

TOURISM AS A PRIORITY VECTOR OF HUMANITARIAN COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

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At present humanitarian cooperation and integration processes are confronting with new risks and challenges, and a search for real ways to overcome them is an important objective dictated by the current moment. International tourism ensures social and cultural development, increases solidity and stability of international and inter-cultural communications, promotes mutual understanding and often catalyzes business relations between countries. The international tourism development within the CIS member states can be supported by a host of factors, such as absence of visa regimes between several CIS member states, absence of a language barrier, and friendly or even familial ties between citizens of our respective countries. Meanwhile, development of tourism in CIS member states faces a host of common negative trends and, first of all, insufficient development of domestic tourism, which to a large extent is determined by low level of investments in the tourist industry, and, as a result, by low level of development of the tourist infrastructure and weak promotion of national tourist products. In current global competitive environment where competition expands and intensifies, it is essential for any CIS member states to build its tourist infrastructure.

Key words: humanitarian cooperation, integration, tourism, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), cultural development, tourist flow

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Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, documents were signed to establish the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Since then, the CIS has been functioning amidst a complicated environment qualified by geopolitical and geo-economic challenges, disparate social and economic development of member nations. Today, we can speak about heterogeneous integration processes in the countries of the post-Soviet space within the framework of the CIS, Customs Union (CU), Single Economic Space (SES), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

At present, the post-Soviet space integration processes are confronting with new risks and challenges, and a search for real ways to overcome them is an important objective dictated by the current moment. To a large extent, integration-related issues so much spoken of late are of political and economic nature. Amidst instability of political and economic systems, humanitarian cooperation can be the foundation of promoting the positive vector of integration.

Which areas of humanitarian cooperation can be perceived as sufficiently effective for the implementation of the tasks at hand? A list of humanitarian cooperation vectors is large, and every one of them is quite interesting and has its prospects. Among those, there is cooperation in the area of culture, information exchange, science, education, healthcare, youth movements, sports and tourism. Indeed, tourism is an area that is largely linked to virtually all sectors of humanitarian cooperation.

The prerequisites and issues of tourism development within the CIS.

According to an accepted definition, tourism is understood as an activity of individuals who travel and stay in locations situated outside of their habitual environment, for a period of time not exceeding one straight year, with the purpose of taking a vacation, going on business and for other reasons.

For the past few years, academic works and publications of specialists cite the tourist and hospitality industry among sectors that can play a positive role in the development of nearly every country, in addressing a number of its social and economic problems.

Inbound tourism makes a positive impact on a host country's economy [5]. In particular, inbound tourism fosters economic growth of a host country, because it opens up new opportunities for business development in the tourist and hospitality industry, enlarges employment by creating new jobs, including those for qualified specialists. Simultaneously, the tourist industry is closely connected to almost all sectors of economy (construction, food and consumer industry, transport, etc.), and, consequently, effects from tourism development spill over to other sectors of economy. Expansion of the hospitality industry not only ensures inflow of investments, but also incentivizes development of a whole number of hi-tech sectors (including the Internet, telecom, etc.). And Russia's economy is no exception.

Development of tourism promotes development of a country's infrastructure (roads, sea ports, airports, etc.), which will subsequently be used not only by tourists, but also by locals.

Expansion of inbound flows stimulates inflow of foreign currency, both through the purchase of tourist products and everyday expenses made by tourists (meals, accommodation, sightseeing, buying guidebooks, souvenirs, etc.)

From the standpoint of preserving national identity, tourism produces positive impact on a country's culture and traditions, revival of local customs, popular arts. Development of event tourism boosts development of creative sectors, invigorates cultural life, and items of folk crafts are often included in expanded tourist products.

On the other hand, development of integration processes is directly related to an increase in tourist flows [6]. However, within the CIS this vector has remained underappreciated so far.

Finally, issues in the political and social areas that have been observed over the past few years, instability of global economy and a declining demand for a number of goods and services, and also shifts in the structure of personal consumption aggravate competition in the tourist and hospitality markets as well, and in a noticeable way. This causes the need to design and use new strategies to ensure competitiveness of businesses operating in that industry and, simultaneously, to study international practices and experiences in the use of those strategies, for the purpose of their possible adaptation and subsequent application.

It is no secret that there are a lot of countries across the globe where the tourist industry is a most important sector of national economy — a sector that helps pull economy out of a crisis.

According to data of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is one of the most dynamically evolving sectors of economy; it is estimated to account for up to 10% of the global GDP, and one out of every 11 jobs worldwide is kept around thanks to tourism [12]. (In island nations with emerging economies, tourism can sometimes account for more than 50% of the GDP. In the Russian Federation, tourism currently accounts for 1.5% of the GDP.

At the same time, across CIS member states, those figures are much lower. Today, analyzing the condition of the tourist and hospitality industry in CIS countries, one can say that the sector is underdeveloped there, although there are obvious prerequisites for its

development on the domestic level.

Simultaneously, development of international tourism within the CIS can be supported by a host of factors, such as absence of visa regimes between several countries of the CIS, absence of a language barrier, and friendly or even familial ties between citizens of our respective countries.

