

Historic Town and Tourism

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Nowadays, the conservation and development of historic settlements is nearly everywhere associated with the development of tourism. However it is not always and not everywhere that such orientation can be regarded as a possible way to its planning and designing. For instance, for many small Russian towns and villages the development of international tourism is yet premature due to the deficient engineering and socio-economic infrastructure, though they do have basic preconditions for such a development.

Therefore, for the sake of a rational organization of tourism in historic settlements, its analysis should be generalizing and should proceed from regional cultural aspects. Socio-cultural, economic and legal, natural-landscape and ecological, town planning and object-special, as well as organisation and management problems, should become the most significant aspects of analysis.

Socio-cultural aspects

1.1. The conservation and development of historic towns is associated with the degree of a country's involvement in the world process of integration and urbanization on a global scale, with the development of mass media, the world market, transport, etc., all of which affect the shaping of contemporary mass culture, including, undoubtedly, tourism, which fosters unification of both regional and ethnic cultures, especially in large cities.

In recent decades, this process became opposed by the "back-to-the past" movement, seeking to perceive and preserve cultural identity. In the West, this return to the past mentality is largely accounted for by people's protests against the unification and

commercialization of culture, against the unification of market demand and supply. In East EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, it is more like a strife for "spiritual renaissance of society", a protest against the party and state control of man, ambiguities and uncertainty about the future. In this contest, tourism plays a significant role in understanding one's identity, in reviving local traditions. And if folk traditions have been destroyed, there emerge new samples, for the most part imitating historical elements of culture which used to possess a certain sense and importance. Sometimes it is a game or "kitch".

Thus, tourism affects the attempts to reconcile global processes with conservation of culture at the level of historic settlements and regions.

1.2. Tourism significantly affects migration processes which are constantly intensifying due to the fact that various strata of population have more time for leisure. In the West, tourists mostly comprise pensioners, disabled and elderly people, etc., who need comfort and stability in the country to be visited. In Eastern Europe, it is young people, students, middle-aged people who account for the bulk of tourists. Proceeding from the interests of different social groups, tourism in historical towns and adjacent areas can assume different orientations: cultural-enlightening, business (including congresses and incentive tourism), special interests tourism (theatres, festivals), religious or sports-oriented.

1.3. Migrating people bring along their culture and introduce new elements of culture into the environment where they have settled. Interactions between different types of migrating and

indigenous cultures (national and regional, urban and rural), their mutual penetration and the strength of this interaction depend not only on the numbers and social composition of population, but also on the existing economic and political conditions. That is why, when organizing tourism in historic towns, it is necessary to analyse and assess cultural interrelations between different types of culture and to be able to predict their consequences. Experience has shown that attempts to transplant or adopt different types of culture (social, economic, architectural, etc.) in a new socio-cultural environment are not always successful and can cause conflicts.

1.4 When considering the development of tourism in historic regions it becomes important to analyse relationships between the town and village, wherein the town is the core of a cultural region and the source of cultural innovations (technologies, methods, fashion, etc.). From this viewpoint, the village remains in the background, though it has always had a culture of its own. Now, due to urbanization and tourism, rural territories and their population found themselves in a difficult position. The touristic boom, especially in mountaneous and picturesque regions of Europe or close to cities, jeopardized the development of agriculture, society and rural culture as a whole. This is mostly due to the fact that prices of houses become so high that local people can not compete with touristic organizations or well-to-do city dwellers, who buy land and buildings for recreation.

1.5 It is evident that tourism has an enlightening, educational and other importance for tourists and affects towns and regions where it is well developed. So it becomes essential to perceive its role in the life of local people. The positive effect of tourism is self-evident in the economic benefits for the town and its inhabitants from investments of enterprises, from leasing houses, letting out private houses, selling objects of handicraft, cottage industry, etc. The improved quality of life for many people,

due to restoration and reconstruction of houses, improved infrastructure of settlements and sites, is likewise evident. For some social groups, particularly children, it is important to perceive the historical and cultural importance of their "smaller Motherland", to feel proud for its fame in the country and the world. In the social sphere, tourism also solves the problem of employment for local people by providing jobs, and brings them closer to international cultural values through, among other things, person-to-person contacts.

1.6 The negative impacts on the life of local people are also evident. Historic centres of towns, pedestrians' zones, large areas in small settlements turn into tourists' centres of pilgrimage. In summer their daily numbers in such famous centres as Brugge (Belgium), Sentendre (Hungary), Suzdal (Russia) and others exceed all permissible standards. In Brugge, for instance, a public movement "SOS Brugge" was organized, with people demanding to cut the flow of tourists and bring the town back to normal life. Meanwhile, only 25 years ago the town was actually dying, as people were leaving it. Nowadays, the life of local inhabitants has to submit to touristic rhythm which frequently degrades the working situation in general. Crime in such tourist centres grows faster than in other types of settlements. Prices for food and clothing are rather high and people have to go shopping out of town, in order to maintain a certain standard of life. Though providing jobs, tourism restricts the sphere of employment, mostly favouring the services sector. This, in its turn, makes people, especially the young, reluctant to acquire new professions and knowledge.

