian national rural green tourism brand formation

Stage name	Stage duration	Typical features of the stage
Brand introduction (Stage I)	mid-1990s – early 2000s	active promotion of competitive advantages of recreation in the countryside among the consumers (mainly urban dwellers)
Brand establishment (Stage II)	2008-2015	service quality assurance and environmentally friendly offers and by generating basic benefit basket for the consumers
Active brand development (Stage III)	2016 – present	developing a strategy for brand development with the offer diversification and expansion of the consumer segment and increase in the number of clients loyal to the rural recreation

**Brand introduction** (*mid-1990s – early 2000s*). At this branding stage, NGOs and state authorities were mainly focused on the organizational and commercial-legal framework of rural tourism business entities – homeowners and rural tourism organizers. The main forms of rural tourism were developed – rural recreation and agritourism, and the commercial and legal status of rural tourism entities (ancillary or entrepreneurial in nature) was approved. From the point of view of developing the attributes of the rural green tourism brand, first of all, potential users, mainly the inhabitants of cities, became aware of competitive advantages of recreation in a village. This was done through the widespread promotion of its consumer values (cultural heritage, rural lifestyles and traditions, closeness to natural resources). This advertising was realized with the engagement of all-Ukrainian mass media, through the publication of catalogues of farmhouses and the all-Ukrainian specialized magazine “Rural Green Tourism”. At the same time, regional rural green tourism sub-brands were formed: Carpathian – with a focus on the attraction of mountain landscapes and folk traditions; Podillia – with an emphasis on traditional hospitality (food, traditional entertainment); Polissia – with a focus on the authenticity of rural lifestyles and the unique environment.



It was during this period that a wide range of activities of NGOs, homeowners, with the support of state authorities, and international grant programs to promote rural tourism in the tourist services market began. This was implemented through annual rural tourism fairs “Ukrainian Village Invites You” in village Pyrohovo near Kyiv (9 fairs since 2000), participation in international, national and regional tourist and agricultural exhibitions. Collaboration with travel companies on the implementation of recreation services in the countryside was established. At this stage, these promotional activities enabled the active involvement of tourists in the rural areas. According to surveys conducted in 2003-2004 among holidaymakers in the Carpathian region, vacation in houses in the village was preferred by 15 to 23% [Potencjal ... 2005], which testified to the good awareness and recognition of the rural green tourism brand by consumers.

The widespread introduction of the brand was also facilitated by several specific features of Ukrainian residents – the main segment of the countryside holidaymakers. They included: nostalgia for the countryside – a significant number are urban dwellers in the 1st to 2nd generation; growing patriotism in a young state that promotes trips to ethnocultural and ethnohistorical sources.

At the first stage, activities were also carried out to ensure the competitiveness of the rural green tourism brand through the development by the public and scientific organizations of the standards of categorization of the quality of services in homesteads and their ecological certification [Vasilyev *et al.* 2004; Trylis 2012, pp. 37-38].

Carpathian region in Ivano-Frankivsk Region, which occupied a leading position in terms of the number of active homesteads in Ukraine and the issue of their competitiveness among other accommodation facilities (hotels, recreation centres, resorts) was rather pressing [Vasilyev *et al.* 2004]. Such initiatives have helped to create such an important attribute for service consumers as high-quality service.

**Brand establishment (2008-2015).** This stage should be linked to the initiatives of the All-Ukrainian Union to develop the programs “Ukrainian Hospitable Homestead” (2008) and “Green Homestead” (2004), which were focused on improving the quality of service and ensuring an environmental component of recreation in the farmhouses. These programs were supported organizationally and financially by state authorities and international grants. During the same period, a draft national standard “Tourist Services. Rural Green Tourism” was developed at the State Institute for Standardization [Horishevckiy 2012b, pp. 35-36]. At this stage, important efforts were made by NGOs and state authorities in cooperation with rural tourism entities to ensure such an important attribute of the brand as the visitors’ perception of a good level of recreation

