

The Tourist Image of Russia in Europe

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ABSTRACT: The research object in the present work is the current tourist image of Russia in the international tourism market, especially in France. Unfortunately, recently many French people have a negative view of Russia, which does not contribute to increasing the flow of French tourists to the country. For various reasons, there is a certain lack of positive information about Russia in the world, while the restrictive political and economic measures imposed on Russia by the European Union, the United States, and other countries contribute to the formation of hardly the worst image of the country. The article analyzes the tourism potential of Russia, considers strategic directions for the inbound tourism development in the Russian Federation (RF), and examines ways that could contribute to the creation of the image of Russia as a country favorable for inbound tourism, and generate positive feelings towards Russians. The authors conclude that a positive image of Russia abroad can be created by solving existing socio-economic problems in the country, developing a competitive tourist industry in Russia, capable to meet the needs of sophisticated and demanding European consumers, rather than by agitation and propaganda calls. It is necessary to promote Russian tourism products not only through global events, such as the Olympics and World Championships, but also through the involvement of businesses and public organizations in this process, because the rich cultural heritage, unique geographical location between the West and the East, and natural diversity advance Russia to a prominent place in the world ranking of countries with potential tourism growth.

Keywords: inbound tourism, the tourist image of Russia, the French tourists.

INTRODUCTION

People like to travel, discover a new culture, customs, and traditions, as well as meet new people. Often this becomes a necessity for them. These days, the role and importance of tourism to meet the needs of the individual, the mutual enrichment of social ties between countries, the economic development of the countries cannot be overestimated. In today's world, it is very important to be able to travel, but often the freedom to travel depends on many factors, including the economy and geopolitics.

The emergence of tourism on the vast territory of Russia goes back to ancient times and the middle ages. The geographical location of Russia, situated in the center of the intersection of trade routes between the West and the East, since ancient times has provided stable international relations which served the basis for various types of contacts. With the adoption of Christianity in Russia, these contacts were further

strengthened by church representatives coming from Byzantium, book scribes, translators, etc., contributing to the extension of commercial ties. Merchants from Russia had their trading rows in various countries, including France.

Thus, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and France has recently turned three hundred years old. In the early 18th century, more specifically in 1717, the first Russian Ambassador to France handed over his credentials, signed by Peter the Great. In honor of this significant date, a large exhibition was opened in 2017 in the majestic Versailles in the presence of the Presidents of the two countries, V. Putin and E. Macron.

The exhibition, opened to the public at the Palace of Versailles, organized by the State Hermitage and the state administration of the Palace, Museum and National Estate of Versailles, allowed not only seeing beautiful and interesting things of a distant era but also reflecting what exactly attracted Peter the Great to France, what is the heritage of this visit in the mentality of Russian-French relations, and what of this heritage is alive today. In his address to the visitors of the exhibition, the Director of the State Hermitage, M. Piotrovsky noted that this exhibition, dedicated to the Petrine era, "will help to better understand the past and present of Russia". It will tell about the desire of the creator of the new Russia "to build the future together with Europe and together with France, in which he saw an ally" (Kuznetsov, 2010: 56).

It is probably safe to say that exactly since then, the first half of the 18th century, tourism between these two countries started developing. And so far, France remains one of Russia's key European partners in the tourism sector.

Delving into history, it can be noted that the culmination of the rapprochement between Russia and France was a bilateral military-political alliance formed at the end of the 19th century. The present-day history between these two countries began with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and France in 1924. But, as known, tourism between France and the USSR developed very poorly for various objective reasons (Dolzhenko, 1988: 18). At that time citizens of the Soviet Union were almost completely prevented from going to France.

This is explained by the fact that iron curtain between the Soviet Union and Western countries, including France, existing since the beginning of the 1920s, prevented free communication of people. Isolation was necessary for the Soviet leadership to ensure complete indoctrination of the population, to make people "real builders of light communism". Besides, travels abroad sometimes led to the flight of Soviet tourists from the USSR. As a result, going abroad became a kind of privilege for certain social categories of the population, such as diplomats, writers, actors, artists, and scientists. But even these people could never be sure that the next time they would be able to go abroad: the iron curtain could fall on them at any time. For the ordinary Soviet population, tourism abroad, in particular to France, was a pipe dream.

