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The Image of the Urban Environment in the Context of Tourist Attractivity of Vladivostok

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Abstract. This article deals with the factors that make the urban environment attractive to visitors from Russia and abroad in the context of developing internal and external tourism in Russia. The research relies on the marketing and axiological approaches to determine the notion of urban environment image.

Its results show that the positive image and tourist attractivity of Vladivostok is determined by its history, unique geographic location, abundant natural resources, and stunning landscapes. The development of the urban environment in Vladivostok does not correspond with its tourist potential and tourist attractiveness. The image of Vladivostok is undermined by the uncomfortable and unsafe urban environment (bad street lighting, poor condition of roads and stairs), low quality of service, high prices, environmental problems (air and beach pollution, lack of green spaces, low water quality).

The practical results of this research work include recommendations on the improvement of the image of the city and its tourism attractivity (especially in winter).

1. Introduction

The contemporary research of territorial images often focuses on the images of cities as the key attraction and influence centers for the residents of a given territory. This is a consequence of the global urbanization trend and the increased role of cities in social development. The relevance of conscious formation of a positive image of cities increases every year because a city's attractiveness for various stakeholders facilitates the solution of its political, economic, and social problems.

In 2019, Russia approved its Tourism Development Strategy until 2035, which focuses on the increase of service export incomes. The strategy stipulates integrated development and improvement of tourist areas including the development of tourist, utility, and transport infrastructure [1].

When analyzing the tourist attractivity of Vladivostok, the capital of the Primorsky territory, we must note that the region's position in the National Tourism Rating is constantly improving. It was the 14th (out of 85 regions of Russia) in 2015, and it became the 7th in 2019. Vladivostok holds the third place after Moscow and St. Petersburg in the National Inbound Tourism Rating for 2019 prepared upon the results of tourist attractivity assessment of Russian regions for foreign tourists [2].

Therefore, the Primorsky Territory and Vladivostok as its center have very high tourist attractivity but the majority of this potential is related to natural factors, i.e. the opportunity for sea holidays, according to our research [3,4]. It is interesting to evaluate how well the urban environment of Vladivostok can serve the needs of various groups of tourists.



The quality of the urban environment in Russian cities can be assessed using the environment quality index (0-360 points), where settlements that scored below 180 points are deemed uncomfortable [5]. In 2019, this index for Vladivostok was 196 points out of 360. It is an average result (22nd position in a list of 63 cities), however, it is the best result among the large cities of the Far Eastern region of Russia. The advantages of the urban environment here include housing and adjacent territories, and municipal areas. The aspect with the lowest score in the city is the green spaces. Besides, its road-and-street network, as well as social-and-business infrastructure and the adjacent territories are underdeveloped.

This index helps assess the quality of the urban environment primarily for the residents of the city. This research focuses on the image of the urban environment perceived by visitors and tourists. This image is approached as a marketing and axiological phenomenon and it is used as an instrument to attract the target audience. To evaluate the image, we used the sociological method, i.e. questionnaire polls, the intent analysis of interviews with people visiting the city, and the tourism experts.

2. Statement of problem

- **A. Research Goal:** The assessment of the image of the urban environment in Vladivostok in the context of tourist attractiveness of its territories.

- **B. Research Objectives:**

1. Identifying the drivers and elements of the urban environment that determine the tourist attractiveness of the territory;
2. Researching the image attributes of the urban environment of Vladivostok as perceived by target audiences;
3. Determining the requirements for the urban environment from various groups of tourists;
4. Suggesting image improvement actions for Vladivostok's urban environment.

3. Theory

The analysis of theoretical approaches to the definition of city image set out in works by P. Kotler [6], T. A. Morozova [7], N. M. Zalutskaya [8], I. S. Vazhenina [9], T. V. Meshcheryakov [10], and S. P. Lapayev [11] helped identify its main aspects:

- It is immaterial and it forms in people's consciousness;
- It is an artificially created image;
- It is a simplistic, often superficial image;
- It generalizes a lot of associations;
- It is emotional and can be either positive or negative;
- It is consolidated, but it can be heterogeneous;
- It produced a psychological impact on the consumer to promote the area and attract economic resources.

Within the scope of this research, we are especially interested in works by G.G. Pocheptsov and N. M. Starinshchikov. G. G. Pocheptsov identifies the factors impacting the formation of a city image: 'These include its geographical location, cultural identity, and cleanliness. In other words, geographic, climate, national, and other differences play an active part in the formation of the city image' [12, p. 37].

