



The Impact of Security on the Tourism Sector: A Case Study of Belarus

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Abstract. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has harmed the tourism sector, especially in Belarus. The negative impacts include the cancellation of ticket reservations and a ban on tourists from Belarus and Russia to other European countries. This study aims to identify the effect of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the tourism sector in Belarus. The results of this study indicate that even though the war is ongoing, the Russian and Belarusian governments continue to cooperate to align policies and innovations in the tourism sector. Both countries have created cross-border tourist routes to facilitate travel and accessibility for tourists to both countries. However, Belarus, the country where the Russian attack was transferred, has harmed the tourism sector, as several countries have banned flights through their airspace by Belarusian airlines. This study concludes that there is a relationship between the ongoing war and the tourism sector.

Keywords: Belarus, Innovation, Policy, Tourism, War.

1 Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a humanitarian tragedy that has caused widespread economic damage and also tourism. Russian and Ukrainian tourists typically spend around \$45 billion a year on overseas travel, much of it in developing countries in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic had barely subsided when Russia invaded Ukraine, presenting another challenge to the travel and tourism sector across developing

countries in Europe [1]. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had an enormous impact, not only in terms of infrastructure damage but also in terms of significant economic losses. The price increase has made many tourists not enter and travel to areas around Russia.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the war will have a significant impact on Europe's tourism industry, including the loss of Russian and Ukrainian tourists, restrictions on airlines and airspace use, higher food and fuel costs, and a significant impact on tourist confidence and disposable income. The loss of Russian and Ukrainian tourists, who spent a combined \$45 billion a year before the COVID-19 pandemic (about eight percent of global tourism), will impact many countries in developing Europe [1]. The loss of Russian and Ukrainian tourists is due to many European countries issuing bans on Russian tourists visiting their countries.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are also likely to lose 10 percent or more of their annual visitors due to an effective ban on Russian tourists, as more and more countries in the Schengen area are choosing to stop issuing tourist visas to Russian passport holders [1]. The impact of war has significantly impacted Russian tourists who want to visit European countries because of the visa ban for tourists from Russia. This condition has affected Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Then, a 50 percent decrease in the number of cruise ships docking in Tallinn (the capital of Estonia) directly impacted the war, as cruise ship passengers could no longer visit St Petersburg, which was the main attraction for Baltic Sea cruises [1]. The impact of the Russian and Ukrainian wars on the tourism industry, especially in the context of spring and summer ticket bookings, has seen a large number of reservations canceled. This is due to the uncertainty tourists and tourism operators feel due to the geopolitical conflict. Reservation cancellations of 60 to 70 percent indicate the decline in tourist interest and confidence in destinations directly affected by the war. This also affects countries around Russia [1]. The impact of war directly affects the tourism sector due to the decline in tourist interest and confidence, especially in tourist destinations located in war areas.

2 Method

This study applies a qualitative method by focusing on a literature review. This approach provides an understanding of social phenomena that occur in a region. This method also explains the author of the relationship between theory and research results to produce a model. This approach also broadens the horizon of thinking about the impact of war on the tourism sector, which tends to harm countries around the war area.

3 Theory

3.1 The Security Theory

Securitization theory provides an overview of a series of security reference objects outside the state's physical integrity, including economics, shared identity, sovereignty, or legitimizing ideology [2]. The security sector is related not only to the physical state or military but also to other dimensions such as ideology, economy, shared identity, social, or sovereignty. Security will always have a significant impact on a country's economic stability because security instability affects investors, so it can also impact the tourism sector.

Meanwhile, Ole Waever from the Copenhagen School said that securitization analyzes essential and urgent issues, so they should not be resolved through ordinary political bargaining but must be handled seriously by the country's leaders [2]. A national leader must pay serious attention to security issues because a country's security can affect regional stability.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Tourism Management amid War

The Belarusian ambassador said the tourist flow between Belarus and Russia has grown by 50% annually for the past two or three years. In 2023, 176,000 Russians visited Belarusian health resorts focused on medicine, and 15,000 vacationed at agritourism facilities. About 93% of international arrivals came to Belarus for such recreational purposes. Belarusian tourists made 247,000 organized trips to Russia [3]. Various efforts have been made by both countries even though the war between Russia and Ukraine is ongoing. The governments of Belarus and Russia remain confident that the tourism sector of both countries will continue to experience rapid growth because it is accompanied by careful planning for various tourism-supporting factors such as transportation, alignment of innovation, and policy.



