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**Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism** is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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## Supporting the Tourism Industry in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic and Economic Crisis: Social Tourism and Public-Private Partnership

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### Abstract

The present article explores the possibilities of restoring the tourism industry in the Russian Federation by attracting investment and public-private partnership. The purpose of the study is to analyze the possibilities of restoring the Russian tourism industry, taking into account the losses incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to determine the main areas of state support. The article provides an analysis of statistical information showing the calculated amount of damage to the tourism industry from the spread of coronavirus infection, and possible negative consequences in the future, as well as data from an expert sociological survey. The authors analyze the measures and the need for state support for the industry that is in an ongoing state of economic crisis and note the problems of tourism development in Russia and several European countries that resulted from the spread of coronavirus infection. The authors consider possibilities and prospects of restoring the tourism industry in the future, describe measures to support the tourism industry planned by the Russian government, as well as anti-crisis programs undertaken in several European countries that are designed to help the tourism industry survive during the crisis. It is shown that support measures undertaken in Russia are incomparable with the help provided to the tourism industry by the governments of several European countries. The authors question the effectiveness of these measures as well as consider possible changes in the business model of the tourism industry and the opportunities to increase the role of public-private partnership projects. The results and suggestions proposed by the authors will be of interest to both the tourism business practitioners, investors in the tourism industry, representatives of relevant government agencies, and researchers studying issues of state regulation of the tourist services market.

**Keywords:** tourism; investment; tourism industry; state support; COVID-19.

**JEL Classification:** L83; H54; H12; L88.



## Introduction

The tourist services in the contemporary world are rapidly developing, and today tourism is already a large independent industry that unites the economies of individual states and is aimed at meeting the recreational needs of the population, as well as providing a large number of jobs (Medvedeva *et al.* 2018, 832; Nikolskaya *et al.* 2020, 467).

Tourism is one of the largest sectors of the world economy with an annual revenue of USD 5.7 trillion. About 10% of the world's gross domestic product are generated through this one of the world's most profitable businesses. The development of tourism affects the creation of new jobs. For example, while in 2005 the global tourism industry employed about 125 million people, in 2018 this figure has increased to 370 million people (Afanasov 2019, 94; Platonova and Vapnyarskaya 2020, 1).

In 2019, 1.5 billion international tourist trips were made worldwide. This is 4% more than in 2018.

At the end of 2019, France remained the leader of world tourism. Having hosted 89.4 million visitors in 2018, France broke the barrier of 90 million foreign tourists in 2019. The second was Spain with a number of visitors equal to 83.7 million, and the USA with 78.7 million visitors completed the top three tourist countries (Association of Tour Operators 2020).

From January to December 2019, foreigners made 32.9 million visits to Russia. However, the number of foreigners who visited Russia for tourist purposes amounted to 5.1 million people. The industry employs 2.5 million people, while taking into account related industries – about 7 million (Kozyreva 2020, 76).

In recent years, there has been an increase in tourism around the world, and 2020 shouldn't have been an exception (Tsokur *et al.* 2020, 164). However, the state of tourism and its development directly depend on external factors (environmental and transport disasters, or social and political unrest) (Chernyakova 2019, 87). The crisis that broke out around the world due to coronavirus infection can be said to have destroyed all the plans for 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 pulled down the entire tourist market due to the closure of all borders, air traffic, and certainly, tourist routes (Nath 2020, 1). The situation in the tourism market will not improve for a long time, therefore currently, the main task for almost all tourist companies, regardless of the scale of their activities, is to survive.

Small-scale tourism operators (often the backbone of the tourism industry) are particularly vulnerable in this regard due to path-dependent behavior and low levels of cooperation among themselves. The coronavirus pandemic requires the main actors in the tourism industry (at the macrolevel) to work closely with external systems, such as health or emergency care. At the microlevel, this encourages businesses to adopt new ways of working, for example, according to the social distancing rules (Zenker and Kock 2020, 104).

After the cancellation of already prepaid tours, which resulted in the fact that tens of thousands of travel agencies' clients suffered, as well as cancellation of thousands of flights, that prevented thousands of tourists from returning home smoothly, the trust in the travel industry was undermined. As a result, residents of Russia, Kazakhstan, and other countries who are afraid of repeating the stories of their compatriots who have remained abroad for an indefinite time may refuse to take a planned vacation abroad.

