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# TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN THE FRONTLINE AREAS OF SUMY REGION: PROBLEMS, OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS

The Sumy region has great and significant tourism potential. Before the Russo-Ukrainian War, the region had 3,465 historical and cultural monuments, including 367 architectural and urban planning monuments (five of them of national importance). Before the war, the tourism sector was developing steadily, with new types of tourism services and the formation of tourism clusters. However, Russia's Invasion of Ukraine resulted in a significant decrease in tax revenues, which has a negative impact on tourism. The purpose of this paper is to study the peculiarities and future prospects of tourism development in the Sumy region during the war, based on data from a sociological survey conducted in five Ukrainian frontline regions in the framework of the Estonian-Ukrainian research project "Development of Ukrainian frontline communities and tourism business during the war and future strategy", which was supported by the Estonian Research Agency.

The sociological survey was conducted online and included 25 closed and open-ended questions. Survey results were processed using Microsoft Excel 2010 and SPSS Statistics V21.0. A total of 29 respondents (20.1%) from the Sumy region participated in the sociological survey, 69% of whom live in urban areas and 31% in rural areas. Analysis of the areas of activity of the tourism respondents from the Sumy region revealed that urban respondents were more representative of tourism businesses (tour operators, travel agents, sole proprietors, etc.), while rural respondents were predominantly representatives of tourist attractions (museums, educational and recreational facilities, etc.). Responses to the following questions were analyzed: pre-war tourism activities, wartime tourism activities, changes in tourism, prospects for tourism development, threats and opportunities for tourism development, problems in the tourism sector, prospects for tourism development, and advantages in cluster cooperation.

**Keywords:** tourism, war, sociological survey, tourism representatives, Sumy region.

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Formulation of the problem: Considerable attention has been paid to the development of tourism in Ukraine, as this sector is closely related to many sectors of the country's economy affecting the level of employment, preservation of cultural heritage, development of international activities, etc. All regions of Ukraine were involved in tourism activities in different and various ways, depending on their existing tourism potential. In Sumy region, the pre-war tourism sector was developing steadily, the new types of tourist services and activities were emerging, and the local authorities always actively supported businesses in creating tourist clusters [15]. This process was facilitated by the presence of a significant cultural heritage, which counted around 3465 historical and cultural monuments, including 367 architectural and urban planning monuments, including 5 of national importance. It is worth of noting that the region has many settlements with a long and ancient history, such as: Bilopillia, Vorozhba, Voronizh, Hlukhiv, Konotop, Krolevets, Lebedyn, Nyzy, Okhtyrka, Putivl', Romny, Seredina-Buda, Sumy, Terny, Trostianets. The State Register of Immovable Monuments of Ukraine includes 200 cultural heritage monuments of local significance and 37 cultural heritage monuments of national significance. The most famous tourist sites are: architectural monuments of the 17th and 19th centuries, the ancient chronicle "The Tale of Igor's regiment" and Yaroslavna in Putivl, the Round Yard in Trostianets; architectural monument of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Sumy Regional Art Museum named after N. Onats'ky in Sumy, Sumy Regional Memorial House-Museum of A.P. Chekhov; a monument of landscape art and architecture the park and palace of the 19th century in the village of Kiyanitsa. The region is home to a great number of historical, archeological, and architectural monuments, preserved garden and park architectural ensembles, and unique natural sites (the botanical nature monument of national importance "Yablun'ya Colony", a branch of the Ukrainian Nature Reserve "Mykhailivska Tselyna", the landscape reserve of national importance "Seredneseimskyi", the national nature park "Desniansko-Starohutskyi", and the natural monument of national importance "Shelekhivske Lake"). In addition, before the war, tourists were offered the developed tourist routes, for instance: "Sumy Sloboda", "Golden Necklace of Sumy Region", "Slobozhansky Journeys", and "Recreational boat trips on the Psel River". The region also has a tourist cluster called "Posullia", which includes 5 agricultural estates. Before the war, there were 18 rural tourism farmsteads in the region [7]. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a negative impact on all spheres of life, including tourism. According to the State Agency for Tourism Development in Sumy region, in the first quarter of 2023, the decline in tax revenues amounted to 16% (UAH 1 million 339 thousand) compared to 2022 (UAH 1 million 592 thousand) and 30% compared to 2021 (UAH 1 million 900 thousand) [13]. This is due to many reasons, including the termination or re-profiling of many tourism industry facilities and enterprises, the closure of tourism enterprises, the lack of tourists, etc. With this in mind, the purpose of this article is to study the peculiarities of the development of tourism in the Sumy region during the war and prospects for the future.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Due to Russia's aggressive attack on Ukraine, the problems of tourism development and future prospects are on the radar of both Ukrainian and foreign researchers. In particular, many economists are trying to estimate and evaluate the damage caused by Russian aggression, which is the subject of a number of publications. For example, in the article by A. Kulik, an approach to assessing real estate damage caused by the war is analyzed [17]. Bordun O. et al. [5] assessed and studied the losses of domestic tourism from the war between Ukraine and Russia and developed recommendations for rescuing the tourism business, such as: financial support, transportation logistics, combining and grouping enterprises into clusters; improving marketing by creating a national tourism marketing organization and its subsidiaries, sectoral improvement of tourism in Ukraine.