The conservation policy in the domain of cultural heritage in such historic centres restricts the development of settlements. Nevertheless, local people, trying to adapt to such conditions, have to construct new buildings on their land, to change smaller forms to follow the fashion, etc. Bans only provoke people's protests (for instance, in Triavna, Bulgaria), where, for all their love of the

historic part, people are eager to move to new districts. The prices of houses and their rent are so high that in certain famous European towns there are rows upon rows of unoccupied houses. That is why Great Britain initiated the socio-cultural project entitled "Problems of the First Floor in Historic Towns".

The above-mentioned negative aspects force the local people out of their places of birth where they are replaced by new social groups: rich entrepreneurs, tradesmen, foreigners, commercially-oriented artisans, etc. The image of the town changes, since its basic features carried on by the people are changing.

Economic and legal aspects

2.1 In many countries, tourism in historic settlements and sites has become a substantial and growing source of profits and national economic growth*. In the ex-USSR republics tourism increased in 1985-1989 as much as during the 15 preceding years. But 1990 saw the beginning of its decline caused by political and socio-economic instability. However, the number of tourists, as compared with other economic activities, has been rather stable even in critical economic situations: it only slowed down its pace and shifted the geography of tourist flows. This fact proves that tourism is becoming a vital necessity to most people in many regions. Tourism is known to become the third most important item of world export, after the export of oil and weapons.

2.2 The intensity of tourism depends on the mean real per capita income. In East European countries, for instance, the standard of life at present only corresponds to that which existed in Western countries in late 50s – early 60s. At the same time, the effective demand for tourism in Eastern countries has not been fully met, since there were planned restrictions of foreign exchange allocations for international tourism, while the development of domestic

* For instance, in Spain export proceeds from tourism account for 25%, in Turkey 20%, in the USA – 5%

tourism in historic centres and sites was hampered by the underdeveloped technical infrastructure, lack of skilled staff and economic insolvency of towns, by the ministry-oriented attitude to the construction of recreational and touristic objects.

On top of this, Russia, for instance, has no integrated program of socio-cultural development of towns, with tourism having a place of its own; many historic sites are not duly represented at the world market; the lack of legislature on tourism and difficulties in the reorganisation of management systems hinder the development of tourism and, hence, aggravate the existing economic problems in towns.

2.3 Along with certain positive results, the growth of the private sector in some East European countries has recently revealed certain deformations: the below-the-board competition, the chance to make quick money without efforts which brought about unsound social stratification of population, large scale misappropriation of public property, seizure of state land, which is now taking place in Russia.

2.4 The experience of many developed countries has shown that investments can come from foreign exchange appropriations into the municipal budget (up to 50%) in the form of rent and dividends from construction, reconstruction and use of premises for tourism, from the residence tax collected from those living in the private sector, taxes from eateries and shopping places, recreational and sports objects, from excursions and the like. Tourism is a capital-intensive industry requiring foreign capital.

However, such Russian towns as Vladimir, Suzdal, Rostov-Veliky and others could not dispose of their profits and had to give them away to the state budget. Because of centralized planning, the municipal budget was nearly always scanty and the town did not benefit from tourism.

2.5 A certain portion of the municipal budget wherein tourism has its share of appropriations should undoubtedly be channelled to the restoration and reconstruction of historic monuments, of the urban and rural environment. The more numerous are the monuments, cultural and natural sites, the more services can be provided to tourists, the longer they will want to stay in the town. The index of income from such tourists (due to spendings on hotels and meals) is many times higher than from those who only stay for a day or two. Therefore, expanding the range of unique features and sites in a town is a vital problem whose solution can stimulate economic growth. This includes: restoration and repair of old local-style buildings and construction of new high-quality buildings, amelioration of sites, setting up a network of hotels, restaurants with various national cuisines, expansion of the industry of recreation, including celebrations, festivals, concerts and the like.

Natural-landscape aspects

Natural-landscape features are an important component of the cultural milieu in settlements both for tourists and local people. It is often maintained that tourism exerts huge loads on nature, rapidly changing landscapes due to the construction of large hotels, campings, sports bases, parking lots and roads, including those built in heritage territories. Hordes of tourists destroy trees, flowers and other plants. Such deformations are most evident in towns and places with an inefficient engineering infrastructure.

That is the way the concept of "soft tourism" is ardently supported all over the world. It implies a cautious admission of small groups of tourists into natural and cultural environment in accordance with a special program, a crisp management of tourist fluxes with due account of activities pursued by local people, construction of small state-owned and private hotels blending with nature, which is more profitable economically, use of vegetation and natural landmarks in the process of town space planning.