in the countryside. In accordance with the requirements of the aforementioned programs, the All-Ukrainian Union assigned categories to the homesteads that corresponded to the level of services quality and environmental friendliness [Horishevckiy 2012b, pp. 35-36; Trylis 2012, pp. 37-38]. Categorized homesteads ensured that tourists are offered an appropriate standard of service and level of pricing that met the preferences of all categories of tourists. According to expert surveys of the owners of categorized homesteads that used the appropriate signs in the visual and published advertising, this led to an increase in the number of tourists [Zinko *et al.* 2008, p. 36]. The quality and environmental components of the brand have played a significant role in ensuring a competitive environment among farmhouses and enhanced the competitiveness of rural tourism in the national and international tourist services markets. At this stage, Ukrainian and foreign tourists have gained the experience that the Ukrainian homesteads provide an adequate level of comfort and service while complying with environmental requirements. Standardization and categorization lead to the consciousness of waiting for the repetition of elements of supply and quality of service [Kategoryzacja ... 2014, pp. 28-40].

The formation phase involves the active development of such an important element of the brand as positive associations from the recreation offers in the countryside, the so-called “benefit basket” for tourists. The main focus in the various communications between rural tourism subjects and tourists was on the opportunities and benefits of accommodation in homesteads (comfortable and relatively cheap) and food (traditional food using organic products). Such features favourably identify and make rural green tourism stand out as compared to other types. This increased the subjective level of value of the national product of rural green tourism and formed positive associations that stimulate consumption [Dorofeyev 2011, pp. 99-113]. However, during this period in Ukraine, as well as in Poland [Kategoryzacja ... 2014, pp. 28-40], archaic communication with a client was noted in the form of a simplified “benefit basket” (accommodation + food).

**Active brand development (2016 – present).** Currently, the formation of the national rural green tourism brand is at a stage that can be described as a stage of its active development. At this stage, active relationships are formed between the core elements of brand equity, including brand loyalty. The strategy of developing the core attributes of the brand are on the agenda now. This strategy envisages the formation of priority areas and related measures that ensure full functioning of the national brand of rural green tourism in the national and international markets of tourist services. Priority areas: securing brand awareness, creating benefits for the products and services, brand support by local

businesses, ensuring brand management, monitoring brand strategy. Priority measures for the implementation of priority areas of the strategy are as follows: development of a modern system of communication with consumers, promotion of the brand logo, expansion of offers (products and services) and a benefit basket for consumers, creation of a positive experience of recreation in the countryside, ensuring consumer rights, activation of state and public organizations in the brand management, as well as the formation of an appropriate attribute of brand loyalty. The initiator of the brand strategy development was the Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine, which is positioned as a business association at this stage. The strategy developed by the Union as a mission defines the creation and development of a communication and marketing platform for the owners of homesteads and tourists [Vasilyev *et al.* 2017].

Below is an analysis of the implementation of activities related to diversifying customer communication, expanding the range of products and services, creating a positive experience, as well as forming an element of brand loyalty in interaction with other elements of brand equity.

At this stage, communication between the homestead owners and clients became more diverse. Studies conducted in the Carpathian region have shown significant involvement of homeowners in placing offers on the Internet. In 2014–2019, the number of homesteads in the online resources of marketing companies increased 2–2.5-fold; several dozen websites of homestead owners has appeared and the amount information about rural tourism of the region has increased in popular social media [Zinko & Levchuk 2019, pp. 262-265]. Tourists book vacation in rural houses online more and more often. Thanks to the latest information technologies, tourists have a number of benefits: an opportunity to see the offers of rural homesteads and programs for stay in the countryside, as well as to make reservations and advance payment.

The updated website of the All-Ukrainian Union of Rural Green Tourism plays a significant awareness-raising, advertising and communication role [Spilka ... 2019]. It presents a program of services categorization “Ukrainian Hospitable Homestead”, which has been modernized to meet European requirements, which gives a list of advantages that a tourist gets staying in categorized homesteads. Homestead owners use their personal accounts to communicate with potential tourists. A special section of the site is intended for tourists, it provides recommendations on how to organize a trip to the countryside and the proposed types of activities. The Union’s site is very popular with potential consumers of rural tourism products and services.

