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THE HISTORY OF TOURISM STUDIES IN KAZAKHSTAN

Tourism geography is a discipline which deals with the spatial organization of tourism, where the object of study is the analysis and synthesis of the spatial forms and relations between tourism phenomena and a number of related space transforming processes. Being a complex phenomenon, tourism has become an object of inter-disciplinary studies. Recently, a new discipline has begun to develop – ‘tourismology’¹, mostly due to the contribution of such as geography, economics, management, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, medicine, architecture, urban planning, regional planning, law, as well as other natural, social and technological fields. However, there is still a long way to go in the process of developing ‘tourismology’ in which the mono-disciplinary approach to tourism is changed to multidisciplinary. The author believes that tourism geography can and indeed does fully perform the functions of tourismology as it is currently developing, because as a sub-discipline of social geography, it refers to all aspects of tourism activity, including the natural-geographical, socio-economic, ecological, political, academic-technological, etc.

Recreation and tourism geography studies in Kazakhstan were pioneered in the 1970s by the ‘Kazgiprograd’ State Institute of Design, employing a team of qualified architects, geographers, economists, engineers and other specialists, such as Rusmanova, Ejdinova, and Muchametchina, who greatly contributed to the achievements of the Institute as regards tourism development plans for Kazakhstan.

Over a period of more than 20 years, ‘Kazgiprograd’ developed many schemes for the tourism economy of the republic. They included ‘Development plans for recreation zones in the Kazakhstan Soviet Republic for 1976-1990’ (1979), and ‘Plans for the development and distribution of tourism centres in the

Kazakhstan Soviet Republic by 2000’ (1983). The second project included a correction – the period was extended to 2005, and the end of the first reporting period – to 1990. The works mentioned above are considered to be the most significant architectural and planning projects on the organization of recreation and tourism in Kazakhstan. They propose preparing attractive areas of the republic for tourism use should take place gradually, taking into account the following:

- natural and historical-cultural potential (heritage) of the area;
- possibilities for organizing tours;
- availability of transport routes;
- infrastructural back-up;
- available work force resources.

Each of the previously established recreational-landscape zones was evaluated from the point of view of its value for different forms of recreational activity. The system adopted for assessing conditions and resources made it possible to compare different areas and recommend individual regions as suitable for the development of various forms of mass tourism. As a result, about 60 tourism-recreational zones were identified covering 16 provinces (*oblasts*).

‘Kazgiprograd’ drew up several other plans, including some regional ones. First of all, we should mention here the ‘Plan for the development and distribution of spas, recreation and tourism sites, nature parks and reserves in the Kazakh Soviet Republic’ (1985) and ‘Plan for the development and distribution of the natural environment preservation fund facilities in the Kazakh Soviet Republic by 2005’ (1989). The projects presented the potential of recreation and tourism development in the republic, based on its natural resources.

In 1970-80, ‘Kazgiprograd’ was the leading producer of tourism-related projects in Kazakhstan,

though in the early 1980s other institutions involved in similar activity appeared, usually on a regional scale. At Kirov Kazakh State University, a group of researchers from the Geography Department conducted a study commissioned by the Zhambyl Provincial Department of Architecture. Its outcome was the 'Plan for the development and distribution of tourism industry in the Zhambyl Province: 1990-2005' (supervised by Erdavletov). The study included the following:

- an analysis of the current level of tourism development in the province;
- recommendations concerning a plan for long-term development and location of tourism enterprises;
- publishing *Tourism map of the Zhambyl Province*, at a scale of 1:750 000 (Minsk, 1990).

Other works, unfortunately unfinished because of the start of Gorbachev's perestroika, included a pocket version of *Tourism atlas of the city of Zhambyl*, which might have become the third publication of this type in the USSR (the other two presented Moscow and Minsk)

The dissolution of the USSR and the regaining of sovereignty by Kazakhstan led to a deep economic crisis, a consequence of the collapse of the national economic system. One result was the disintegration of 'Kazgiprograd', divided into several smaller specialist departments. They continued to pursue the activity of the former 'giant' and were run by its previous managers: Muchametchina, Bajzakov, Dudukalova, Ejdinov and others.

