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Social tourism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has given rise to a number of newly-independent states which today experience changes in all aspects of their society, including tourism. The Soviet centrally planned management of tourism has now been abolished in the newly-independent states and a market-oriented tourism is in the process of being established. The transition from Soviet tourism to market tourism parallels the many other social, economic, and political changes. This paper reviews transition of social tourism in CIS countries and former countries of Warsaw Pact and presents a case study of social tourism in Modern Kazakhstan. From the 1960s until the 1990s social tourism rapidly developed in the Soviet Union, and in member states of the Warsaw Pact such as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Albania and Yugoslavia. The state played a central role in the provision and administration of social tourism, and infused the concept with strong ideological values. The paper will provide a brief historical sketch of social tourism development in Soviet Union and other countries, and will explore the development of tourism after its collapse. It will also explore which examples of social tourism remain nowadays.

The isolated world: Social tourism in communist countries

USSR

Soviet tourism rapidly developed: from a marginal leisure pursuit, it transformed into an activity that was widespread and accessible to large sections of the population. The Soviet state played a central role in the provision and administration of tourism. Tourism in Soviet people's lives was strongly connected Marx's political philosophy. In his view, capitalist society did not leave time to the worker for his self-development. The worker was asked only to work, and the realization of his potential was not a significant issue. In Marx's vision of society, in contrast to capitalism, leisure played an important role. Marx suggested that the measure of wealth in the Communist Society should be the quantity of free time: time which people would be able to spend on the "harmonious development of their personalities" (Riordan, 1993). There was an attempt to implement that approach in the USSR. Tourism was seen to be part of the education and moral elevation of the masses and it was used as an instrument for building a strong nation.

Before the end of the Soviet Union and the communist system, tourism was encouraged and financed by the government. So all tourism in Soviet Union could be seen as social tourism. Tourism was accessible to a wide range of groups in the population, and existed across the whole Soviet Union.

Social tourism was organized by providing tourist vouchers with discounts or for free participation. For example, there was sports tourism, wellness tourism, amateur tourism, youth tourism, tourism for children, limited international tourism and even military tourism. There were widespread councils of tourism which provided discounted vouchers to people in the Soviet Union. State policy was focused on creating conditions for development of tourism: the government built tourist accommodation, rest houses, sanatoriums, tourist bases etc. (Noack, 2006). In Soviet Union tourism was mainly domestic, this can be explained by isolated policy of the soviet government. Tourism was seen almost as part of a social security system, with a strong link to health and education.

Countries of Warsaw Pact

In the first half of 20th century tourism developed in economically strong Western European countries, of which the countries in the later Warsaw Pact were often an integral part, though this situation changed in 1948 when the communists came to power. This change led to great changes in tourism development and the countries' economy in general (Prucha 2009; Heiman 2009; Tuma and Vilimek 2008). The totalitarian system privileged heavy industry, nationalized all private property, and all this brought to a substantial decrease in quality and quantity of services and lowered tourism potential for next generations. During the 1950-ies all tourist buildings such as large cottages, summer villas, private resorts were expropriated, nationalized and redistributed to party officials and workers' unions. The construction of new tourist accommodation was dedicated for the working class and for youth. In general tourism was mainly domestic, group-oriented recreation, mountain and water-sports resorts, which was sponsored by industrial enterprises. The working masses were rewarded by cheap accommodation and transport which were sponsored by the trade unions, state-owned enterprises and youth organizations. Workers and their families were the main receivers of social tourism. For example there were special Pioneer camps for children (Horakova,2010). In general the development of tourism in countries of Warsaw Pact was very similar to that in the Soviet Union. Socialist governments regulated all types and forms of domestic and international tourism.

Transition of social tourism after the collapse in countries formerly belonging to the Warsaw Pact

Since the collapse of communist hegemony in 1989, the countries formerly belonging to the Warsaw Pact have been attempting to redefine their national identity. This involved first, the rejection of identities created during decades of state socialism. They tried to construct new post-communist national identities, characterized by a democratic, pluralist, capitalist and largely Westward-looking orientation (Light, 2000). This reflected on tourism policy too. Tourism has been seen to have particular importance not only as a new growing market but also as a means of producing favorable images of these countries. Tourism in communist Czechoslovakia was characterized by rigid planning, however «new» tourism became the vanguard of privatization and market liberalization. In such countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, the Soviet tourism model was changed to a privatized tourism sector. The privatized tourism system served as an illustrative example of successful growth, flexibility in services, as well as a reduction of centralism and bureaucratic control (Williams and Balaz, 2000). Through tourism, Central and Eastern European countries embodied their post-communist freedom, a symbolic transition from the time of isolation, moral darkness to the hope that people might start to live their lives themselves (Horakova,2010). So in Eastern European countries, former Yugoslavia and other countries of the Warsaw Pact, many western models of international tourism were adopted, but often the social tourism policies that existed during communist and socialist era were lost.

CIS countries (former Soviet Union)

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 all the former Soviet republics have been coming to terms with a new found independence and with a need to operate in a world market economy. During the Soviet Union, the Soviet economy was based on such principles as centralized administrative planning, state ownership of the means of production, collective farming and industrial manufacturing. After the separation into 15 independent states, began a transition to a market economy, and these countries tried to rebuild and transform their economic and political systems (Davies, 1998).