A considerable number of publications are devoted to the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on tourism in Ukraine and the development or review of prospects for its development in the future. These issues are analyzed in the publication of N. Barvinok and M. Barvinok [2]. Also, the peculiarities of tourism development during the postwar period and the goals and directions of recovery are revealed in the article by N. Yakymenko-Tereshchenko et al. [15], in which, according to the authors, the main principles of the post-war restoration of the tourism industry should be memorial, military-patriotic and military-historical, health and wellness, psychological, business, educational, sports and ecological tourism.

A number of publications investigate the problems and the main directions of restoring the tourism sector after the end of hostilities in Ukraine. The publication by O. Fastovets is devoted to these issues [14]. V. Boyko and N. Dalevska in their work [4] analyzed the development of the tourism sector in different countries of the world where armed conflicts took place and analyzed the tourism resource potential of Ukraine, which can be used for tourism development during the post-war times There are also some new publications devoted to the development of tourism both in certain regions of Ukraine after the end of the war and to the development of certain types of tourism in the postwar period. V. Boyko's article examines the prospects for the development of tourism business in the southern region of Ukraine in the postwar period [3]. The peculiarities of the development of military tourism in Luhansk and Donetsk regions are described in the publication by G. Zavarika [18], in which the author describes the organizational mechanism for creating and promoting military tours in the tourism market on the example of the eastern territories of Ukraine, suggests specific tourist locations for creating military tours, and develops proposals for creating innovative military tours as a feature of postconflict tourism development in the affected territories of the eastern regions of Ukraine. Barvinok N. [1] describes the prospects and importance of the development of military tourism in Ukraine after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, examines military and historical tourism as a type of tourism and suggests priority areas for the development of military tourism.

The development of tourism in the rural areas of Sumy region in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war and prospects for the future is considered in the article by M. Reimann with co-authors [10; 11]. However, despite a significant number of scientific publications, there are no sociological studies, surveys of tourism representatives to assess the peculiarities of the development of Ukrainian frontline communities and tourism business in the context of war.

Material and methods of research. The material of the study were results of a sociological survey of 144 representatives of the tourism sector from frontline communities in 5 regions of Ukraine (Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Dnipro, Sumy and Kharkiv regions), which was conducted within the framework of the Estonian-Ukrainian research project "Development of of Ukraini-

an frontline communities and tourism business in the context of war and strategies for the future" with the support of the Estonian Research Agency [8; 9] Sociological survey was conducted by online survey and included 25 questions of closed and open-ended questions. The survey results were processed using computer programs Microsoft Excel 2010 and SPSS Statistics V21.0.