Figure 1. Belarus Travel Advice

Source: [3]

Regarding the development of the tourism business, the Union State Program for harmonizing legislation in the field of tourism will be successfully implemented by 2023. Cooperation agreements and roadmaps have been completed. The agenda of both countries is the expansion of the geography of regular flights between major cities of Russia and Belarus and the development of direct interregional bus and rail communication. About 36 constituent entities of the Russian Federation have expressed interest in establishing air services with Belarus or increasing the frequency of flights. 13 entities are working on expanding bus and rail routes. New flights to Moscow have been launched from Gomel and Brest in 2024. The possibility of organizing flights from other regional centers of Belarus to the capital of the Russian Federation and different destinations is being worked out [4]. One of the prioritized factors is transport accessibility and expansion of flight areas. Both countries emphasize the importance of creating cross-border tourist routes, stimulating the growth of the tourism industry and

the entire related service sector. Belarus and Russia are working on building infrastructure and developing inter-regional communications to facilitate travel and accessibility for tourists to tourist destinations. The prioritized sectors are aviation and land routes such as railways. This effort is supported by about 49 entities of the Russian Federation who expressed interest in building flight frequencies and expanding bus routes.

Russia and Belarus are discussing the implementation of a visa recognition mechanism to facilitate travel for foreign tourists so that they can travel freely within the Union States with only a visa from one of the countries. Through visa recognition, border officials can focus on a single visa verification rather than processing separate visa applications, potentially resulting in faster and more efficient border crossings [5]. The introduction of visas could encourage tourists to visit both countries, generating increased revenue for businesses in various tourism sectors.

Russian Deputy Minister of Economic Development Dmitry Vakhrukov said that the volume of tourist arrivals in 2023 will exceed 2022 and the period before the pandemic. The Deputy Minister of Economic Development said the reciprocal tourist flow between Russia and Belarus is recovering rapidly [4]. According to the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, from January to June 2023, there were 419 thousand tourist trips from Russia, almost the same volume for 2022. This condition is facilitated, among other things, by the absence of language barriers and the ease of non-cash payments with MIR cards [4]. Due to several factors, such as language and cultural proximity, tourism in Belarus and Russia has promising opportunities and potential. This condition is also driven by several convenience facilities, such as transactions that can be made non-cash. Transportation infrastructure and tourism services are also affordable for the general public. Based on this potential, the two countries agreed to align several policies to encourage the growth of tourism cooperation.

The Union Program for the Unification of Legislation in the Field of Tourism Activities (Union State) was successfully implemented by the end of 2023. In particular, the standards of the activities of tour guides and guide-translators, standards for the provision of hotel services, requirements for financial responsibility of tour operators, and guarantees to tourists in providing services have been harmonized. These steps should become the basis for further efforts to develop a standard tourism product that attracts foreign and domestic tourists. Russia will coordinate all innovations in national legislation in the field of tourism with the Belarusian side in the future [6]. Russia and Belarus are harmonizing tourism legislation to improve the quality of tourism standards and services between the two countries. In addition to quality, these efforts are made to create tourism branding for both countries to attract foreign and domestic tourists. The two countries are also harmonizing various vital factors in tourism development.

Alesya Abramenko, Deputy Minister of Economy of Belarus, stated that the governments of Belarus and Russia are working to create a favorable environment for promoting the tourism industry in Belarus and Russia. Alesya Abramenko noted that the Union State program for unifying tourism legislation provides for harmonizing tourism promotion strategies. The number of tourists from Russia to Belarus increased by 1.6 times in 2022—tourists from Belarus to Russia by 1.4 times. The tourism industry contributes to the country's economic growth. It accounts for 0.1% of GDP growth in 2022 and 0.2% in 2023 [7]. Russia and Belarus have recently shown interest

in improving their tourism industry. Both countries have great potential for tourism due to their rich history, culture, and nature. Based on the facts and data, Belarus' tourism industry has continued to increase in recent years. Belarus is committed to improving its tourism industry by collaborating with its neighboring country, Russia. Given that Russia is a country with many tourists going to Belarus,