To evaluate in accurate figures the economic effect generated by tourism is impossible, because the effect brought about by the development of the tourist sector has a multiplication character, as it affects many industries of national economy – transport, catering, publishing; certainly, the hospitality system gets encouragement in the growth of hotels, hostels, etc.

The most important thing is that within the CIS, development of tourism ensures social and cultural development, increases solidity and stability of international and inter-cultural communications, promotes mutual understanding and often catalyzes business relations between countries.

In the CIS member states, there are many interesting cultural, historical and natural attractions that can form the basis for the broad development of tourism and increase tourist flows between the countries.

Therefore, in today's global competitive environment where competition expands and intensifies, it is essential for any CIS member states to build its tourist infrastructure, in order to attract tourists and to incentivize their willingness to come back and recommend visiting the country to other people.

The current situation in tourism in CIS member countries

Identifying tourism as one of the vectors of development of humanitarian cooperation, which ultimately contributes to integrative rapprochement of countries, implies development of various kinds of tourism (for recreation, sports, culture, business, etc.). Moreover, it is closely linked to and, consequently, gives an impetus to the development of creative industries, studying of languages of CIS member countries, including the Russian language, implementation of educational projects, and projects in culture, science, etc.

Analyzing the Russian tourist flows [4] showed that about 27 mln visitors for tourism purposes from foreign countries came to Russia (including in January-June 12 mln visitors) in 2015, but the tourist flow from Russia foreign countries - 35 mln tourists during this period (including in January-June 15 mln tourists). We can see a predominance of tourist flows from the country

On the other hand, it can be seen uneven distribution of tourist flows between countries. The top positions in rating Among the main tourist flows to Russia from CIS have been Ukraine (8.9 mln) and Kazakhstan (4.7 mln). For comparison, the maximum number of visitors from other countries (outside the CIS) Poland (1.7 mln), Finland (1.4 mln), China (1,1 mln) (tabl.1).

Tabl.1. Tourist flows to Russian Federation rating, thousand visitors

Position	Country	January - June 2015	January - December 2015
<i>To Russian Federation from CIS (1-10)</i>			
1.	Ukraine	3 753	8 912
2.	Kazakhstan	2 356	4 711
3.	Azerbaijan	373	856
4.	Uzbekistan	362	797
5.	Armenia	228	552
6.	The Republic	203	491

	Greece	213	634
	Cyprus	210	550
	United Arab Emirates	244	472
	Bulgaria	147	413
	France	192	408
	Czech Republic	176	361
	Vietnam	152	321
	Latvia	143	312
	Israel	156	299

Source: created by the author in accordance with [4]

Analysis showed the dynamics of tourist flows is changing every year. However, the overall trend remains unchanged.

To build a competitive tourist product and to improve its quality, new interregional nationwide traveling routes and packaged tours were designed in 2015.

The 2016 data of the Association of Travel Operators of Russia (ATOR) [1] reveal a 6% decline in the number of international travelers, which is lower than in the previous year. In 2015, according to data of the Federal Agency for Tourism (Rosturism, or Russia Tourism), international travels equaled 34.39 million (a decline by 19.9%).

The growing currency exchange rates and affordable prices of offerings (in 2016, the average price of a tour across Russia was 10,000 rubles per person, and to CIS countries, 15,000+ rubles [2] boosted tourists' interest in taking vacations in CIS countries, among which the most popular destinations were Georgia, Armenia, Belarus and Uzbekistan. For instance, from January to September 2016, the number of tourists who travelled from Russia to Georgia climbed by 17.6% (to 595,000 people).

In 2016, St. Petersburg saw 6.9 million visitors, or 6% more than in 2015 [3]. According to available data, in 2016, more than 200,000 visits to tourist information centers were recorded, which means a 17% rise in year-on-year terms.

In Kazakhstan, one important vector in the development of the tourist sector is water-based tourism. Winter recreational tourism also shows active involvement. One example is the Shymbulak mountain ski resort situated 25 km from Almaty. Snow there can be found from November to May, and sunny weather occurs more than 300 days a year. For now, the resort hotel can accommodate simultaneously a little more than 100 tourists [10].

Meanwhile, development of tourism in CIS nations faces a host of common negative trends and, first of all, insufficient development of domestic tourism, which to a large extent is determined by low level of investments in the tourist industry, and, as a result, by low level of development of the tourist infrastructure and weak promotion of national tourist products.

The tensions between Russia and Ukraine, and complications faced by Russian citizens crossing the Russian-Ukrainian border were among the negative factors. At the same time, they influenced the change of the transfer structure, with air passenger volumes between Moscow and Chisinau climbing significantly [11].

Tourism management in the CIS. In the area of international interaction between CIS member nations, the CIS Council for Tourism operates, which was set up in accordance with the Resolution of the Council of Heads of Governments of CIS Member Nations in September 1994. The activities of that Council used to be governed by the Regulation on the Council for Tourism of the Member Nations of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Tourism (1994), and also by the Agreement on Cooperation in the Area of Tourism itself (1993).