Presenting of the main material. The sociological survey involved 29 (20.1%) people from the Sumy region, of which 69% of respondents live in urban and 31% are rural residential places. Among the respondents from urban areas, the majority of most of them were representatives of the tourism business (tour operator, travel agent, individual entrepreneur, etc.), and among the respondents from rural areas representatives of tourist attractions (museums, educational and leisure facilities, etc.) (Frame 1).

Frame 1

Sphere of activities of tourism business respondents in Sumy region

Sphere of activity	Urban area	Rural area
Tourist infrastructure (accommodation, catering, etc.)	10%	11,1%
Representative of NGOs and tourism-oriented clubs	10%	11,1%
Representative of the tourism business (tour operator, travel agent, individual entrepreneur, etc.)	35%	22,2%
A structural unit of the executive branch that coordinates tourism activities	25%	
Tourist attractions (museums, educational and leisure facilities, etc.)	25%	55,6%
Higher educational institutions	10%	
In total	20	9

Prior to the outbreak of war in the Sumy region, the main feature of the tourism business in urban and rural areas of Sumy region was excursion activities (45.8% and 46.2% respectively) and organizational and coordinating activities in the tourism sector (45.8% and 46.2%). The most common types of tourism before the outbreak of war were cultural and educational (30.3%), festivals and events (11.8% of respondents), sports and active (10.5%), rural and ecological (7.9% each), and religious (6.6%). The survey results showed that cultural and educational (85.0%), festival and event (40%), and ethno-cultural (35%) tourism prevailed in urban areas, while cultural and educational tourism (66.7%), rural (33.3%), and ethno-cultural (33.3% of responses) prevailed in rural areas.

Since the beginning of the military aggression, changes have taken place in the communities of Sumy region. According to the respondents, the level of interest in visiting tourist sites has decreased (25%), attractive tourist sites have ceased to function or receive tourists (23.1%), and the level of solvency of the population has decreased (17.3%). 13.5% of respondents said that some tourist locations had been damaged. 9.6% indicated that cooperation between volunteers, communities and tourism representatives has intensified. 3.8% of respondents noted that the flow of IDPs and their interest in local tourist sites had increased. 7.7% of respondents said that tourism had totally disappeared. 45% of respondents from urban areas indicated that tourist attractions have ceased to function or receive tourists and that the level of interest in visiting tourist sites has decreased.

40% of respondents noted a decrease in the level of solvency of the population. 44.4% of respondents from rural areas consider the decrease in the level of solvency of the population to be among the biggest changes, and 33.3% - that tourist attractions have ceased to function or receive tourists.

Among the problems and challenges faced by tourism enterprises in Sumy region, respondents noted the following: tourist facilities with which the business was connected fell into the zone of occupation or active hostilities and became inaccessible (17.6%); they had to completely reorient their activities from tourism to another direction (15.7%); partners in tourism activities ceased to function or do not accept tourists (13.7%); emotional exhaustion of employees and their moral unwillingness to work in the service sector (11.8%); due to low demand, they decided to temporarily suspend operations (11.8%); employees went abroad (7.8%); employees were called up to serve in the Armed Forces (7.8%); had to completely cease operations due to lack of economic profitability (5.9%). Another 7.8% of respondents indicated their own answer (other): overcoming the challenges of war; due to low demand, they decided to temporarily suspend operations, partially suspended operations; no sales; emotional exhaustion of employees and their moral unwillingness to work in the service sector, the tourism department was reorganized into a "sector", current operations were stopped. 35% of respondents from urban areas mentioned that the main problems were that as a result of military operations, their tourist facilities, with which their business was connected, were in the zone of occupation or active hostilities and became inaccessible, 25% – partners in tourism activities ceased to function or do not accept tourists, 25% had to completely reorient their activities from tourism to another direction. In rural areas, the main problems were the reorientation of their tourism activities to other areas and the conscription of their employees to the Armed Forces (33.3% each).