The Federal Tourism Agency estimates that more than 1.6 million people were at risk of being fired or sent on unpaid leave as a result of the crisis. International tourism sales in April 2020 decreased by 20-30% (World Tourism Organization 2020). In Russia, due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, tour sales fell to almost zero by the end of the first half of 2020, while the total amount of lost revenue for the Russian tourist business is about 1.5 trillion rubles (about USD 21 billion) (Kozyreva 2020, 76).

In this regard, researchers put forward two different scenarios (Zenker and Kock 2020, 104). On the one hand, the government and business seek to preserve the existing economic system through financial support and deregulation. During the upcoming recession, customers may also prefer the lowest price rather than the most sustainable economic option. At the company level, the financial resources planned for investment in sustainable development will be used to support the business. Nevertheless, sustainable behavior in the tourism industry largely depends on the agreement of internal stakeholders (business and government) and the best industry practices.

Another scenario may be the entry into the market of enterprises implementing new business models to replace the old ones. These new businesses will likely invest in projects, which, according to experts, are more sustainable. These businesses may be more open to change and innovation. Because of this, it is difficult to predict the direct and indirect effects on the tourism industry, so longer-term research projects are necessary, as well as determining the role of the state in supporting and developing tourism in the current context of socio-economic development of society.

In the current crisis situation, interest has increased in various theoretical and methodological aspects of organizing tourism in the context of a pandemic, its state support, and the search for ways out of the crisis. These issues have already been considered by several authors (Kozyreva 2020, 76; Gurevich *et al.* 2020, 61; Safronov 2020, 184). This research focuses not only on the issues of anti-recessionary support for the tourism industry but also on cooperation based on public-private partnership (PPP), as an option for an early exit from the crisis.

In its recommendations, the WTO notes that at the current stage of tourism development, only the state and government play the primary, if not the only, role, while the private sector is only partially involved in this process. The latter will never be able to cover the need for large investments for the development of the resort, hotel, and other tourist enterprises, as well as the main elements of tourist infrastructure (Afanasov 2019, 94).

Researchers (Bessonova 2002; Troshin *et al.* 2020, 322) note also the need not only for state regulation but for state participation in supporting the tourism industry. State support for domestic and inbound tourism in the Russian Federation is declared one of the main directions of state policy in the field of tourism, along with regulation. This applies primarily to inbound and domestic tourism.

The novelty of this work is not so much in a comprehensive review of the regulation of the tourism industry but in the development of proposals that would allow restoring the tourist market as quickly as possible.

The research hypothesis is as follows: the rapid recovery of the tourism industry at the present stage is possible only based on the organization of PPP.

## 1. Methods

The methods used in this study can be divided into two groups.

The first group included general scientific research methods, in particular, the dialectical method of cognition of reality, which was used along with methods of theoretical generalization, comparative analysis, analysis and synthesis, and statistical method that allowed justifying the need to develop financial and organizational measures to support and restore the tourism industry and determine their criteria. The comparative analysis, in particular, allowed studying organizational and legal approaches to supporting the tourism industry on an international scale. The formal legal method allowed identifying concepts that could be included in the projected statutory regulation. The method of transition from a general conception to a special one allowed attracting investment as one of the measures to support the tourism industry. The information basis for proving the research hypothesis included the works of scientists on the issues concerning financial assistance and state support for the tourism industry in a disastrous situation, as well as statistical data on the economic indicators of the tourism industry in the world and Russia, which were freely available on Internet resources.

The second group concerned a survey of experts in the field of the tourism industry. Experts were asked voluntarily to fill out a semi-structured questionnaire.

The survey involved 31 experts in tourism, including 12 managers of large tourism companies, 7 employees of state structures related to the tourism industry, and 12 experts in the travel industry involved in the development and management of various hotel facilities. Experts were selected from employees having continuous experience in the tourism industry for at least five years. The selected experts were responsible for organizing tours, implementing investment projects, managing companies, making personnel decisions, as well as were representatives of federal authorities.

The selection of experts representing a professional standpoint on PPP in the tourism sector will, in the authors' opinion, highlight the problematic issues of overcoming the crisis in the tourism industry.

The experts were asked several questions concerning the role and importance of state support and ensuring the investment climate in the tourism industry in the current context, as well as questions related to a general assessment of the situation, and the search for the main ways out of the crisis.

