

SOCIAL TOURISM

A Russian Dimension

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce chapitre, qui s'appuie sur des données émanant de l'Organisation mondiale du tourisme (OMT), présente une évaluation du potentiel touristique de la Russie, dans un contexte marqué par l'adoption et la mise en oeuvre du programme fédéral visant à développer le tourisme intérieur et le tourisme réceptif dans la fédération russe pour la période 2011-2018, à la veille des Jeux olympiques d'hiver de 2014 à Sotchi et de la Coupe du monde de football en 2018. Or, pour atteindre le nombre de 70 millions de touristes en 2020, les efforts à consentir à la promotion du tourisme social chez les jeunes, les seniors et les personnes handicapées sont considérables.

L'auteur estime que le tourisme social en Russie a ses traditions historiques, mais que, du fait des conditions qui régissent à cette étape du développement économique moderne du pays et compte tenu des tendances mondiales, ces traditions mériteraient d'être repensées. À cet égard, la Russie fait de plus en plus souvent appel à l'expérience acquise dans les pays européens, ce qui conditionne son intérêt à coopérer avec l'OMT et l'Organisation internationale du tourisme social (OITS) et à participer au travail de ces dernières.

Si la Russie partage fondamentalement le point de vue des Européens sur le système de tourisme social et son développement, elle présente à cet égard certaines particularités. Tout d'abord, l'échelle de cet immense pays nécessite une approche systémique, ce que pourrait favoriser l'adoption d'un certain nombre d'actes réglementaires. Autre avenue prometteuse, l'ajout d'un statut transfrontalier au tourisme social, fondé sur les relations horizontales entre les pays. Or, il est surtout nécessaire de créer des infrastructures de tourisme social à l'intérieur du pays, particulièrement à l'intention des voyageurs handicapés.

Il demeure que toutes les conditions sont réunies pour favoriser le développement du tourisme social en Russie. De manière générale, les conditions économiques y sont plus favorables que dans la plupart des pays européens. La croissance des niveaux de revenu au sein de la population permet aux entreprises et aux organismes d'offrir un important soutien social aux employés qui en ont besoin. Par ailleurs, les prestations sociales versées aux citoyens défavorisés et l'aide sociale sont en hausse, un lien qui incite à poser la question suivante: comment amener ces citoyens à dépenser plus d'argent pour se reposer et voyager?

Les touristes russes préfèrent visiter l'Europe, puisqu'il est si simple et pratique pour eux de s'y rendre. La Russie et les pays de l'UE se rapprocheront beaucoup, culturellement et socialement, s'ils conçoivent ensemble des projets de tourisme social visant des intérêts communs.

INTRODUCTION

A hard task falls to the lot of the author writing about Russia. The scale of this country, its role in the world development, the thousand-year history and the constant involvement in political processes defining the destinies of many nations of the world, its extensive territory located at the joint of Europe and Asia, its enormous cultural heritage, its multilingual population numbering 193 ethnoses, the revolutionary and frequently violent character of its social transformations, all these facts and many other things make Russia a unique fragment of modern civilization, defining its essential place in the global progress of humankind.

The country we live and work in, the Russian Federation, is a very young state with a long history, and this circumstance stipulates the specific features of many processes, which essence is sometimes difficult to understand for our foreign friends.

The state that emerged a bit over two decades ago became an official successor of the disintegrated Soviet Union; but it also absorbed and preserved the heritage of the Russian Empire, the tsars, and, before that, princely Russia. Hereby, if in the first case this succession is mainly meant in legal terms, further it rather concerns spiritual, moral, and ethical norms based on the doctrine of the Orthodox Christian religion.

A major turn from socialism, where the state has a leading role as a driver of the social and economic development, to the dominance of the liberal doctrine and the progressive disengagement of the state it entails, has been happening in our country for the last 20 years.