One of the questions in the questionnaire was to identify threats to tourism development. It is well known that military operations in any territory lead to a reduction in the number of trips. In times of war, people are less likely to go on vacation or holiday due to security concerns. People may be afraid to travel to places where conflicts are taking place because it is considered an unsafe environment. This can lead to a sharp decline in demand for airline tickets, hotel rooms, car rentals, and other travel services. Also, many businesses require large upfront capital, and the lack of regular customers can lead to bankruptcy if they do not have enough savings to survive these losses. Even if a business does not close completely due to financial losses, opportunities for expansion can be severely affected. War disrupts trade patterns, so that basic resources such as fuel and labour become scarce and expensive at times, leading to price increases that may discourage potential tourists from traveling at all. In addition, infrastructure is often damaged in places where hostilities have taken place, leaving hotels, tourist attractions, and entire cities in ruins. According to the respondents, the biggest threats to the tourism development of communities in Sumy region are: 57.1% threat of loss of material cultural values in the occupied and frontline territories and a significant deterioration in the financial capacity of customers -53.6%. Respondents from urban and rural areas of the region indicated that the threat of loss of material cultural property in the occupied and frontline territories is a high level of threat to the community (52.6% and 66.7% respectively). Urban respondents indicated that the threat of loss of ethnic and cultural identity of peoples in the occupied and near-frontline territories is a medium threat to the community (50%). Respondents from rural areas indicated that the threat of loss of ethnic and cultural identity of peoples in the occupied and frontline territories is a low level of threat to the community (50.0%), and the annexation of territories is a low level of threat to the community (50%). Respondents in urban areas of Sumy region see the danger of the territory due to its excessive mining as one of the high threats (55.6%). Respondents in rural areas noted that the outflow of qualified personnel abroad poses a low level of threat to the community (62.5%). Also, according to urban and rural respondents, a significant deterioration in the financial capacity of clients is a high threat (50% and 50% respectively). Respondents in urban areas of the Sumy region indicated that the threat of depopulation of the territory is a medium threat to the community (50.0%). Despite the fact that the Sumy region has the longest border with Russia, urban and rural respondents indicated that the destructive impact of Russian propaganda and Russification has a low level of threat to the community (52.9% and 62.5%, respectively).

Among the opportunities for the development of tourism business in Sumy region, the majority of respondents noted the following as promising: obtaining advisory services (76%) and developing tourism infrastructure (60.7%). The development of new tourism products in the community was assessed as a promising opportunity (77.8%) by rural respondents. The development of new tourism products in the community was assessed as a fairly promising opportunity by urban respondents (57.9%). Rural and urban respondents assessed the provision of advisory services as promising (87.5% and 70.6% respectively). The development of tourism infrastructure was assessed as a promising opportunity by rural and urban respondents (66.7% and 57.9%, respectively). Monitoring, promotion, and marketing of locations were also considered promising opportunities by both categories of respondents (62.5% rural and 50% - urban areas).

Regarding the prospects for tourism development in Sumy region in the future, the majority of rural respondents identified the introduction of digital (75%), tools for attracting funding and stimulating investment from domestic and international partners (66.7%), the introduction of innovations in tourism development and training (50%), and capacity building in the tourism industry (55.6%). The surveyed urban areas of the Sumy region considered attracting funding and stimulating investment from domestic and international partners to be quite promising opportunities (61.1%), introducing digital tools (57.9%), and introducing innovations in the field of tourism development (50.0% and 55.6%, respectively). Another important area is the diversification of the rural economy through tourism activities based on European practices [6]. This area is also quite relevant for the development of rural areas in Sumy region during the period of post-war recovery.

**Conclusion**. Restoration of tourism after the war in the territories where hostilities took place includes many components. The main ones are: creating attractive activities for tourists, providing access to tourist products and services at affordable prices, improving transport infrastructure, creating an attractive environment for tourism and lifestyle, offering hotels and other relevant services.