All participants were warned about the purpose of the survey and that the study organizers planned to publish the results of the study in a generalized form in the future. The expert survey was conducted in the Russian language.

## 2. Results

Summarizing the results of the experts' responses, one can conclude that the main task of state regulation of tourism activities, especially in the inbound and domestic tourism, is to create the necessary legal, economic, and social conditions to form sustainable development of the tourism industry that would meet international standards with a high level of competitiveness. The main methods of state regulation of any economic sector, including the tourism industry, can be direct (administrative enforcement) and indirect approaches to regulation. Direct methods of public administration consist of forcing participants in a certain sector of economic relations to fulfill legally

stipulated obligations, attitudes, and prohibitions emanating from the state. For the travel industry, this can be expressed, for example, in the licensing, contributions to mandatory insurance funds, etc. Indirect methods provide for the creation of external special economic and, to a greater extent, financial conditions for a particular business sector, such as special (preferential) taxation, requirements for financial reserves, availability of credit resources, etc.

The application of methods of the first kind is intended primarily to ensure the stability of the tourism industry and the protection of its consumers through coercion. The methods of second kind based on the operation of economic laws are aimed at supporting business and ensuring its progressive development. Thus, state support for the tourism industry is provided primarily by ensuring suitable funding for the tourism sector. Effective management of the tourism industry, therefore, will consist in the effective financial management of this sector. However, in the current situation, there are problems, such as limited financial resources, a budget deficit that causes the state to expect an increase in activity from business, which is mainly represented by medium and small-sized enterprises (Paderin and Osmanov 2013, 481). As noted by one of the experts, "the tourism industry will suffer great losses after the quarantine, but after the restrictions are lifted, the demand for tour operators' services will increase very sharply. It is necessary to survive this time, and it will be the most difficult for the tourist industry. The larger the company is, the more chances it has to survive" (expert Ilya, heading over eight years the company department which is developing various format tours to Asian countries).

As it seems to the experts participating in the survey, representatives of the travel industry, tour operators, and travel agencies will not be able to face independently the challenges in this situation. Most organizations involved in the tourism industry have not yet learned to correlate risks and profitability, often make wrong managerial decisions, and do not have a sufficient financial cushion which, in the context of a lack of inflows of funds from users of tourist services, allows them not going bankrupt.

The Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation has developed a mechanism to compensate tour operators for losses they suffered in connection with the spread of COVID-2019 pandemic. So far, it is about the fact that the state can reimburse the costs of tour operators associated with nonrefundable airfares, as well as the costs of returning Russian tourists from other countries. Losses of tour operators caused by the inability to refund the cost of air transportation are subject to compensation. This will affect both charter and scheduled flights. The purpose of the subsidy is to refund the money paid for the tour to the final consumer of the product, i.e. the customer or tourist (Kozyreva 2020, 76).

Until the end of 2020, travel companies will be exempt from paying contributions to the reserve fund of the Tourist Assistance Association (its funds are used for emergency evacuation of tourists) and contributions to personal liability funds (from which tourists receive compensation in case of bankruptcy of the tour operator).

According to the decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 434 (2020), enterprises in the tourism and hotel business sector are included in the formed "List of the Russian economy sectors that are most affected by the deterioration of the situation resulted from the spread of a new coronavirus infection". Travel industry companies will receive a deferred tax payment for six months. For micro enterprises (where the average number of employees is no more than 15 and the income is no more than 120 million rubles), i.e. exactly for travel agencies, in addition to tax deferrals, a deferral is given on insurance contributions to social funds. This measure of support for travel companies is very important, but, unfortunately, it is only a deferment of payments. After the epidemic, participants in the tourism industry will have to pay both taxes and fees. Another anti-crisis measures to support business is an interest-free loan to pay salaries. Small and medium-sized businesses are allowed to receive direct gratuitous assistance from the state in the amount of the minimum wage (12,130 rubles) per employee per month, provided that employment in the company remains at the level of at least 90% of the full-time staff as of April 1, 2020 (Samtynova 2020).

Currently, a full anti-crisis program to save the tourism industry has not been adopted. According to the experts surveyed (80.6%), the above-mentioned measures cannot help companies in the tourism sector, which are currently almost completely terminated their operations and not only deprived of income but are obliged, according to current laws, to return significant amounts of money to their tourists for refusing tours. The measures taken in Russia, unlike in European countries, do not provide any subsidies, grants, or financial assistance to entrepreneurs from the state, although the government recognizes that additional support measures are obviously needed.