But the situation with outbound tourism in the Soviet Union has changed slightly after the Second World War when new socialist countries appeared in Eastern Europe. Tourism from the USSR to these countries has become more real for the common population than tourism to France or other Western European countries, especially since the mid-1950s. But some liberalization of the political regime that existed at that time did not make traveling abroad more comfortable for ordinary people, since the Soviet tourist was under constant control, and received only a very limited amount of foreign currency, usually equivalent to \$20 since the Soviet Union then had a large deficit of foreign currency.

Research methods included comparative approaches, as well as survey and analysis methods that allowed justifying a scientific approach to the study and solving practical issues of inbound tourism, which was one of the significant socio-economic sectors that shaped the country's reputation, its hospitality, as well as employment in this economic sector.

It was only in the 90s that a new era of development of the Russian tourism industry began when the unbreakable Soviet Union collapsed, and the iron curtain opened. It was in the 90s that outbound tourism boomed, when Russian citizens, having received certain political freedoms, began actively travelling abroad. At the same time, the flow of legal emigrants from the country has also sharply increased. However, a certain part of tourists from among those, who were forcibly held in the USSR for many years, also began to use tourist services for emigration and were not returning to the USSR.

The outbound flow of Russian tourists in the 90s was, one might say, spontaneous and unregulated. Most of the trips were shop tours to countries such as China, Turkey, Poland, and other countries. This period of development of Russian tourism was characterized by the transition from administrative regulation of tourism to economic stimulation, which was based on new Russian laws concerning both entrepreneurship and the market in general, and related to tourism activities, in particular. But in general, all this contributed to the extensive development of Russian tourism: both the radical changes that took place at this time in the European arena, and the advancement of Russia determined the active development of political and economic dialogue between Moscow and European capitals, which gave a great impetus to the tourism development between Russia and Europe.

In the new Russia, the understanding of tourism as an economic sector with significant benefits for the socio-economic development of the country was formed gradually. The period of tourism prosperity, in particular between Russia and France, began but alas, it did not last long. Unfortunately, the contemporary tourism industry in the world is vulnerable, and very closely linked to the economy and politics (Rubanik, Ushakov, 2010: 380; Jucan, Jucan, 2010). Global geopolitics often determines the world economy vector, which in turn contributes to the emergence of various risks for the normal functioning of the tourism industry (Kazybaykyzy, Mukhanova, Smagulova, 2015: 167; Kasim, 2006; Nižić, Golja, Vodeb, 2011). The situation began to deteriorate since 2008 and became especially worse in 2014. And this time, the policy of sanction measures has again hit tourism, primarily in Russia: tourist flows to Europe have decreased, and Russia's image as a country favorable for inbound tourism has deteriorated.

RESULTS

The anti-Russian policy orientation conducted in the world today is harmful to tourism both in Europe and Russia. Inbound tourism has significant impact on the country's economy. Do they understand this in Europe, and in France, in particular? What can be done in this situation, and in general, is it possible to change something in this situation?

The formation of Russia's image is a dynamic and contradictory process. As already noted, today Russia has not the best image in the West (Kuznetsov, 2010: 23). Currently, due to various reasons, there is a lack of positive information about Russia in

the world (Cherkasov, 2017: 173). What is the first thing an ordinary French student says when talking about Russia? The range of associations is very limited. Here are the results of a survey conducted at the request of the authors in the winter of 2017 among students of a Lyon University (Gazilov, 2016: 74):

- Le froid – cold;
- La vodka – vodka;
- Moscou – Moscow;
- Poutine – Putin;
- Flics à tout va – control everywhere;
- Sibérie – Siberia;
- Baïkal – Baikal;
- Ours – bear.