A significant role in conducting training events for the owners and at the same time informing potential countryside visitors is played by the Network of Informa-

tion-Advisory and Agritourism Organizations (IKATO), which began its activity in 2015 on the basis of successful rural tourism farmsteads [Vasilyev *et al.* 2017].

In general, it can be argued that the widespread awareness-raising of modern rural green tourism products and services by the homestead owners using e-marketing has helped tourists to develop a more specific image of recreation in the rural area and its competitive advantages.

At the stage of active brand development, it is important for the homestead owners to form specialized products and services (agro-gastronomy, agro-entertainment, agro-sports and ethnography) and to carry out wide communication with potential consumers to promote their offers. There appear homesteads specializing in specific rural tourism products and services: eco-homesteads, ethnographic homesteads, homesteads with traditional cuisine, homesteads for different activities, educational homesteads. The diversity of services and products creates a new “expanded” benefit basket for tourists in rural areas [Kategoryzacja ... 2014, pp. 28-40].

In the last decade, the associations about the rural tourism have changed in the minds of tourists, which is explained by the fact that they gained their own experience of staying in the village during vacations, holidays and weekends using farmhouse services. Such factors as the socio-economic crisis of 2008-2009, annexation of the Crimea as an all-Ukrainian health resort contributed to the growth in the number of countryside holidaymakers, and consequently in gaining experience of stay in rural areas. Agritourism has become a kind of alternative for expensive holidays abroad and recreational centres of the Black Sea and Azov Sea that lack facilities.

At this stage, brand loyalty, based on quality and benefit association, begins to play an important role. According to the All-Ukrainian Sociological Surveys (2011–2012) [Zaburanna 2012, pp. 6-10; *Rezultaty* ... 2014], a targeted segment of countryside holidaymakers is being formed in Ukraine. It is predominantly represented by the residents of large and medium-sized cities, dominated by middle-age (31-40) and old-age (41-50) groups, and is characterized by family tourism. As far as the motivation behind travelling to the countryside is concerned, it is connected with the desire to combine the cultural and environmental component. Tourists want more “live experiences”. Educational, wellness and environmental motives are dominant (Fig. 1). Tourists appreciate the unpolluted environment and tranquillity, and the most popular activities include participation in festivals and other cultural events, getting to know local traditions, traditional cuisine tasting, wellness procedures and active tourism [Zaburanna 2012, pp. 6-10]. All this proves that traditional rural accommodation and food offerings (old “benefit basket”) should be combined with

interesting educational and wellness and environmental programs for staying in the village (new “benefit basket”) (Fig. 2).

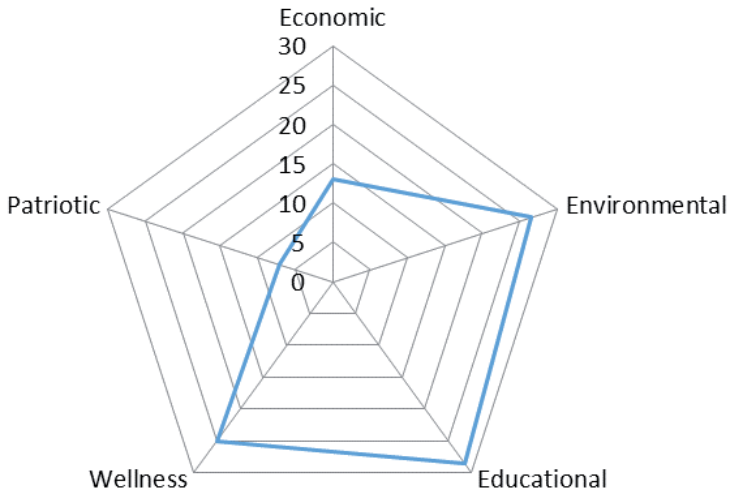


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents to questions about motives for travelling to the countryside, %  
 Source: [Zaburanna 2012, p. 7].