In general, the world has accumulated sufficient experience in using various tools to diversify financial sources of investment. For example, venture capital funding, syndicated, and subordinated lending. It is practiced providing guarantees for refinancing and provision of reserve credit lines by second-tier banks. The specifics of



projects in the tourism industry require attracting so-called long money, which in turn is possible through the creation of associations by banks in the form of pools or consortia (Nurpeisova 2018, 42).

Thus, in Spain, where according to preliminary estimates, up to half a million people will lose their jobs in the tourism sector, the government has launched a crisis assistance program worth more than EUR 200 billion, which is 20% of the country's GDP (Zeit Online 2020). A special regime has been introduced for companies in the tourism industry for a period of three to six months. During this period, the tour operator or hotel can temporarily lay off employees, and during these months, the state will pay the dismissed 75% of their average salary for the last six months, as well as incur the costs of paying income tax and social fund contributions. An employee in the tourism sector in Spain earns an average of EUR 1,200 per month. Thus, the temporarily dismissed employee will get from the state about EUR 900 per month. Besides, for companies in the tourism sector, preferential lending with state guarantees is introduced, as well as deferred tax payments. For individual entrepreneurs, including those involved in the tourism sector, who have temporarily ceased their activities, payment of EUR 700 is provided (Handelsblatt 2020). All these measures are designed primarily to help hotel businesses and tour operators for inbound and domestic tourism. Tour operators for outbound tourism in Spain are also supported but only if the operator does not violate the law on combined travel (tour packages) and returns 100% of the cost of the booked tours to customers in case of the forced cancellation of the trip. The Spanish government supports all tour operators but, on the condition, that the operator ensures that consumer interests do not suffer. If the entrepreneur does not have enough resources, he should contact the bank and get a loan to pay off tourists (Kozyreva 2020, 76).

### 3. Discussion

In this regard, according to experts, it is possible to pay attention to domestic tourism destinations that can support the industry operation. As noted by one expert, "we surveyed customers who contacted us earlier, and one in four said that he discussed the opportunity to spend vacations in Russia, without delay in anticipation until the borders were opened and air traffic was resumed" (Artem, runs a travel agency for 12 years).

However, experts do not doubt that the development of tourism will be hindered by the economic crisis. Crisis conditions, as a rule, result in a problem with the population's solvency. In other words, tourism remains popular in Russia, but the desire to go on vacation right now and shortly in the future for many is limited by financial recourses. The problem can be overcome by social tourism, a form of social support in which vulnerable segments of the population can go on a journey fully or partially funded by the state or nongovernmental organizations. This type of assistance to the needy can have positive impact on both its recipients and the development of the tourism sector in general, helping companies engaged in the tourism sector to overcome seasonal fluctuations in demand, providing services at reduced prices for social tourists. Similar payment schemes in other countries, for example, are implemented based on the eCalypso (2018) platform, which unites the tourism market participants and potential customers.

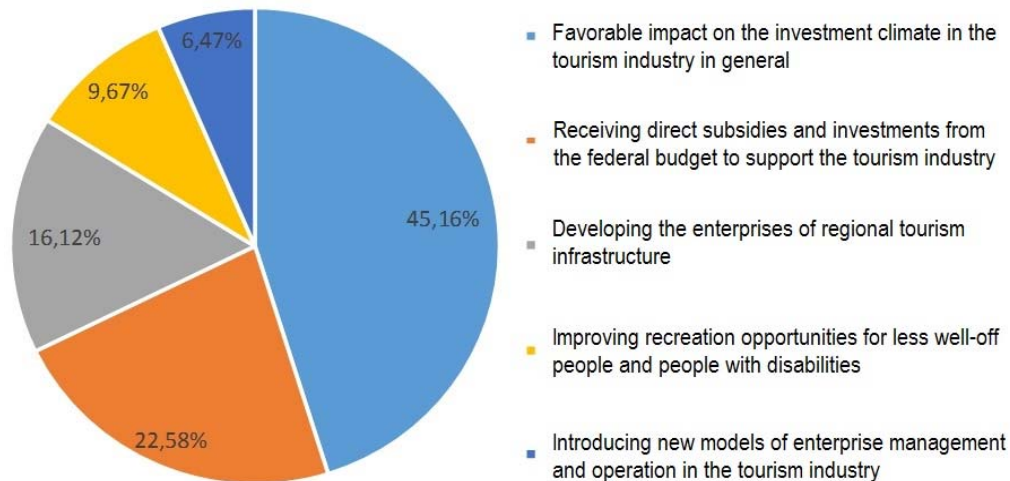
However, social tourism is not so popular in Russia. Implementation of programs is given to regional authorities, which do not always pay due attention to this component of social policy. It is also difficult to find statistics that illustrate the state of this activity. Social tourism is characterized, first, by the way of financing: money can be paid directly to the tourist going on a trip, or it can be transferred to tourism organizations to develop social tourism infrastructure; second, there are different target groups included in the social tourism program. The list of such groups is approximately the same for all countries (disabled people, children, and youth, senior citizens, multimember families, and low-income families), however, the amount of support and the sources (the state, as well as nonprofit, public, or commercial organizations) vary from country to country (Nazarbayeva 2020, 53).