French students also recall the following established expressions:

- montagnes Russes – roller coasters (French children call them Russian slides);
- famille Russe – this is how a family with more than three children is called. The

French know about the strong family traditions of Russians and respect them;

- Rendez-vous Russe – a situation where dining together in a cafe or restaurant, women pay for their lunch. If the invited lady allows the gentleman to pay her bill, such a rendezvous is called Russian;

- Les Russes ont la peau dure. Ils savent survivre – Russians are very tenacious (in French, Russe means both Russian ethnicity and Russian nationality);

- Les Russes ne sourient jamais – Russians never smile.

Someone compared the history of relations between Russia and France to a "romance of man and woman that lasts for more than three hundred years where France is a rather windy coquette, while Russia is a powerful but simple-minded cavalier who constantly has to prove his worth" (Carriered`Encausse, 2011: 39).

"What associations do you experience when hearing the word France"? We asked the same questions to students of the Russian State University of Tourism and Service (RGUTiS). As one might expect, most often students associate France with the Eiffel Tower. Other associations include love/romanticism, perfume, fashion, Alexandre Duma's "The Three Musketeers", Napoleon and the war of 1812, frogs, cheese, accordion, Louvre, croissants, French singers and actors, French women, Champs-Elysees, and Cote d'Azur.

For the most part, France and all the associations with which it is associated, cause extremely positive emotions in Russian respondents. However, some students are lukewarm about France. For example, they remember that the French wanted and tried to conquer Russia. Besides, what is surprising most of all: the word France has recently started to be associated with the terrorist attacks (2%). Also, the word France reminds Russian students about the problem of migrants. But overall, the study has found that French students think much worse of Russians than Russians think of them.

Although the era when Russia was associated in the minds of the French with a samovar and bears on the streets has passed, nevertheless, the perception of Russia is still negative. In Russia, people think positively of France, more positively than the French think of Russia. This is explained by the fact that Russian culture has historically seen France and Europe as a cultural hero. Russia has radically transformed based on this hero. Besides, Paris was once the center of Russian culture. Paris attracted N.M. Karamzin, F.M. Dostoevsky, I.S. Turgenev, N.V. Gogol, F.I. Tyutchev, V.V. Mayakovsky, and M.I. Tsvetaeva, who visited this city not once. The French ballet owes much of its fame to

Diaghilev and Pavlova. "I would want to live and die in Paris if there were not such a place as Moscow", wrote Mayakovsky, who loved France very much.

Studying Russian literature, one can pay attention to the fact that very often the classics used French in their works. Thus, Pushkin wrote in "Eugene Onegin":

Inside a pocket Triquet nurses,
Addressed to Tanya, certain verses
Set to well-known children's glee:
"Réveillez-vous, belle endormie"¹

The whole Russian literature is imbued with love for France, which is transmitted to the reader through these works (Lapina, 2015: 67). Even in cooking, a peculiar cultural paradox is noticeable: the same salad is called *salade Russe* in French, while *Olivier salad* – in Russian. It so happened that, of all foreign countries, with all the differences in cultural and historical paths, France has become one of the most attractive countries for Russian tourists, in contrast to the Russian oligarchy, which increasingly prefers London to Paris (Gadzhiev, 2017: 74).

To develop tourism, it is important to change the tourist image of the country, but how? Work in this direction is underway, although this work is very difficult, especially in today's context. Thus, to solve this problem, in 2008, Russia has established the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo). The concept of the International Organization of Russophony is being developed, using the rich experience of France, where the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) has been operating for several decades. The main task of Rossotrudnichestvo is to create the maximum possible conditions for improving this situation, and the best way to do this should be tourism as a "direct communication of people" (Gadzhiev, 2017: 125).