Since the process of forming the new social-political regime, a process dubbed "transitory" due to its indistinctness and eclecticism, is incomplete and contradictory, both the concepts of the Soviet period and the innovative slogans that have not yet received any practical application co-exist in the consciousness of the citizens of Russia.

Thus, for example, the Constitution in force declares Russia a "social state," and humans the "superior value," but the responsibility of the state and its leaders for giving life to these declarations remains ineffective (Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, 2013).

Changes in the economic model where the state used to act as a warrant of the social gains obtained by the working class and the entire population as well as subsequent reforms led to a situation where services in different spheres such as housing construction, healthcare, education, sports, and leisure, which had been free or preferential before, became paid to a greater extent.

Similar changes can be traced in lawmaking. The right to leisure is embedded in the Constitution: "Everyone has a right to rest. The working hours, days off and holidays, and annual paid vacation established by federal law are guaranteed to any person working under the employment contract." But this right has not received due record and development in Russia's federal laws, first of all from the point of assurance of affordability of leisure, where it turns into an asset reserved for the elite population strata.

The federal law "on fundamentals of tourist activity in the Russian Federation" contains a definition of social tourism: "a form of tourism completely or partially funded by budgetary funds, state extra-budgetary funds (including funds allocated within the state social aid), and employers funds," and a reference to its basic concepts—"the priority areas of state regulation of the touristic activity are support and development of the domestic, entry, social, and amateur tourism," but suggests no implementation mechanism for these priorities.

1. SOCIAL POLICY AND TOURISM IN RUSSIA

It must be recognized that in recent years the Russian Federation policy has been more and more oriented towards the social sphere, which presupposes land allocations for establishing and developing social tourism in the country. The Russian Federation's recently adopted 2013-2015 budget provides for allocation of 29% of state spending for the pursuance of social policy, apart from the development of the healthcare system, physical education, and sports. In 2013, 130 billion dollars are allocated for these purposes from the budget (Open Budget, 2013).

Significant funds are earmarked for social programs in local budgets. For example, in Moscow, about half of the city budget is allocated to social support of the population. The target program "Development of the tourism and leisure industry" provides 4 billion dollars for the period 2012-2016 (Open Budget, 2013). Subprograms operate within it to support families with children (large families in particular), for the social support of the elder generation, including veterans of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), veterans of military actions and their family members, modernization and development of the city population's social protection system, social integration of disabled persons, and creating barrier-free environments for disabled persons and other low-mobility population groups (FCP, 2011).

Being the state with the largest territory in the world, contemporary Russia has very high prospects in the field of tourism. As it was defined by Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), it is a country which is developing in the tourism sector for it has high recreational potential. Russia has something to show both to its citizens and to foreign guests: unique natural and recreational resources, objects of national and global cultural and historic heritage are concentrated on its territory.

However, due to a number of objective socioeconomic reasons, tourism, so far, has taken quite a modest place in its economy, accounting for about 3.5% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Not so many foreign guests come—about 2.3 million people in 2012. According to 2012 official statistics, a little over 33 million people took part in domestic tourism. As a result Russia ranked just 59th of 139 states in the global competitiveness rating of countries in the tourism sector. However, according to WTO estimates, our country has the potential to receive up to 70 million Russian and foreign tourists annually.

Despite the wealth of potential for tourism development, there are still regions where tourism development is not currently feasible. The reasons include insufficiently developed infrastructures, low investment levels, undeveloped transport networks, deficit of qualified personnel, low quality of provided services, an insufficiently effective promotion of the touristic product, unsettled land issues, and excessive administrative formalities.

The current Russian political leadership, seriously concerned about the solution to these problems, has recently prioritized the development of tourism. The Federal "Domestic and inbound tourism development in the Russian Federation" target program for 2011-2018 has been adopted. This program provides for the allocation of significant funds, about 10 billion euros, for the development of tourist destinations and tourist infrastructure (Coral Travel, 2013).