N. M. Starinshchikov claims that the problem of city images in Russia lies in their anonymity and the blurred and fuzzy opinions about them. The author stresses that the image formed (based on strategic management) must be clear and definite in the consciousness of the consumers. [13, p. 101]. The urban studies experts hold to the same opinion [14].

Therefore, according to the marketing approach, the image of a city must be original, recognizable, and well-defined. It cannot lag behind fashion: it must constantly develop while keeping the specific features [15].

All of these requirements can be related to the urban environment as an element of the city image and implemented through its development projects.

Dmitri Zamyatin, a culture expert, identified three models of the urban environment that help approach the solution of attractive city image design and development [16].

The first model focuses on such components as the system of utility supply in the city (utility services, buildings, and constructions, logistics, family routines, etc); the socio-cultural activities of people of communities; the 'existential meaning' of the territory (the historical, psychological, and mythological aura of the city that is important to every resident and the city populace as a whole, as well as the meaning of the city as perceived by the residents).

The second model includes the following elements:

- The cultural infrastructure (theaters, museums, cultural centers); city's visual appearance determining the first impressions it produces; key events and people.

- The relations between individuals and society and the national and municipal authorities. In the context of tourist attractiveness, these can include local holidays and cultural activities.

- The culture of the urban environment on the neighborhood level (planning, development, local communities, etc) in the city as a whole, in the country, region, or the world.

The third model is the most complicated one, according to D. Zamyatin. It comprises significant panoramas (skylines); locality warmth, i.e. the factors that create psychological comfort and promotes open communications among people (e.g. cozy cafes in successful tourist cities), and dramatic topography (emotional historical past).

For tourist attractivity, the second and the third models seem to be more interesting. Vladivostok has great development potential within these models.

4. Research findings

According to the official data, over 5 million people visited Primorsky territory in 2019, and 941,000 of them came from abroad. The foreign tourists amounted to 762,819 people (17% increase). The three leading sources of tourists include China, South Korea, and Japan. The Chinese tourists were the largest group by the absolute count. South Korea featured the highest increase of tourists, over 40% [17].

To analyze the tourist attractiveness of the urban environment and the associative perception of Vladivostok by various segments of the target audience (Russian and foreign tourists), we conducted a questionnaire survey that involved 1589 people. Among those, there were 34% of Russian tourists, 29% - tourists from Korea, 16% - China, 10% - Japan, and 11% - visitors from other countries. According to the results of the survey, 65% of the Russian visitors to Vladivostok come from the Far Eastern and Siberian Federal Districts.

The gender composition of the survey respondents is as follows: 51% female and 49% male. The survey was carried out in 2019 before the restrictions related to the pandemic.

We found out that 66% of the respondents preferred ecological tourism, while the most popular goals of travel include rest, having a good time, visiting new places, entertainment (64%), as well as learning about cultures, traditions, and habits of other nations (44%).

The analysis of Vladivostok's perceptions showed that the city is associated with a tiger or a lotus flower (77.25%), the sea and taiga (72.6%), and the color blue (63.6%). Among the respondents, 33% said that they associate the city with a seagull, 13% with fish, and 8% with a leopard. Vladivostok is perceived as a city of the youth (20%), a city of bridges (12%), a city of narrow streets (10%), or a run-down city (7%). Besides, for 18% of Russian tourists, Vladivostok is a city of Japanese cars.

The development of infrastructure in the city is seen as good by 57% of the respondents, while 43% claim it is insufficient.

The locations of hotels in Vladivostok was comfortable for 80% of the visitors. The selection of hotels was sufficient for 34% of the participants, while 55% said it was average and 11% were not satisfied with the hotel selection. The prices for hotel services were perceived as high by 52% of the

visitors, while the rest found them acceptable. The quality of hotel services was perceived as average by 43%, and it was good for 32% and excellent for 21% of the visitors. Only 4% of the guests were not satisfied with the quality of service.

The availability of catering facilities was evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5, and 40% of the visitors said it was excellent, 39% claimed it was good, 16% found catering facilities quite unavailable, while only 5% said that dining facilities in the city were not available at all.

The most popular and often-visited attractions in Vladivostok include the following: The Primorsky Aquarium (93.9%), the Primorsky Stage of Mariinsky Theatre (85.4%), as well as Sportivnaya, Korabelnaya, and Tsesarevicha embankments (83.4%).

Apart from these, tourists mentioned some iconic locations, such as squares, vista points, and bridges that feature panoramic views of the city and the Golden Horn Bay. They wanted comfortable places to meet and talk that would feature not only entertainment but also educational aspects.