In the current context, one of the possible options for mobilizing investment resources in the tourism industry is the organization of the PPP to support social tourism. Russia is constantly developing programs to create large-scale PPP projects in the field of social tourism that will allow the state to solve two important tasks simultaneously (Romanova *et al.* 2020, 663; Morozova *et al.* 2020, 535; Dudin *et al.* 2020, 1435). As noted by the experts involved in the survey, in the first place, this will allow "providing an opportunity for social tourists to use a tourist product at affordable prices". In the second place, according to experts, this will "provide support for the tourism industry, as well as tourist facilities and infrastructure, restore employment in the tourism industry, and in general, help to overcome the decline in demand caused by crisis". These results are explained by the fact that in Russia, social tourism can support individual market participants in the tourism industry or individual segments (health tourism, children's tourism and recreation in camps, etc.) and will not provide fundamental support to the entire industry.

Another important component of PPP can be the search for new forms of interaction to support new entrepreneurs and facilitate the flow of funds to the tourism industry in domestic tourism development projects. In particular, it can be the development of a social institution to support startups. The PPP will help new companies and support domestic tourism in Russia. It will help to implement projects through mass media and marketing support, as well as investments that can be attracted in the frameworks of developing new ideas or supporting those that require initial funding or assistance in terms of their lobbying at the level of government structures (which is not possible for individual entrepreneurs to do).

In general, the involvement of the state in the tourism industry, in particular, the organization of internal social tourism and PPP, according to experts, has several advantages, of which the main is the favorable impact on the investment climate in the tourism industry (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Advantages of developing internal social tourism and PPP



The state is not able to support the tourism industry with subsidies permanently, thus these can be just individual promotions. Therefore, especially the development of PPP will be a crucial step in creating a truly favorable investment climate for the broad involvement in this process of entrepreneurs engaged in tourism. Given the limited nature of available resources and other constraints, policymakers and government representatives, who influence investment decision-making in the country, should carefully weigh up the investment policy options and choose those that will bring the greatest returns in both the short and long term.

### Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic is unique in scale and represents a combination of disasters and crises, in particular, a combination of a natural disaster, a socio-political crisis, an economic crisis, and a crisis in demand for tourism services. However, after overcoming the consequences of the pandemic, interest of people in travel will undoubtedly increase, and problems that occurred before the onset of the epidemic, such as organizing financing and attracting investment, will once again come to the fore and will have to be addressed as they return to normal life. The research presented in the article shows the need in the current context to develop a state program to promote domestic tourism, and in particular, social tourism, based on benefits, creating favorable conditions and financial assistance from the state. It is also concluded that attracting significant investment in the tourism industry requires not only developing legislative measures to encourage and protect investment, but also attracting government agencies to participate actively in both the investment and use of investment. The most promising direction in the implementation of state policy concerning the tourism industry, especially in the long term, is creating all kinds of tourism projects in various forms of PPP, as well as providing transparent and stable funding mechanisms. Such a partnership, especially when carefully planning investment projects taking into account national, regional, and private interests, can attract large-scale investments in the national tourism industry and boost it to a new level. Thus, the research hypothesis is proved. The study of technological projects in the framework of PPP development in the tourism industry can be a continuation of the topic discussed.

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