The war in Ukraine has severely affected rural tourism businesses. The war has led to a significant decline in tourism, both domestic and international, as well as stressed the infrastructure of many rural areas and damaged the environment. However, despite this, the potential for rural tourism development after the end of the war is quite large. Travel restrictions are gradually being lifted, allowing businesses and tourists to resume travel and see many of the attractions. In addition, international organizations are beginning to invest in rural tourism projects, helping to rebuild infrastructure and promote this type of tourism. Examples include the World Bank's Rural Tourism Initiative, which aims to promote sustainable economic development through the development of rural tourism. Therefore, it is important to motivate the local population to participate in tourism development by enlist the support of a government program. The Ukrainian government should create new incentives and regulations aimed at increasing the supply and demand of rural tourism innovators. These rules will encourage

developers and investors to develop projects in rural areas, creating new businesses and jobs for local communities. Currently, rural tourism development is being carried out by specialized agencies, such as the National Tourism Organization of Ukraine and the Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine, which are responsible for promoting and popularizing the rural tourism industry in Ukraine. Through their network and initiatives, they help to promote the country's unique rural attractions on both the international and national markets. The development of rural tourism remains relevant, as it is a prerequisite for the formation of a high-quality tourism product with a strong national character and a significant factor in the sustainable development of the territories.

Undoubtedly, after Ukraine's victory, the territories where the fighting took place have significant prospects for the development of military tourism. Many of the war-affected territories have already been subject to rehabilitation and restoration, and with the help of foreign aid, significant efforts have been made to accomplish this task. Military tourism in Ukraine would give visitors the opportunity to explore the country's rich cultural and historical sites, as well as learn more about the conflict and its impact on the population, economy

and society of Ukraine. There is also potential for the development of "memory tourism," where tourists can visit historical sites, memorials, and hear firsthand accounts from local residents about the conflict and its impact on their lives. Ukraine has excellent opportunities and potential to become an attractive hub for military tourism. With proper investment, infrastructure and advertising, Ukraine could attract tourists from all over the world who are interested in learning about the conflict and its impact. In addition, the Ukrainian government could work to provide tax incentives to attract foreign investors willing to finance repair and restoration initiatives. These investments will be an important part of the development of military tourism in the country. Another important factor is the development of a marketing strategy to attract tourists. This requires reaching out to foreign tourism markets by promoting Ukraine's attractions and benefits to travellers, creating investment programs that encourage investment in tourism infrastructure, advertising Ukrainian travel destinations, and creating programs for state support for tourism service providers. In the aftermath of the Russian-Ukrainian war, tourism development will help accelerate Ukraine's economic and political recovery.

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## Туристична діяльність у прифронтових зонах Сумської області: проблеми, можливості та перспективи

У статті представлено результати соціологічного опитування представників туристичної сфери прифронтових громад Сумської області, яке проводилося в рамках естонсько-українського науково-дослідницького проекту «Розвиток українських прифронтових громад і туристичного бізнесу в умовах війни та стратегії на майбутнє» за підтримки Естонського дослідницького агентства. Соціологічне опитування проводилося методом онлайн-опитування та включало 25 запитань закритого та відкритого типу. У соціологічному опитуванні взяли участь 29 (20,1%) осіб із Сумської області, з них 69 % респондентів проживає в міській місцевості, а 31% — жителі сільської місцевості. Розглянута сфера діяльності респондентів туристичного бізнесу у Сумській області: серед респондентів міської місцевості найбільше було представників представник туристичного бізнесу (туроператор, турагент, ФОП тощо), а серед опитаних із сільської місцевості переважали представники закладів туристичної атракції (музеї, пізнавально-дозвіллєві заклади тощо).

Проаналізовано відповіді респондентів на наступні питання: туристична діяльність до війни, туристична діяльність в умовах війни, зміни, що відбулися в туризмі, перспективи розвитку туризму, загрози та можливості розвитку туризму, проблеми у туристичній сфері, перспективи розвитку туризму, переваги у кластерній співпраці. Описано туристичний потенціал Сумської області, який включає 3465 пам'яток історії та культури, у т.ч. на державному обліку — 367 пам'яток архітектури і містобудування, серед яких 5 — національного значення. Проаналізовано наукові публікації українських та закордонних дослідників шодо розвитку туризму в повоєнний та післявоєнний час в Україні.

Ключові слова: туризм, війна, соціологічне опитування, представники туристичного бізнесу, Сумська область.

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