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GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF TOURISM SECURITY IN RUSSIA. LEGAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Abstract

Tourism plays an increasingly important role in the economy of all countries, including Russia. Guaranteeing the safety of tourists arriving in the country is in the basic interest of every country, as it has a serious economic interest. One way to ensure a high level of tourism security is to create a "tourist police". Russia and several former Soviet states are following this path. The study shows how these special police units were set up in Russia and what their characteristics are. In a country the size of a continent, police forces for the protection and assistance of tourists were established primarily in those destinations that are visited by millions of tourists annually.

Keywords: tourism, security, Russia, law enforcement

1. Introduction

Tourism is a complex system that depends on many factors. Among them, the human one takes the lead; therefore, tourism is one of the vulnerable areas of human activity regarding its security, including against terrorism (Kobets 2020). In 2020 Insurly, a French insurance aggregator, ranked Russia 86th among 180 countries included in the safety rating for tourists with the level of risk classified as "significant". Insurly assessed a total of 180 countries. The rating allows us to find out the level of risk for travelling to a particular country. The rating includes either data on violence (murders, terrorist attacks) or information on safety for tourists' health (such as epidemic outbreaks, basic sanitation and air quality) as well as transport safety. The rating was compiled on a 100-point scale. Russia was given the lowest rating in the category

of “Violence” (only 17 points out of 100) based on two indicators: intentional killings and acts of terrorism. “Transport security” in Russia was awarded 41 points. The highest score (83 points) was given to health protection. Emergency protection received 74 points out of 100. The other CIS countries were ranked as follows: Belarus (48th place), Azerbaijan (52nd place), Turkmenistan (60th place), Moldova (66th place), Georgia (68th place), Kazakhstan (71st place), Armenia (72nd place), Ukraine (83rd place), Russia (86th place), Tajikistan (93rd place) and Kyrgyzstan (106th place) (<https://www.tourismsafety.ru>).

Therefore, the safety of tourism at a time of the first 22 years of the 21st century is a prerequisite for the tourism industry development and enables tourist services (Kobets 2018, 22-25.). Nevertheless, so far in the Russian Federation, the relevant federal authority responsible for this area has not been determined, and the regions have quite mysterious and incomprehensible powers (Kobets – Krasnova 2022). While crimes, incidents with and against tourists occur, and until they are sure that they will not be robbed at the hotel, deceived by taxi drivers, blown up and raped, or that in the case of any emergency or fire a person with disabilities will not be left without help and will not die, no infrastructure, advertising and promotion of tour products will help (Tihanyi 2017).

2. The role of tourism security in Russia

The safety of tourism directly depends on the state policy and its measures for protecting tourists. In Russia, the rights and obligations of a tourist that prepares and makes a trip are determined by the federal law on the bases of tourist activity in the Russian Federation. In particular, according to the law, a tourist has the right to be guaranteed the personal safety, safety of his property, unhindered receipt of emergency medical care, as well as to receive reliable information about the rules of entry into the host country and the peculiarities of behaviour in it, such as customs, various rites of the local population, sanitary and epidemiological conditions. Clearly, during the journey, the tourist is obliged to comply with the host country legislation, respect its customs, traditions, religious beliefs and social structure and follow personal safety rules. Information about the threat to tourists’ safety in the host country should come from the national tourist administration and tour operators.

Russia also takes the necessary steps to issue regulatory documents to ensure tourists’ safety. The adopted legislative acts oblige the federal executive authorities to inform tour operators and tourists about the security threats, including through the state media. The Service of the Chief Sanitary Physician of Moscow seeks to prevent quarantine and parasitic infections during tourist trips. Managers of travel agencies must instruct each tourist that travels to

countries with life-threatening diseases (such as plague, cholera, yellow fever and malaria) and provide them with a memo and antimalarial drugs.

The safety of tourism and the reduction of travel risks relate to a wide range of challenges, including the creation of a special police service to protect visitors and the local population, checking the safety of tourist accommodation establishments and their licenses and certificates, organizing emergency communication lines, receiving complaints from tourists, protecting monuments, the environment, combating drugs and prostitution.