The Belarusian government, especially the Deputy Minister of Economy of Belarus, has designed several agendas to continue to improve the tourism industry in Belarus, such as promoting tourist routes, carrying out activities in the 2023-2024 tourism roadmap, and cooperating with various tourism actors to investing in Russia to encourage investment in infrastructure projects in Belarus. The Belarusian government believes investing in Russia can also help attract Russian capital to the tourism industry. As part of cooperation within the framework of the Union State between Russia and Belarus, there are efforts to unify the tourism laws of the two countries [7]. This effort aims to create a consistent and unified legal framework for developing the tourism industry in both countries. The cooperation between Russia and Belarus in tourism can also strengthen both countries' tourism industries. It can help increase the number of tourists visiting the region and encourage economic growth in both countries. The existence of bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine strengthens the relationship between the two countries, one of which is in the Tourism Industry. Programs created by both countries can help improve cooperation between Russia and Belarus in the tourism industry, which can benefit both countries and increase economic growth in the region.

4.2 Negative Impact of War on Tourism

Some newspaper reports advise against traveling to Belarus at this time due to the volatile security environment that could worsen at any time. Belarus imposes severe penalties for offenses such as propaganda, terrorism, and defamation of the Belarusian government, security forces, and military organizations. The penalties are severe, including the death penalty for high treason. Belarus does not recognize dual citizenship. If a person enters Belarus with a Belarusian passport, the authorities will treat them as a Belarusian citizen even if they are dual citizens. Belarusians cannot obtain or renew travel documents abroad. Dual nationals are at risk when renewing travel documents in Belarus and should seek independent legal advice before traveling to Belarus [3]. However, Belarus did not directly participate in the war between Russia and Ukraine. However, Belarus is a country that is on the border between the two countries. Therefore, Belarus has strict security regulations. Moreover, the Belarusian government even threatens the death penalty for high-level violators of the rules. In addition to the fact that Belarus is not yet considered safe, there is also a difference in the treatment of tourists, which has created a warning by the media not to visit Belarus.

The unstable security situation in Belarus is caused by Russia's war in neighboring Ukraine and the Russian military presence along Belarus' border with Ukraine, as well as arbitrary law enforcement by Belarusian authorities. Russia is conducting military operations from Belarus to invade Ukraine, and this situation is increasing tensions in the region [3]. Understanding the security risks when traveling is essential, primarily when conflict occurs in neighboring countries. The war in Ukraine could affect the stability of neighboring countries, including Belarus. The war between Russia and Ukraine has made the security situation in Belarus uncertain, plus Russia is conducting

military operations from Belarus to invade Ukraine, which is increasing tensions in the region. Therefore, the media is telling the public not to visit Belarus at this time because the security situation could worsen at any time.

News also reported that there is a radiation exclusion zone around Chernobyl. Authorities have restricted travel in the area so that food may have high radiation levels, so avoid eating local food if possible. Then, there are frequent foodborne illnesses, waterborne diseases, and other diseases. At the same time, the standard of health care in Belarus is below Australian standards [3]. While healthcare standards vary by country, it is important to remain aware of the health risks that may arise during travel and take appropriate precautions. Understanding the health risks associated with traveling to Belarus, especially those related to the radiation zone around Chernobyl, is essential. Following the official health guidelines and advice from local health authorities in the context of the situation will help minimize the risks that may arise.

Flights to and from Belarus are minimal. Flight availability and travel routes may change or be disrupted at short notice. Several countries have banned flights through their airspace by Belarusian airlines, including all EU member states, the UK, and Ukraine [3]. Political and security developments heavily influence Belarus's aviation and transportation situation. Flight restrictions and changes to travel routes can occur quickly due to the current situation in Belarus. This can disrupt travel plans and require adjustments.

5 Conclusion

Tourism management by the Belarusian government during the war remained consistent with the program that had been prepared. The Belarusian and Russian governments determined safe zones for tourist areas that could be visited during the war. Both countries relied on domestic tourism involving local communities to support the tourism economy. However, Belarus as a transit area for the Russian attack resulted in other European countries implementing travel bans for tourists from Belarus. Tourists were also concerned about security, so governments in different European countries asked their citizens not to visit Belarus. As a result of this policy, tourist visits to Belarus experienced a drastic decline. Likewise, many tourists from Belarus and Russia could not travel to other countries. This study shows that no matter how well a country prepares a tourism program amid a war, it will still not generate profits for the country. Tourism does not belong to one or two countries but to many countries, so a country's leader must pay serious attention to security issues that occur in his country.

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