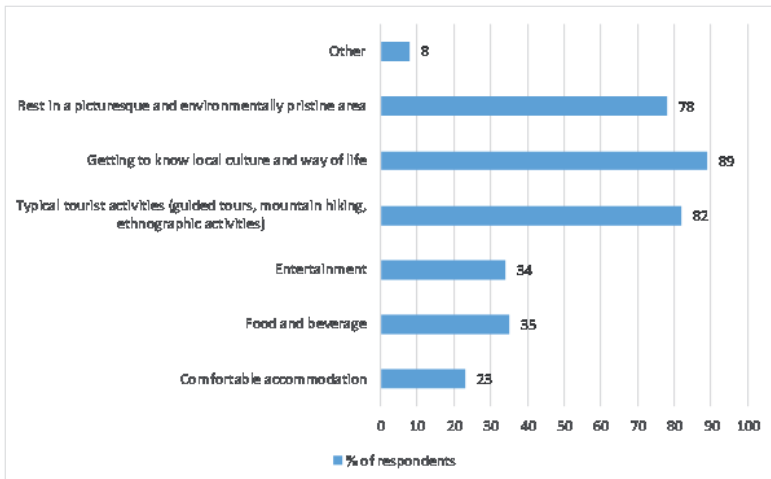


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents to questions about the most important services for them in rural homesteads  
 Source: [Zaburanna 2012, p. 8].

In recent years, a trend of having a rest in rural areas such as the Carpathian, Podillia-Dnister, Polissia, and Dnipro regions has been observed in Ukraine. At the stage of active development of the rural green tourism brand, there are more and more signs that testify to the formation of such brand value as loyalty. One of the features of this loyalty of tourists to specific homesteads is the fact that they return to (re-visit) the selected owners. This feature was typical of many Carpathian homesteads in the pre-war period and 1950–60s [Rutynskiy & Zinko 2006], which facilitated the formation of close relations between the owner and the regular tourist (guest). Now, these relations between the owner and the tourist are somewhat different and move more into the sphere of awareness-raising communications. The issue of forming an on-line community such as Friends of Rural Green Tourism, Friends of a Specific Agritourism Destination has now been raised. In social media, on the websites of marketing companies, tourists advertise their trips to the countryside, highlight the benefits of this type of tourism and make some practical remarks. Considerable opportunities for ensuring tourist loyalty to rural tourism are linked to the introduction of innovative forms, such as rural tourism clusters, gastronomic tours and heritage tours with accommodation in homesteads. They largely correspond to the educational, wellness and environmental motives of urban dwellers – the main target group of holidaymakers.

### **3. Factors and tools for the development of a national rural green tourism brand**

When studying a tourist brand, as well as its territorial positioning, it is important to clarify the main factors and tools that ensure its functioning [Dorofeyev 2011, pp. 99-113]. The important factors for the formation and functioning of the Ukrainian rural green tourism brand are described below: government and law, public sector support, information, communication. Each of these factors is characterized by its own set of tools that ensure the formation of national brand equity attributes.

In Ukraine, functioning of rural green tourism was supported and legalized in two basic laws: “On Tourism” (1995, as amended in 2005) and “On Personal Farming” (2003). In particular, the Law of Ukraine “On Personal Peasant Farming” provides for “provision of services on the use of personal peasant farm property, in particular in the field of rural tourism” [*Zakon Ukrainy...* 2003]. For almost a decade, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has been presented with targeted draft laws on rural green tourism in various forms: “On Rural

Green Tourism”, “On Rural and Green Tourism”, “On Agrarian Tourism”, “On Rural and Agrarian Tourism”. The latter legislative initiative was related to the amendment of the Law of Ukraine “On Personal Farming” on the development of rural green tourism (draft law 2529 dated July 4, 2013), which provided for voluntary certification and provision of “accommodation and food” services.