Town planning and architectural aspects

4.1 It is most preserved historic places that are selected when one deals with the master plan of a town. They typically include: trade squares with Town Halls, cathedral and church squares, monastery complexes, standard residential blocks, parks and gardens, individual monuments of architecture. Such territories are most attractive to tourists and so they are selected for display and commercial development. If in the past centuries many central squares were used as market squares where various foods and commodities were sold, now such historic centres, with their shops, restaurants, houses and squares became "objects" and "items" of trade and a source of profit, which means that the cultural milieu of historic centres is involved in the process. In such zones, one can see not only the past of the country, but also contemporary samples of folk and professional art, handicrafts, engineering and technology. Such places of recreation haunted by tourists became commercially profitable to towns, but at the same time complicated the life of their inhabitants. Therefore, the master plan should envisage the existence of different buffer zones providing a smooth transition from residential blocks to the touristic and commercial part.

4.2 The development of tourism in every town changes its infrastructure, re-shapes its social and special milieu, with orientation to recreation, rest, trade, museums, exhibitions. In Western countries, with a well-developed tourist-oriented industry, holiday-makers are not too eager to visit natural-science and historical museums. In Russia, on the contrary, most groups of tourists visit such establishments, because many towns lack a developed tourist infrastructure.

However, visits to rural and urban open-air museums are rather attractive nearly everywhere. Open-air sites in historic parts of some towns, e.g. Scansen in Stockholm, in Lund (Sweden) display both static and dynamic exhibitions: fairs, theatrical

shows, games, etc. Museums of this kind are important components of the habitat, they favour the conservation and development of regional features of urban and rural culture, at the same time partially solving financial problems.

4.3 The development of tourism in historic towns and places bring about changes in architecture, with orientation to the reconstruction (or restoration) and new contemporary construction. In the first case, the goal is to preserve the outlook of monuments and to act cautiously when trying to adapt historic objects to touristic purposes (exhibitions, shops, hotels, etc.). Their utilization makes them permanently accessible to people. New construction in historic centres goes along three lines: restoration of present-day copies of a past period, e.g. medieval blocks in Antwerp (Belgium) or Rothenburg (Germany); construction of new buildings built in various styles of the XX century: constructivism, post-modernism, post-functionalism, etc.; development of regional and local samples involving local elements of vernacular or classic architecture.

The first trend was widespread in the West in the post-war period and involved a nostalgic restoration of towns as they looked in the past and an artificial approach to the shaping of historic town blocks. The two latter trends manifest most significant contemporary lines in culture: the development of global processes levelling the features of urban environment and the search of one's own identity. It is in touristic objects that one can come across such contradictory trends in architecture. Either of them is entitled to live on, if carefully introduced into the texture of historic towns, and if the quality of construction is high enough.

Organisational and management aspects

5.1 Organisational and management aspects are very important for the development of tourism and call for a special study. This concerns domestic and foreign tourism alike. This activity

includes a tourist-oriented campaign to be organized to coordinate the activities of local tourist agencies and hotels, to analyse the estimates of touristic resources and the market, to select and shape tourists' requirements, to conduct promotion work, etc. Commercial bureaus should be set up for granting licences to individuals who want to provide accommodation to holiday-makers, etc. These problems are vital to small Russian towns with a vast cultural potential and plenty of touristic products which have been made little use of until now. The development of tourism calls for an adequate investment policy, including investments from foreign partners, which requires safeguards from the country where tourism is to be developed, and this can hardly be guaranteed in times of an economic and social crisis. But if the situation stabilizes, investments into tourism of eastern countries will undoubtedly boost Western economy.

Hence, Russia has to seek and tap its domestic resources to modernize and streamline the infrastructure of historic settlements, monuments and buildings through joint ventures, issue of stocks and loans, by inviting investors, etc. It is necessary to adopt laws covering tourism, to set up a management system, including a special-purpose Tourism Foundation in historic towns aiming at the development of urban environment.

5.2 In future, the development of tourism, both at the regional and international levels, should take account of the type of historic towns and villages, with due regard to their socio-cultural and organisational and management aspects. Such an approach to settlements and natural sites makes it possible to find most important and versatile touristic routes. Socio-cultural typology of settlements, based on their functional specifics, different ways of life of population, can have the following versions: agricultural, trade, resort, military settlements, monasteries with attached settlements, settlements inhabited by ethnic groups, etc. Such settlements, together with natural

environment, monuments of history and culture, provide a basis for the development of diversified international and regional tourism (for instance, there exist programs "The Silk Route", "The Rural Habitat", "The Monasteries Route"). In this way, one can provide

solutions to many requirements, with due account of interests of different social groups of tourists, and enrich their professional and day-to-day experience, on the basis of a crisp organisational system of tourism management in historic sites.



St. Petersburg, Russia: Historical Centre
(Photo: Olga Sevan).



Town Evpatoria, Crimia, Russia: Historical Tartarian Street
(Photo: Olga Sevan).



Riga, Latvia: Historical Part of the town.
(Photo: Olga Sevan).