During 1990-2000, tourism in CIS countries developed in an unplanned and uncontrolled fashion. Piirainen (1997) has suggested that restricting of economy has resulted in the decline of official economic activity as people respond to inflation and the threat of unemployment with activity in the shadow or «grey» economy. This led to an unregulated and uncontrolled market activity which did not operate within the framework of the law. The political and economic

situation after the collapse was not stable, and this influenced the tourism sector. Tourism became seen as a luxury, a commercial product, and social tourism declined. The tourist councils and bases of accommodation which functioned during Soviet Union were abolished over time. The number of sanatoriums and rest houses dramatically decreased. The majority of tourist buildings were privatized, and changed their profile, others just closed because of a fall in demand. For comparison, only 30% of tourist accommodations which were used during Soviet Union were still in use in 2000 in CIS countries. The 70% required reconstruction, renovation or were destroyed (Voronkova, 2004).

After 2000, the majority of CIS countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine and Uzbekistan started to place increasing importance on issues of social welfare and social security. This can be explained by stabilization of the economic and political situation. Year by year state policy increased social benefits to vulnerable groups. This brought to revival of social tourism. Nowadays, there are free or discounted travel vouchers for disabled people, children and other vulnerable groups of population subsidized by the government (Sokolova, 2002). In 2000 the Inter-parliamentary Committee of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan created a Model Law about Social Tourism. The main aspects of this law were about the development of social tourism in their countries, legislation, financing and functioning instrument of social tourism. Unfortunately, this Model Law was not adopted. It is however an indication of a potential renewed interest in developing social tourism. Kazakhstan will now be considered as a case study example.

Case study, Social tourism in Kazakhstan

The Republic of Kazakhstan is situated in the heart of Eurasia, bordered by Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and China. Kazakhstan is the world's largest landlocked country by land area and the ninth largest country in the world; its territory of 2,727,300 square kilometers is larger than Western Europe.

The population of country is 17 million and the capital is Astana. Ethnically Kazakhstan is a very diverse country containing more than 150 nationalities and ethnic groups. The land area of the country is 447 000 km of which 58% is desert and 10% are mountains.

Modern Kazakhstan is a 20th century Soviet invention, having been created as a republic within the former Soviet Union in 1924. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Kazakhstan was proclaimed as an independent democratic state in December 1991 (CIA World Factbook).

Tourism in Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union developed slowly. Before 2000, tourism was mainly outbound and the main tourists were traders. After 2000, the economic situation became more stable and the state started to pay more attention to social welfare issues. Kazakh Constitution in article 1 declares that the Republic of Kazakhstan proclaims itself a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are an individual, his life, rights and freedoms (Constitution, 1995). Article 28 declares that a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be guaranteed a minimum wage and pension, and guaranteed social security in old age, in case of disease, disability or loss of a breadwinner and other legal grounds.

Social security is a strong focus of the Kazakh government to this day. In the Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until the year 2030 it is written that: “citizens in 2030 will be assured that the government would protect their rights and defend their interests, however, they will know that the state will take care of those few who by virtue of adverse circumstances could not find his place in life and had to turn to the state for social assistance”. Development of social tourism is part of this. Nowadays, in Kazakhstan there is no such concept as social tourism, however the state gives opportunity of social tourism for vulnerable groups of population. Today in Kazakhstan there are the following kinds of social tourism:

- Wellness tourism. The government provides free and discounted travel vouchers for sanatoriums and spas. Adult people and children with disabilities can get free vouchers according their medical condition. This is declared in the Law about social protection of disabled people in the Republic of Kazakhstan (Law about social protection of disabled people in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2005). Pensioners can get discounted vouchers according to medical recommendation. Moreover, ill children get free rest in wellness centers and sanatoriums (Law about the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2002). For veterans of World War II the state provides free treatment for the required number of days and travel expenses to the resort or sanatorium and back (the Law about privileges and social protection of participants and invalids of the Great Patriotic War and persons equated to them, 1995). All these initiatives are subsidized by government funding.

- Tourism organized by trade unions. Some big enterprises in Kazakhstan still have own privatized tourist bases, rest houses. And they provide to their workers discounted vouchers. For example, some universities have tourist bases and they provide discounted rest to students and staff.

- Leisure and culture. There are Pupils’ Houses in every city and district. Pupils’ Houses are the current incarnations of the Pioneers’ Houses which existed during Soviet Union. All courses for children are free, for example, dancing, music classes, art, sport classes etc. Moreover, veterans of World War II have priority and free access to sauna, cultural and

entertainment or sports events, and hairdressers. All this is financed by state budgets. (Government Decree 18.01.2008 N 27).

- Transport expenses. Veterans of World War II can use municipal public transport for free and travel once per year by rail, air, water, and long-distance road transport is free too (About privileges and social protection of participants and invalids of the Great Patriotic War and persons equated to them, 1995).

- One-off initiatives. Sometimes different private companies or governmental organizations organize social activities for vulnerable groups of people. It may be free excursions for different people, free tickets to cultural events for big families, travel vouchers to local rest houses, free transportation etc.

Conclusion

This working paper has briefly explored the situation of social tourism from communist and socialist regime to nowadays. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has tried to build its own social tourism system according the new market realities. Currently Kazakhstan does not have the systematic approach to social tourism which existed during communism. However, Kazakhstan has intentions to develop policies which provide a personal support for people in need because Kazakhstan positions itself as social orientated country.

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