Tourist, environmental and cultural-ethnographic NGOs have played a significant role in promoting the national rural green tourism brand. The brand has been promoted for many years by the All-Ukrainian Union of Rural Green Tourism and its regional branches, using legislative and regulatory instruments and various information and communication tools. In turn, a number of non-governmental organizations hold educational campaigns for homeowners (seminars, trainings), arrange awareness-raising tours to study the experience of farmhouses operation, festivals and events involving rural green tourism providers and consumers.

Rural green tourism awareness-raising activities are rely on print publications (booklets, catalogues, guides, journals) and online resources maintained by state and local self-governments bodies, NGOs, information and marketing structures. Due to the large-scale awareness-raising campaigns, the image of this brand has become more recognizable by the consumers of tourist products, especially those in the cities, and the values became more tangible. An important role here was played by the Union’s publications: National Rural Green Tourism Journal, catalogues and advisories for the farmhouse owners, *etc.* At the same time, there is some promotion of the brand and its regional modifications through the use of communicative means. Own national fairs have been organized, participation in international and national tourist and agricultural fairs has been ensured. A significant number of thematic conferences and seminars have been held and participation in international and national grant programs for rural tourism and development has been ensured.

Targeted programs for improving the quality of services and the eco-labelling of homesteads were used as a basic tool in the formation of national and regional rural green tourism sub-brands. Since 2008, the All-Ukrainian Union of Rural Green Tourism has been implementing a voluntary categorization program “Ukrainian Guest House”. This program was developed on the basis of the program “Categorization of Homesteads in Ivano-Frankivsk Region” (Carpathian region). The main purpose of rural homesteads categorization is to increase and maintain the quality of the accommodation services provided, to maintain and mitigate the negative impact on the environment [Horishevckiy 2012a, pp. 16-17]. In the national categorization practice, four levels are used – basic, first, second and third. Each of the four categories

has a corresponding sign. Sign “Ukrainian Guest House” with the phrase in Ukrainian “Українська гостинна садиба” and in English “Ukrainian Guest House”, as well as a graphic symbol with a stylized image of a traditional Ukrainian house (Fig. 3). Below this image of the house, there are one, two or three flowers representing categories I, II and III, and the basic category has no flower. In early 2018, 210 homesteads in 21 regions were categorized in Ukraine, of which: 96 homesteads of the basic category, 38 homesteads of the 1st category, 41 homesteads of the 2nd category and 35 homesteads of the 3rd category [Spilka ... 2019].

In its turn, the Green House Eco-Labeling Program, aimed at providing environmentally friendly accommodation and conservation services, gives special status to homesteads and guarantees a safe and environmentally-friendly stay for tourists [Trylis 2012, pp. 37-38]. This program was implemented by the Union of Rural Green Tourism in 2004 using European experience in environmental certification. One of the goals of this program is to increase the popularity of rural green tourism among tourists by focusing on its environmental component.

Eco-labelling provides for three levels – first, second and third. In labelling practice, a special sign with the inscription “Green House” («Зелена садиба»), a graphic image of the homestead and green leaf and the designation of the level of environmentally-friendly homestead is used (Fig. 4). As of the early 2018, Green House Eco-Labeling Program was implemented for 49 homesteads in 7 regions, including: 45 eco-homesteads of the first level and 4 homesteads of the second level of environmental-friendliness [Spilka ... 2019].



Figure 3. Logo of the Program „Ukrainian Guest House”

Source: [Spilka ... 2019].





Figure 4. Logo of the Program „Green House”

Source: [Trylis 2012].

The two analyzed Union programs, with an appropriate information and graphic image, contributed to the creation of a logo for national rural tourism. A traditional Ukrainian house is in the centre of its graphic image. The Union promotional materials (booklets, fact sheets, tourism magazine „Rural Green Tourism”) use the sign of the program „Ukrainian Guest House”. Regarding the slogan (motto), in the last decade the most popular were: “Ukrainian Village Invites” (early 2000s) and “Feel the Taste of Rural Green Tourism - Have a Rest in the Ukrainian Village” (recent years) [Spilka ... 2019].

