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EXPANDING THE SPECTRUM OF INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AND LEBANON)¹

The article is devoted to the study of interaction between the Republic of Belarus and the Lebanese Republic in the field of tourism. It assesses the prospects for the strategic development of cooperation between the states. The author identifies the problems and reserves of interrelationship. Main factors that determine the conditions of potential intercultural interaction, such as interest in cultural heritage (including Christian religious sights and shrines), desire to get education in Belarus and chances to be engaged in ecotourism are highlighted. It is stated that despite existing difficulties, there are still chances for strategic cooperation as counties concluded agreements in fields connected with tourism.

It is outlined that the increase in cultural diversity of modern humanity requires the creation of new approaches to preservation and development of their integrity and cultural appearance. It is relevant for both Belarus and Lebanon in 2022 as far as both countries face the same struggle of their image being undervalued around the globe. New ideas were proposed to improve the development of tourism in the countries.

The results obtained can be used by organizations and enterprises involved in the tourist and excursion sphere when developing new sightseeing routes and tours or choosing a strategy for expanding the target audience of tourists.

Keywords: *tourism, intercultural interaction, forms of intercultural communication, tourism activities, Lebanon, Belarus.*

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РАСШИРЕНИЕ СПЕКТРА МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ В СФЕРЕ ТУРИЗМА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ И ЛИВАНА)

Статья посвящена изучению вопроса взаимодействия Республики Беларусь и Ливанской Республики в сфере туризма, и дана оценка перспективам стратегического развития сотрудничества между государствами. Автором выявлены проблемы и резервы межкультурного взаимодействия стран и основные факторы, определяющие этот процесс, включая интерес к культурному наследию (в том числе историко-культурное наследие и святыни христиан), желание получить образо-

¹ Статья публикуется в авторской редакции.

вание в Беларуси и возможность посещения туров в рамках экотуризма. Утверждается, что, несмотря на существующие трудности, стратегическое сотрудничество является перспективным и соглашения в сфере туризма и смежных отраслях в настоящее время подписаны.

Подчеркивается, что увеличение культурного разнообразия современного человечества требует создания новых подходов к сохранению и развитию их целостности и культурного облика. Это актуально как для Беларуси, так и для Ливана в 2022 году, поскольку обе страны сталкиваются с одинаковой проблемой неполноты или недооценки своего имиджа в мире. Были предложены идеи для улучшения развития туризма в странах.

Полученные результаты могут использоваться организациями и предприятиями, задействованными в туристическо-экскурсионной сфере при разработке новых экскурсионных маршрутов и туров, выборе стратегии расширения целевой аудитории туристов и экскурсантов.

Ключевые слова: туризм, межкультурное взаимодействие, формы межкультурной коммуникации, туристическая деятельность, Ливан, Республика Беларусь.

At the dawn of the third millennium, it is becoming increasingly obvious that humanity is advancing through expanding the interconnection and interdependence of nations and their cultures. This process has covered multiple spheres of public life around the globe. Today it is impossible to find ethnic communities that would not be affected by the cultures of other peoples, as well as the broader social environment existing in individual regions and in the world as a whole.

This was reflected in the rapid growth of cultural exchanges and direct contacts between state institutions and social groups, social movements and individuals belonging to different countries and cultures. The expansion of interaction between nationalities makes the issue of cultural identity and cultural differences an important concern.

Another key fact to remember is the increase in cultural diversity of modern humanity. It requires the creation of new approaches to preservation and development of their integrity and cultural appearance. This tendency to protect cultural identity confirms the general pattern that mankind does not lose its cultural diversity even though it becomes more interconnected and unified at the same time.

In light of these trends in social development, it is crucial to be able to identify the cultural characteristics of peoples in order to understand each other and achieve mutual recognition. This is particularly relevant for Belarus and Lebanon as both countries' image is not yet clear for representatives of different countries.

According to Geert Hofstede's six dimensions of culture [1], Belarus and Lebanon are at a similar level in terms of how their nations are organized.

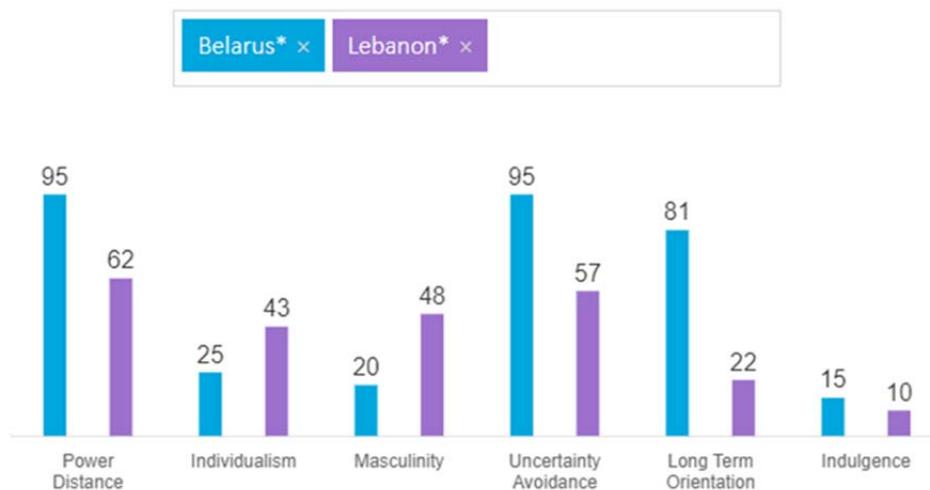


Figure – Geert Hofstede's Comparison of Belarus and Lebanon

Source – The 6 dimensions' model of national culture by Geert Hofstede, 2022

Analyzing the Figure 1 it is necessary to outline the concept of individualism. As if in both countries people are expected to choose the goals of the community, rather than personal ones, it can be suggested that communication between representatives of both cultures may be successful. As for tourism, organized tours for family members joining a bigger group of tourists will be preferred as well.