The analysis of the interest of all tourist categories in visiting cultural heritage sites helped identify the most significant ones: the Soviet Rule Campaigner Memorial (84% of the respondents); the Vladivostok fortress (80%); the Cable Railway (78%); Nikolayevsky Triumphal Gate (75%); the Millionka district (72%); the Railway Station building (72%); the GUM building (69%); S-56 submarine (67%); the Primorsky State Museum n.a. V. K. Arsenyev (65%); Sukhanov's house (62%) and other sites.

The monuments enjoying the most attention during tours include the E. Pray monument (63%), the G.I. Nevelsky monument (52%), the merchant navy sailors monument (50%), the Muravyev-Amursky monument (46%). Among the less popular and relevant monuments for all categories of tourists are the ones commemorating Katyusha, V. I. Lenin, A. S. Pushkin, A. P. Chekhov, and O. E. Mandelshtam. That being said, 65% of Russian tourists are attracted by the V. Vysotsky monument.

Apart from the monuments, art objects dedicated to various important moments in the city's history also create a unique urban environment [18-20]. For example, the Water-Carrier figure on the wall in the old Chinese Millionka neighborhood commemorates the problems with water that Vladivostok used to experience. The city was saved by water carriers, mostly Chinese, who sometimes carried the amounts of water twice their weight. Research showed that tourists are very positive about similar elements of the urban environment.

The visitors name the Day of the Tiger (73%) and the Eastern Economic Forum (42%) as the events that are very important for the image of the city. Other events like the Day of the City and the Pacific Meridian international film festival of the Asia-Pacific Region countries were mentioned by 25% of the respondents.

About 80% of the visitors stated that they liked the city in their questionnaires. The architecture was mentioned by 54% of the respondents who registered the combination of Asian building decorations and European modernity style. The things that больше the visitors disliked нравятся in the city include high prices (30%), transport problems (17%), hotels (15%), low safety (13%), service (12%), and bad ecological situation (10%).

Thus, the research showed that Vladivostok belongs to a small group of Russian cities with striking individuality, as well as clear and stable image characteristics. The positive attributes of the Vladivostok image are often connected to its unique nature, the fauna and flora of the Primorsky territory or its history, while the negative ones are associated with the urban environment.

Tourists from the neighboring Asian countries enjoy 'the cheapest opportunity to discover European culture' that Vladivostok provides: traveling to Europe is expensive, and the economic downturns lead to a global trend for selecting cheaper tourist products. Vladivostok encapsulates places and events that provide visitors from the Asian-Pacific Region to discover European culture.

South Korean tourists see Vladivostok as a weekend break destination. Over 70% of those are individual tourists or small groups. This type of tourists enjoys vista points, panoramic views, and beautiful urban sceneries. Tourists from China mostly come to the Primorsky Territory in groups, although the numbers of individual tourists are growing. They are interested in the traditions and

habits of Russians. The Japanese visit Vladivostok in groups as part of cruise tours and are mostly interested in the city's history.

Tourists from Russia perceive Vladivostok as a coastal city, a cultural capital of the Primorsky territory, and an important historical location. They enjoy all of the tourist attractions on offer equally.

The research shows that most tourists come to Vladivostok within a relatively short time frame. The visitors count peaks between July and September, while in May-June and October their numbers are around average.

From November to April, the tourist flow drops. This period can be seen as the low season. To attract visitors to the city, it is necessary to create a bright winter image of Vladivostok and promote it in the infosphere. For instance, tourism experts give very positive appraisals of the culinary tourism development in the city. Within the scope of the Pacific Russia Food project, a Calendar of Far Eastern Cuisine Festivals was prepared that features the Oyster Festival (November), the Smelt Festival (December), and the Navaga Festival (February) [22]. Developing new exhibition and congress events for the target audience would also be rewarding.

Thus, to promote Vladivostok during the low tourist season, the authors suggest creating

- an attractive event schedule that would feature best practices of the culinary, exhibition, and congress tourism, etc;
- the infrastructure that would allow for the implementation of winter events and preserve the coziness and warmth of the locality;
- various art objects, photography areas, and other expressive visual, auidial, and dynamic elements of the urban environment that would take into consideration the weather conditions of a given season.

5. Conclusions

Vladivostok is quite attractive for tourists despite the average quality of the urban environment for a Russian city. The further improvement of its image can be achieved through the development of not only summer but also winter tourism infrastructure. We believe that the city may benefit from the innovative improvement of cultural event infrastructure, including exhibitions. Art objects, photography areas, and other expressive visual, auidial, and dynamic elements of the urban environment can help support the recognized and fashionable image of the city provided that they are made taking into consideration the relevant weather conditions typical of the season.

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