#### **4. Carpathian regional rural green tourism sub-brand: major achievements**

As Kotarski emphasizes [2018], a national tourism brand is the result of brands of certain regions and cities. In this respect, regional sub-brands, in particular the Carpathian one, had a significant impact on the RGT national brand.

The Carpathian region, covering 4 regions, accounts for about 2/3 of the existing farmsteads in Ukraine providing rural tourism services. The Carpathian rural green tourism sub-brand is well-recognized among consumers, and is popular because of the proper accommodation comfort, attractiveness of local cuisine and a wide range of activities – from mountain holidays to active (qualified) winter and summer activities [Malska *et al.* 2015]. The basic attributes of the Carpathian sub-market were formed through the successful cooperation of rural tourism entities, NGOs, state authorities and local self-government bodies, as well

as international grant programs (TACIS, PAUCI, cross-border cooperation and cooperation between individual states). Rural green tourism has been recognized as a priority in regional tourism development programs, thanks to the activity of NGOs, trainings or the owners and insight into the experience of neighbouring countries (Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary) are given. For the first time in the region, the categorization of homesteads by the quality of services and level of environmental-friendliness has been tested, awareness-raising and advertising activity on promotion of rural tourism offers has been well-organized.

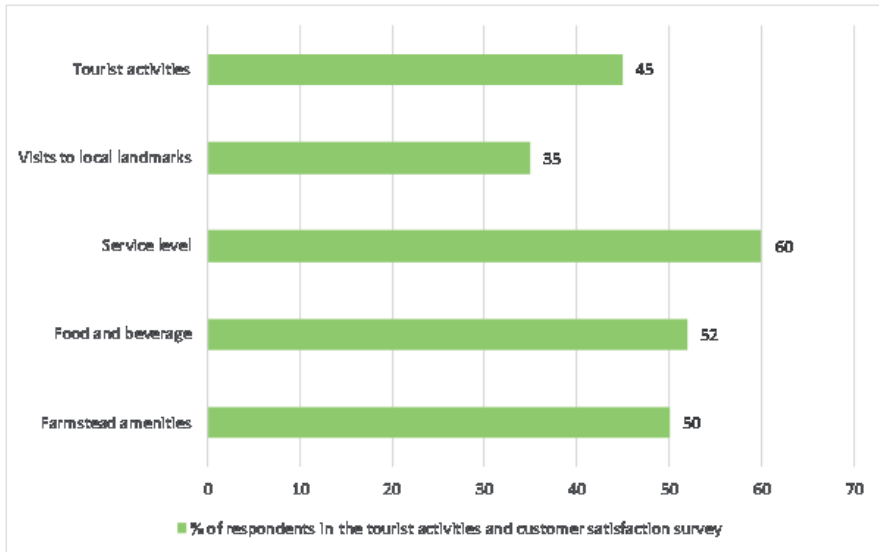


Figure 5. Results of (2005 and 2016) sociological surveys (conducted at different time points) of visitors to Carpathian rural areas about the choice of activities and satisfaction with services

Source: [Potencjal... 2005; Zinko *et al.* 2016, pp. 16-18].

Carpathian sub-brand awareness is ensured by the images of mountain landscapes, the authenticity of cultural heritage, advertised wellness and sports activities created by mass media and online resources, as well as trips to the region. Various sociological surveys of tourists in the Ukrainian Carpathians (2005 and 2014) showed that 30-40% of respondents visited certain natural, historical and cultural attractions, 40-50% engaged in active types of tourism (skiing, hiking) [Potencjal ... 2005; Zinko *et al.* 2016, pp. 16-18] (Fig. 5). More than 60% of the categorized homesteads under the Ukrainian Guest House Program and 75% of the homesteads under the Green House Program

are located in this region [*Spilka ... 2019*]. This contributes to the formation of a positive image of the Carpathian sub-brand in maintaining the quality of services provided. Multiple surveys of tourists in 2005 and 2014 confirm the high score of tourists' satisfaction with the accommodation conditions in the region (40–60%), the level of food (50–65% of respondents) and the service (more than 60%) [*Potencjal ... 2005; Zinko et al. 2016, pp. 16-18*].