However, increasing quantitative indicators are only one aspect of the case. The Russian public, managers, and experts of different levels firmly believe that these figures for inbound tourism, as well as significant growth in domestic tourism, cannot be achieved without the comprehensive development of social tourism.

Indeed, in contemporary Russia, social tourism has its own historical traditions. In the Soviet Union there was a well-organized system of state support to provide services and infrastructure for the recreation of the working population. This provision encompassed services and facilities that are largely similar to current conceptions of social tourism as defined by the ISTO, although the term "social tourism" as such was not used.

Now, people of the older and middle generations recollect that in Soviet times, by law, every citizen had the right to work and benefit of holidays. This was mainly carried out through a network of trade unions, youth organizations and the Intourist All-Union Joint Stock Company. Thus the state provided the majority of workers and retirees the opportunity, at least once a year,

to go relax at a resort, sanatorium, or guest house on favourable terms. At that time, nearly half of the working population was traveling and vacationing with tourist vouchers, issued on preferential terms or free of charge at the expense of trade unions, state social insurance, or state-owned travel companies.

The main provider was called the Central Council for Tourism and Recreation (OJSC), which at that time had an annual turnover of up to US\$5 billion in current dollars and annually provided services to more than 50 million people. It was the world's largest single tourism organization, which focused on social tourism, but operated on principles of complete self-sufficiency and development.

2. CURRENT ISSUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL TOURISM IN RUSSIA

The current situation in Russia is quite different from the Soviet one. According to Victor Pugiev, President of the OJSC, only 15% of Russian citizens have the opportunity to travel and rest during the holidays, and not even all of the middle class have a fully enjoyable time during vacations. This is largely because of the market relations that come into play, in which the integrated system of social tourism is not established at the state level, but at a corporate and regional level.

First of all, companies or employers, based on their rules, give their employees discounts on leisure time in their own holiday resorts or at those tour operators with whom they have concluded agreements. This is indeed corporate social support developing like individual islands.

Secondly, regional social programs are implemented to support the local populations who, for various reasons, cannot participate in leisure and holiday activities.

Recently, the country has been increasingly turning to the experience gained by the European countries. In this regard, the Russian government is highly interested in cooperating with the WTO and ISTO, as well as in participating in their work.

It is important to emphasize a few important points: unlike the Soviet period, many Russians wish social tourism to become cross-border, not to be confined only to the domestic market of tourist services. Russian citizens wish to travel abroad within the social tourism network and also want foreigners to come to them, including persons with disabilities, to ensure the development of closer international ties.

Second, we strive to create a social tourism system which requires a corresponding federal program that takes into account the world's experience as well as our own and which focuses on supporting people with disabilities.

Third, creating or re-creating the social tourism system will require efforts not only on the part of executive power, but on behalf of legislative authority as well, since laws must clearly define the employers' rights, responsibilities, and benefits related to social support to needy people and people with modest incomes, as well as education of tourist staff and teachers.

Russia has every opportunity to develop social tourism. The economy is now in a better position than that of most European countries, which increases the level of personal income and gives companies and institutions the possibility to provide more social support to workers who are in need of it. Welfare payments to low-income citizens and their social support are increasing, and now the question arises as how to encourage them to spend more money on recreation and treatment. After all, the duration of the citizens' active participation in the labour force depends on it.

In Moscow, which is the largest metropolitan area in Europe with about 12 million people, nearly half the city's budget goes to support socially vulnerable people. A part of these social funds support tourism activities, such as trips to other cities, sightseeing, and stays in holiday resorts.

Moreover, the Russian regions are now developing their work in support of tourism individually. They have their own leaders. For example, in the North Caucasus Stavropol Territory, the social tourism sphere involves 220 organizations and recreation centres. Bashkortostan, one of the largest republics, introduced a system of discounts (up to 70% of the cost of vouchers) on the vacations of pensioners and persons with disabilities.