At the WTO's initiative, the First Global Research and Travel Trade Conference on Security and Risks in Travel and Tourism was held in Österund (Sweden) back in 1995 (<https://studwood.ru>). The findings of a survey among 73 countries on the safety and protection of travellers, tourists and tourist sites showed that in 71% of the countries the special tourist police or security service guarded tourists' spots and attractions. In more than half of the countries, such a service is part of the state or municipal police; 21% of the countries have a special tourist police service; in half of the countries, this service helps tourists solve their problems, and in 40% of the countries the police inform the relevant consulates and tourists. The tourist police are also mandated to preserve cultural monuments and the environment, combat drugs, provide information to tourists and protect local ethnic groups. However, at that time, only nine countries had laws on tourist police. Tourist police officers in 41% of the countries study foreign languages, and in 26% of the countries are trained in specific tourism disciplines. In 37% of the countries, they maintain regular communication with tourism agencies, firms and ordinary police (<https://www.tourismsafety.ru>).

The tourist police serve as a powerful argument in assessing the tourist destination's reliability for visiting by foreign tourists. The tourist police mainly exist in countries where the tourism industry is of great importance (Kobets 2017, 9-11). As an ambulance service in medicine, this unit helps foreigners solve problems in a different country. If this fact is a novelty in our country, then for several countries of the Middle East and South-East Asia (Kobets 2019, 22-24) as well as some Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Kobets 2020, 31-32) it is a practice with the concept already formed and experience accumulated. In these countries, the tourist police perform the functions of patrolling active recreation areas. If necessary, it is obliged to assist foreign citizens.

3. Foundation of the Russian tourist police

During a telephone survey, in which 1600 thousand Russians over 18 years old took part, 75% of respondents answering the question of "whether the tourist police in the Russian Federation

are more likely needed or not needed” chose the option of “more likely needed” (<https://ria.ru>).

The decision to create temporary specialized units of the tourist police was announced on April 2, 2018 (<https://мвд.рф>). The tourist police began to function in Moscow in July 2018. Its creation was initiated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. This unit’s duties are to ensure the safe stay of guests of the capital and maintain Moscow’s positive image. The tourist police officers’ duties include actions to ensure security and provide assistance to tourists and other capital guests. This unit staff speaks foreign languages and has received special training in communicating with foreigners. The tourist police are also tasked to quickly respond to thefts and robberies that involve tourists as victims, to help foreign citizens caught up in criminal situations (<https://fb.ru>).

Russian regions assess differently the need to introduce such units and see the possible tourist police’s functions in various ways. Most tourist industry representatives say that the special tourist police are essential for mass tourism destinations, for example, St. Petersburg and Crimea, which are visited every year by millions of Russians and foreigners. In Crimea, the idea of creating the tourist police finds local support. Places of mass recreation often require the constant presence of people in uniform, because it happens that people walk with children while someone drinks, swears, begs, does illegal business or actively litters the spot. Such violations spoil the whole picture. The Republic of Dagestan, where the number of tourists is increasing, also supports creating the tourist police. In Veliky Novgorod, the idea is considered especially timely with the number of foreign tourists being on the rise. Some regions, including those included in traditional tourist routes (for example, the Golden Ring of Russia), believe that the tourist police’s creation is still irrelevant because there are other problems (<https://travel.rambler.ru>).

Another issue that requires discussion is the integration of the tourism industry into the digital economy. Concerning the safety of tourism, the introduction of innovative practice-oriented technologies is essential. In particular, machine vision technologies, or so-called facial biometrics, can identify a person in transport security systems during operational activities (Morozov – Morozova, 139.).

4. Conclusion

Despite some restrictions on inbound tourism caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (air traffic takes place with only 15 countries), the improvement of tourism security is a promising area for both lawmakers and the police. The idea of the tourist police’s creation is generally correct, but it is necessary to clarify such a service's functions, explain its tasks and convey this

information to tour operators working with foreign tourists. For a foreign tourist, the presence of an approachable policeman who can speak a foreign language and explain something means additional comfort. With the rapid development of domestic tourism, one should predict the demand for such a service to ensure the Russians' safe rest. As a consequence, the appearance of the tourist police in Russian cities can only be welcomed.

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