In a 2014 sociological survey, tourists answered questions about where they came to know about rural tourism estates. Prevailing answers were: online resources (> 60%), printed materials (up to 10%), from acquaintances (about 20%) [*Zinko et al. 2016, pp. 16-18*]. In this region, there is active communication with potential clients, which provides further formation of the element of the Carpathian sub-brand awareness. According to various studies (2014 and 2019) on the number of advertised rural tourism entities on the Internet, there is a positive process of their growth over the last 5 years and the development of new channels of promotion of their services, in particular through social media (Table 1) [*Zinko & Levchuk 2019, p. 264*].

Table 1

Quantitative changes of the Carpathian region farmhouses advertised online for a 5-year period (2014-2019)

Region	2014	2019	Increase, number of farmhouses	Increase, %
Ivano-Frankivsk	590	998	408	69
Zakarpattia	172	458	286	166
Lviv	192	398	206	107
Chernivtsi	44	58	14	31

Source: [*Zinko, Levchuk 2019, p. 264*].

The same data from the sociological surveys of tourists confirm the attractive perception (loyalty) of the Carpathian rural green tourism sub-brand and capture the tourists' intentions to visit the place again. 20 to 30% of tourists say that they might visit the farmhouse again.

At the same time, we should note some problems that arise in the development of the Carpathian sub-brand. In particular, the support of local authorities is insufficient – a mere 40% of the heads of these bodies consider the development of rural tourism to be promising for their territory [*Kudla 2015*]. Initiatives are being introduced to develop regional categorization of

farmhouses [*Poriadok ... 2017*], which is not in line with the national program “Ukrainian Guest House”.

The Carpathian sub-brand, as the most formed and advanced one, identifies the main trends in the formation of the national brand. According to sociological surveys, its strong and attractive features in the minds of consumers are related to the clean environment, comfortable housing, unique regional cuisine, authenticity of cultural heritage and the offered wide range of recreational activities. The Carpathian regions have the highest consumer rankings and are characterized by the highest income among other regions in Ukraine [Kryziuk 2018]. Effective management of the Carpathian rural green tourism sub-brand at national and international levels is needed to ensure its strong position. It is important here to create partner structures that will define the sub-brand strategy and the sub-brand operator (business structure) that will ensure the sub-brand’s operation. This is the path that has now been chosen to promote the Carpathian interstate brand (Carpathian Brand) [*Marka Karpacka... 2018*].

## **5. Problems of the national rural green tourism brand functioning and management**

The analysis of the stages of becoming a national rural tourism brand and its regional sub-brands shows its growing popularity among users and competitiveness in the tourist services market. However, there are some challenges to further strengthening this brand, related to regulatory and legislative initiatives of central agricultural and tourism agencies and to ensuring that they are effectively managed. In recent years, the Ministry of Agro-Industrial Policy has provided considerable organizational and regulatory assistance to the development of rural tourism. In particular, an agricultural advisory service has been set up to provide advisory and information activities to the owners of the homesteads, to promote legislative initiatives to support the development of rural tourism as an ancillary activity, provided that the number of beds is not exceeded (less than 10 beds). At the same time, new legislative initiatives seek to change the name of the existing brand “rural green tourism” to “rural hospitality” (eliminating the element of commerciality associated with the term “tourism”) or “agrarian tourism” (unifying the name of rural tourism). In 2019, a draft law “On Rural Tourism and Agritourism” was developed, however, it lacks the concept of RGT among the main terms [*Projekt Zakonu... 2019*].