Some universities in the country offer courses on social tourism. The Russian International Academy of Tourism (RIAT) acted as the initiator and driving force to promote the ideas of social tourism in Russian society. Over the last two years, representatives of the RIAT published papers in the national press on conceptual materials to validate social tourism as a positive social phenomenon. The Calypso program is studied by students and the introduction of a special course on "Fundamentals of social tourism" is under consideration.

Over the last year we carried out research and published two training aids: "Barrier-free tourism in Moscow," regarding the tourist services for disabled and low-mobility population, and "Excursions in Moscow." These are important researches since in the whole country there are nearly 500,000 residents in wheelchairs. The RIAT has successfully raised the issue of tourism development in the core structures of the legislative and executive branches.

Today, the number of tourist organizations interacting with international institutions which deal with social support to population is increasing. The first All-Russian Forum on social tourism was held in Bashkortostan in December 2011. It brought together international experts, including the president of the International Organization of Tourism and a large number of Russian and local tour operators.

However, the introduction of social support for recreation of citizens in Russia should become a systemic practice. Simple calculations show that the development of affordable social tourism as a system would bring the contribution of tourism to GDP up to 10%, and the number of Russian holidaymakers and foreign tourists up to 70 million people per year, which will contribute to an overall improvement of the Russian nation and of the guests who come to us for the holidays.

CONCLUSION

The above study makes it clear that Russia has all the prerequisites to join the European and global social tourism system, which could give the industry a brand new dimension. To that, at least four considerations should play a role.

The first relates to the Russian domestic tourism as a developing category. The Russian Federation, according to WTO experts, is among the five countries with the greatest tourism potential, but many of our citizens prefer to travel abroad on holidays and are still reluctant to travel around the country. Now, it is important to make considerable efforts to expand the tourist flows into the country, primarily by providing access to tourist recreation for all people, especially for families, youths, and elderly and disabled people. The development of domestic social tourism will allow us to develop the inbound social tourism.

Secondly, Russia has participated in ISTO's activities almost from its inception, first through the OJSC, then through the RIAT. But if European countries where tourism is developed

have several representatives working in the international organization, only one is from Russia as of this writing. In other words, Russian tourist structures should work more actively on this front.

The third circumstance lies in the fact that the country's economic growth, though somewhat slowed after the outbreak of the financial crisis, allows the public and private entities to feel stable enough to plan their social policies. A growing number of employers include among the benefits of the new policies the presence of an extensive social package, which also includes subsidies for holidays and trips to Russian resorts with which they have concluded agreements. It seems very important to us to unite the Russian social projects with projects of all the states working with the ISTO.

The fourth argument concerns the fact that to develop social tourism it is necessary to increase investment in Russian tourist infrastructures. For example, travelers with disabilities need special equipment in airports, staircases, elevators, restrooms, and so on, a requirement that has been ignored so far. But for these people traveling is not less, but rather much more important in life, both as a means of communication and as a way of understanding the world around them. There are so many foreigners with disabilities who wish to visit our country as part of social programs, visit our tourist sites, or undergo treatments. But technically, we cannot receive them; neither our hotels, nor our transportation or catering facilities are ready for this. Others do not travel for financial reasons.

The simplest calculations show that the economic effect from the arrival of such foreigners will be more than that from the arrival of present tourists who have no social discounts.

Recently, certain positive changes in Russia's international activities have given hope for progress in cooperation with European countries and ISTO members. In addition to the high-level international exchange of experts, educational programs are coordinated. In this respect, the RIAT implements joint educational programs with leading universities in several European countries; it has student exchange programs and issues diplomas on the European model.

Such an approach should not mean giving up our own heritage and experience in supporting the socially vulnerable people's rights to leisure. It is a matter of creating qualitatively different conditions for social tourism.

Finally, Europe is the closest foreign territory for us; it is more comfortable and much easier to travel there. We shall become culturally and socially closer to it if we jointly develop social tourism projects. And this cooperation will contribute to improving the quality of life, health, and duration of the participation in the labour force of both Russian and European citizens.

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