Speaking about family it is important to analyze the degree to which small children are socialized. In this case the dimension of Indulgence is appropriate. It is defined as the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Relatively weak control is called "Indulgence" and relatively strong control is called "Restraint" [1].

Belarus's score of 15 indicates a culture characterized by great Restraint. Restrained societies have the perception that their actions are, or should be, restrained by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong [1]. Similar situation is observed in Lebanon.

Considering all the data provided in Figure 1, it should be noted that interaction between two states under analysis would be successful if it happens in the way of group tours around the country.

Thus, on the example of tourism, cultures can better reveal their potential in multi-polar world of today. It is evident that as a social system, culture must meet a number of well-known requirements of integrity, structurality, interrelation of components, and the presence of progressive functioning. So if to speak about interaction, Edward Hall's works seem to be the best to describe the process. The author showed a close connection between culture and communication. Developing his ideas, E. Hall came to the conclusion about the need to teach culture ("if culture is studied, it means that it can be taught"), thereby for the first time proposing to make the problem of intercultural communication not only a subject of scientific research, but also an independent academic discipline.

Continuing the research of Edward Hall today, it is important to analyze as many forms of communication as possible. To begin with, diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Lebanese Republic were established on March 21, 1996. On July 7-8, 2004, President of Lebanon E. Lahoud paid an official visit to the Republic of Belarus. In June 2001, the Prime

Minister of the Republic of Belarus paid an official visit to Lebanon. Since then the commencement of rapprochement between the states was observed.

Firstly, the two countries have concluded trade and economic agreements, as well as agreements in the field of education, as a result of which in 2020/2021 academic year the number of Lebanese citizens obtaining their Bachelor's and Master's degree at Belarusian universities reached 659 people [2]. It all means that one of the factors for the development of intercultural interaction between Belarus and Lebanon is educational tourism.

Secondly, during 2012-2019, revenue from the provision of tourist services increased from 48.0 million rubles in 2012 to 212.9 million rubles in 2019, while in 2017-2019, in comparison with 2012-2016, the cost of tours paid for by tourists and tourists who left the Republic of Belarus increased significantly, which is also due to an increase in the number of tourists leaving. Provided data signifies that Belarus has the required potential to attract foreign tourists [3].

As for tourism in Lebanon, the activity of the hotel sector in Lebanon intensified in 2018 due to an increase in the number of tourists. The number of foreign tourists coming to the Republic of Belarus is growing, while the share of tourists from Lebanon in 2019 was 0.08%, which is lower than the level of 2014, 2016 – 2018. The number of Belarusians traveling abroad from 2016 to 2019 is growing, but there are no tourists visiting Lebanon.

The civil protests taking place in 2019-2020 in Lebanon, the economic crisis, as well as the explosions in the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 and the appearance of the Covid-19 on the planet had a negative impact on tourism, since transport links between the states of the planet were minimized. However, despite rather challenging figures and existence of unstable situation in the world, the strategic development is possible. In difficult times, Belarus is ready to offer assistance to Lebanon in overcoming existing difficulties by supplying its own products, participating in industrial cooperation projects, scientific, technical and humanitarian cooperation. As soon as the situation stabilizes, it will be possible to talk about full-fledged cooperation in the field of tourism.

At the moment, visa regime between countries have been simplified [5] and direct flights

from Minsk to Beirut are provided by Belavia. In this case, it is vital to consider the tourism potential of both countries. For instance, the Belarusian one lies in the diversity and beauty of nature, the uniqueness of historical and cultural heritage. There are more than 17 thousand objects of historical, cultural, architectural significance in the republic, as well as memorable places associated with the names of outstanding figures of world history and culture. Ecological tourism is developed in the country on the basis of national parks "Narochansky", "Pripyatsky", "Braslav Lakes", "Belovezhskaya Pushcha", Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve, reserves "Naliboksky", "Blue Lakes" and many others. Recreation and wellness are offered to guests by 490 health resorts, wellness organizations and other specialized accommodation facilities.

Religious tourism does not lose its relevance as 40% of Lebanese are Christians. This can mean the ability to provide excursions to religious sights of both countries.

The tourism potential of Lebanon includes preserved medieval castles, ruins of ancient Roman structures, limestone caves, churches and mosques. There are 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites on the territory of the Lebanese Republic: the ancient city of Anjar – the center of the Levantine trade routes; the cities of Baalbek and Byblos, the valley of Wadi Kadisha and the forest of Khorsh-Arz-el-Rab; the city of Tyre.

The conducted research proves the possibility and prospects for the development of tourism between the countries. Having analyzed the dynamics of annual tourist arrivals and profits from the provision of tourist services in Lebanon and Belarus, similarity in terms of cultural dimensions, similar religion, the existence of precious historical sights and UNESCO heritage objects, simplification of entry to both countries, it is logical to believe that by 2025 the countries will conclude relevant agreements in the field of tourism and continue successful cooperation, as is observed in the field of education.

All mentioned above brings to a conclusion that intercultural interaction is a relationship that arises when cultures or individuals belonging to different cultures interact. Currently, there is a tendency towards rapprochement between the states of Belarus and Lebanon. Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Lebanese Republic were established in 1996. The Republic of Belarus and Lebanon have concluded trade and economic agreements, as well

as agreements in the field of education, as a result of which around 700 Lebanese citizens are currently studying at Belarusian universities.

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