Russia loves tourists. As for the French, who come to Russia, Russian tour operators consider them to be the most open to new destinations in Russia: French citizens, in contrast to 90% of foreign tourists coming to Russia, are interested in visiting not only Moscow and St. Petersburg but also many other tourist destinations in the country, such as Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Baikal, etc. Almost all the visits from France reported by Rosstat (Federal Service of State Statistics of the Russian Federation, n.d.) were made by typical French tourists (who made excursions on arrival and stayed in hotels for a long time) (Taigibova, 2011: 220). Tourists from France, along with other Europeans can be attributed to the category of the most valuable for Russia (Kazybaykyzy, Mukhanova, Smagulova, 2015: 11). But the presence of French tourists is still mainly focused on the European part of Russia, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Nizhny Novgorod. It is necessary to extend this presence to other regions of Russia (Doronkina et al., 2014: 36).

Indeed, the targeted creation of a positive tourist image of Russia should become a priority. But a positive image of Russia abroad can be created not only and not so much by propagandistic appeals, but by solving the existing socio-economic problems in the country, and creating a competitive tourist industry that can meet the needs of sophisticated and demanding French people. This concerns, in particular, improving the infrastructure of existing tourist facilities. It will be difficult to attract French and European tourists to Russian cities and regions until the developed transport network is

¹ A.S. Pushkin "Eugene Onegin", chapter 5, strophe 27; Translation by Charles H. Johnston.

established, hotel complexes and hostels comply with European standards, and the attractions are well equipped. The promotion of the Russian tourist product on the domestic and foreign markets can also help to create a positive image of Russia. Creating and disseminating subsequently high-quality advertising products, both printed and electronic, which uncover the regional characteristics of the country, will also contribute to the set goal. After all, Russia, as a destination has not a very positive image not only among foreigners but sometimes even among Russian citizens.

Among the negative reasons one can also mention insufficiently comfortable information environment that provides the tourist business; lack of available hotels and infrastructure elements; limited range of tourist products offered, lack of practice of creating favorable conditions for investment by the regions of the RF, low level of service, problems related to trade in goods and souvenirs for tourists, lack of qualified personnel, etc. Solving these problems along with simplifying the visa regime for tourists from target countries, will also contribute to improving the country's position on the world market, and will help to improve Russia's international tourism image. The ability to meet the expectations of sophisticated and demanding foreign consumers will inevitably lead to drastic changes in the perception of the image of the Russian state in the West, and in particular, in France, and significantly increase the flow of foreign tourists.

Over the past decade, Russia has firmly entered the international tourism market, which in the context of global competition makes it necessary to increase the competitiveness of the national tourism industry. One of the main factors hindering this process and preventing the unlocking tourism potential is also the lack of competitive tourist routes in the country.

In the context of global competition, it is becoming urgent to develop competitive national tourist routes that would bring together all the factors, tools, and production technologies available in the country, and actively use public-private partnership mechanisms to create Russian national routes.

CONCLUSION

Today in Russia, tourism activity is being reformed and developed, but there is a need to adapt it to the conditions of geopolitical instability that are associated with the growth of world currencies, the devaluation of the ruble, and the imposition of sanctions against Russia by major European powers and the USA. Indeed, recent years have been uncomfortable for Russian tourism. It was not easy for travel agencies to operate under the imposed sanctions. But not everything is as bad as it seems. Over time, Russia, with a huge territory, a wealth of culture and history, and hospitable ancient cities, will be able to act as a competitor to other countries. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the country is already consistently among the top ten tourist destinations in the world. The WTO considers the Russian Federation to be an actively developing country in the tourism sector having a high tourist and recreational potential.

Certainly, one should mention the 2014 Sochi Olympics, the 2017 Confederations Cup, and the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which were successfully held in Russia, and attracted a large flow of tourists to the country. However, it is necessary to promote Russian tourism products not only through global events such as the Olympics and World Championships but also through the involvement of businesses and public organizations in this process.

Against all the odds, the growth of tourist flow to Russia continues and is gaining strength. The country must take advantage of this by actively solving existing problems, making fundamental changes in the organization of the work of state and corporate management bodies in the tourism sector, implementing innovations aimed at developing tourism, and creating new competitive national destinations.

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