In turn, initiated by the Departments of Tourism and Resorts at the Ministry of Economy, amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Tourism” con-

sider rural tourism only as a form of leisure in the countryside [*Pro vnesennia zmin...* 2018]. It does not specify such basic functions as recreational, cognitive, environmental.

At present, the issue of managing the national brand and regional rural tourism sub-brands is pressing. Given the real situation with the brand's functioning and the factors that contributed to its formation, the most appropriate model of management could be the scheme proposed for the interstate brand Carpathia, with the following components: brand partners, brand operator, brand supplier. The functioning of this governance structure for the rural green tourism brand would be ensured by the involvement of state authorities, NGOs and rural tourism entities. In particular, the main partners of this national brand could be the Ministry of Agro-Industrial Policy, the Department of Tourism and Resorts, and the Union of Rural Green Tourism as a business association with the rights of the main owner of the brand. The function of the brand operator could be performed by the newly created structure – the National Marketing Centre for Rural Green Tourism at the Union. Rural tourism entities (homeowners) and rural recreation organizers will be the brand's suppliers.

At the same time, in recent years, there have been trends in moving away from Ukrainian visual brand standards (logo and motto) to creating their regional logos of the sub-brands that are not associated with the national brand. For example, in the Carpathian region (Ivano-Frankivsk Region), categorization by state and non-governmental organizations supported the return to the “fir-tree”-shaped logo of 5 years ago, depicting the categories of homesteads [*Poriadok ...* 2017]. In the national logo, the categories of homesteads are represented by a “flower”. Such “separatist” regional initiatives do not actively promote the all-Ukrainian rural green tourism brand, misleading the consumer about the quality of service. For the modern period of the national rural green tourism brand development, it is more relevant to develop specialized brands related to the basic forms of rural green tourism: recreation in the rural area and recreation at rural dweller's (agritourism). This is the path followed by the Polish national rural tourism brand in its development [*Kategoryzacja ...* 2014, pp. 28-40].

## Conclusions

Over twenty years of history of the national Ukrainian rural green tourism brand testified to the strengthening of its value for consumers through

purposeful organizational, information, advertising and practical activity of the rural tourism entities in the stages of its introduction (mid 1990s – early 2000s), formation (2008-2015) and active development (2016 – to date). The conducted studies on the phased formation of the national rural green tourism brand showed that the main role was played by such factors as state-legal, public, information and communication support. Important brand formation tools include: a wide range of information and communication tools, programs for categorization and certification of quality and environmental friendliness, active support for rural tourism entities – owners of homesteads. The peculiarity of this brand formation was the gradual expansion of its range of values (from brand awareness through evaluation of its quality and benefits to the formation of an effective loyalty policy).

Recent years' statistics and multiple sociological surveys of tourists at the national and regional level indicate a good awareness of rural tourism offers, satisfaction with the quality of service and a tendency to visit the countryside again. It can be argued that the national brand has become entrenched as the set of values in the environment of rural tourism entities, as well as real and potential participants in rural recreation.

The positioning of the national rural green tourism brand at the international level is becoming relevant in this period. In the national "Tourism and Resort Development Strategy until 2026", the issue of promotion of Ukrainian tourist products and tourist brands on the international market was recognized as a priority. In this regard, the promotion of the national rural green tourism brand should be focused on potential consumers from the countries bordering on Ukraine: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Belarus. In these countries, many tourists have some experience in staying in the Ukrainian countryside and have developed a range of brand values. Therefore, using a variety of marketing technologies (information visits, all-Ukrainian and regional portals, participation in tourist fairs of neighbouring countries), it is possible to significantly promote this brand.

In a practical context, the following measures will facilitate the promotion of the brand in the short term: expanding the offer of products and services for domestic and foreign tourists, specializing in services for tourists traveling by bicycle/motorcycle, anglers, SPA or gastronomic tourism, comfortable recreation for people with disabilities. In practice, holiday or off-season promotions and offers (discounts, animation events) should be used more extensively, and partnerships with tourism-focused NGOs and protected areas should be expanded.

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