Later, the Council underwent a series of modifications, which helped improve

coordination of the cooperation of the Commonwealth States in the area of tourism. In addition, new instruments on development of tourism have been signed, and, among other matters, they covered international tourism; other documents were signed within the framework of the CIS.

According to the adopted resolutions, the CIS Council for Tourism gives great attention to elaboration of a common strategy of tourism development, mutual approval of the main guidelines of the implementation of tourism policies, creation of a joint competitive tourist product and its efficient promotion in the international market.

The Strategy of Development of Cooperation of CIS States in Tourism through to 2020 adopted in 2013 defines the key missions of the governments in tourism [9]. Those missions include:

- harmonization of existing legislative rules with due account of common approaches to the development of tourism in the territories of the CIS member nations within the context of provisions of international documents; development of regulatory provisions with due account of changing conditions and principles of tourist business and activities across the CIS space;

- development of cooperation in matters related to protection of rights and interests of tourists through the coordination of activities of CIS member nations in providing safety and security to tourists;

- harmonization of approaches to the introduction of a mutually agreed system of quality standards applicable to the provision of tourist services;

- expansion of opportunities for the use of electronic and printed media, and the potential of exhibition business services for the promotion of tourist products in the internal and international markets;

- working out common approaches to personnel training for the tourist sector in CIS member nations, and building proposals for its development with an emphasis on practice-oriented forms of training.

The Year of Tourism declared in 2014 became an important factor in terms of a deeper integrational interaction of CIS countries and more active promotion of tourist products of various countries across CIS markets. In 2014, that event boosted the growth of the tourist and hospitality industry to a certain extent, helped increase mutual tourist flows, and resulted in proposals of tourist products based on new tourist routes.

Within the framework of the declared Year of Tourism, the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations [7] released a list of the most important sights, which ultimately heightened interest in tourism within the CIS.

The most frequently visited countries are Russia, Belarus and Armenia. In Belarus, Moldova, Central Asian and Transcaucasian countries, positive shifts have been observed that resulted in increased funding for the resort and tourist infrastructure.

At present, the Plan of Measures for 2015–2017 is still being carried out; it is based on the Strategy of Development of Cooperation in the Area of Tourism and was adopted at the Ashgabat meeting of the Council of CIS Heads of Governments [7].

All that creates additional opportunities for expanding tourist flows between CIS countries, mitigating downward the challenges in that area.

National tourism policies of CIS member nations

National tourism policies of CIS member nations differ. Those differences are influenced by the perception of tourism at the government level.

Relatively good indicators in the area of mutual tourist exchange are displayed by Russia and Armenia [6]. According to official statistics, the number of tourists who have visited Armenia is increasingly on the rise [8]. To a large extent, the process was encouraged

by the signing of a program of joint activities for 2014–2016 between the Russian Federal Agency for Tourism and Armenia's Economic Ministry. The Russian-Armenian program of joint activities for 2014–2016 stresses the importance of increasing tourist flows from Russia to Armenia and of promoting cooperation in tourism.

Conclusion. What kind of future tourist flows development between CIS countries.

Identifying tourism as a vector of development of humanitarian cooperation, which will ultimately be contributing to the rapprochement between countries, implies the following:

- assistance in raising the quality of tourist services and products;
- diversification of tourist products;
- combining different types of tourism (recreational and eco-tourism, sport-, culture-, business-, beach-, ski-, adventure-, event-related tourism, etc.);
- development of creative industries and event-based tourism;
- study of languages of CIS countries, including the Russian language;
- implementation of various educational projects in the area of tourism and hospitality;
- development of budget tourism among young people.

It is believed that within the CIS one important vector of humanitarian cooperation in the area of tourism is building a common tourist space, which requires improvement of the monitoring and further unification, so far as international tourism is concerned, of legal and regulatory framework governing different aspects of tourist activities (safety and security matters, activities of informational entities, including ways of enhancing informative capacity of the web space, etc.)

Let us note in brackets that in Russia Rosturism has created the web portal Russiatravel. It functions and helps promote the country and its tourist opportunities. At the same time, the portal must not be an information center but should rather be focused on both members of the professional community and "untrained" users.

Currently, it is essential to roll out programs to expand use of IT in tourist and hospitality businesses operating on new platforms and applying innovative technology.

Effective instruments include:

- use of different types of communications, organizing international tourist trade fairs in CIS countries, building and promoting tourist brands across the CIS, its regions and territories;
- market research, studies of consumer demand and tourist loyalty to certain traveling destinations that grows after a visit there; those will help adjust the content of the tourist product, and terms of its sale and distribution;
- expansion of tourist and hospitality industry markets, for instance, through social programs (tourism for senior citizens).

Sticking to these and other vectors of development of humanitarian cooperation, in particular in the tourist and hospitality industry, using IT, socio-cultural, historical, communication and other factors, it is possible to ensure stability of friendly relations between CIS member nations and development of integration processes within the EAEU.

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