Tourism planning was resumed in the early 1990s by the group led by Muchametchina. The team worked on two important projects, 'A comprehensive plan for the study and distribution of facilities along the Kazakh section of the Silk Road' (1991) and the 'National Program for Tourism Industry Development in the Kazakh Republic - a draft' (1993). They both played a significant role in formulating a long-term conception of national tourism development, based on its natural and socio-economic resources.

Some researchers began to work at private institutions, executing orders from other firms and organizations. Such works included a *Map of the Almaty Province for hunters and anglers*, at a scale of 1:800 000, by Chikovani, published in Minsk, 1993.

An important publication was the landscape-based *Map of the tourism-recreational resources of Zhetysu (Semirechye)* (Nazarczuk & Girovka), by 'Ekoprojekt' (1997), including a qualitative assessment of the recreational resources of the region.

In 1998, the same company published the *Map of environment protection in Kazakhstan*, at a scale of 1 : 350 000 (Nazartchuk, Bajzakov & Dudukalova), which presented the existing and potential sites for protection as well as a basis for the development of various types of mass tourism.

Despite some small inaccuracies, the very original *Map of ecological tourism sites in the vicinity of Almaty*, at a scale of 1 : 60 000, drawn by Fishman & Firsova in 1999, may be successfully used by both tourists and the lecturers and students of the country's universities which educate prospective tourism workers.

In the late 1990s, tourism and recreation studies were taken up by researchers from the Institute of Geography at the National Academy of Science. Led by Popov, a group of academics from the 'Geo-ecological Laboratory for Mountain Area Problems' conducted wide-ranging research into using the natural environment of northern Tien Shan. The results of the study included the following:

- rules for assessing recreational resources were established, which might be applied to other mountainous regions of Kazakhstan and the neighbouring countries;
- factors and conditions of tourism activity were analysed, in relation to the types of activities at individual destinations;
- methods of mapping mountain areas were established.

In 1996, the Geography Department at the Al-Farabi State University opened a tourism section (including the Faculty of Tourism) and researchers became involved in studying the development and spatial organization of tourism in Kazakhstan, as a result of which the university became the leading higher education institution dealing with the subject. It was confirmed by the opening of a multifunctional Tourism Research and Education Centre in 1999, whose main objectives included:

- the study of tourism;
- issuing academic publications;
- compiling university textbooks;
- preparing information and advertising materials.

The founder of the Faculty and the Centre was Prof. Erdavletov, a specialist in tourism geography. In cooperation with assistant professors Artiemiev, Alijeva, Isakova and Abisheva, as well as Tyncherova and Ivanov, they conduct research into theoretical and practical issues of the spatial organization of tourism in the Kazakh Republic, the results of which may be found in both journals and occasional academic publications, mainly in the 'Kazakh National Uni-

versity – geographical series’, or in conference publications.

Since it was founded 13 years ago, the Faculty of Tourism has organized three international academic conferences: ‘Current issues of tourism theory and practice’ (1999), ‘Problems of tourism industry development in Kazakhstan’ (2002), and ‘Tourism geography: current theoretical and practical issues’ (2006). All three events were followed by the publication of conference materials.

In 2000, the Faculty of Tourism won a grant for conducting research, in a competition announced by the Kazakh Ministry of Education and Science. As a result, together with the Tourism Research and Education Centre and the ‘GradInform’ group (Muchametchina & Vagapova), they conducted a study concerning the assessment of recreational resources as the basis of the sustainable development of the tourism industry in the Kazakh Republic. The aim of this project was to establish theoretical and methodological foundations for a research-based, rational use of the recreational resources of the Kazakh Republic for the purposes of tourism development and spatial organization.

The results of the study were as follows:

- establishing criteria for classifying and assessing natural and socio-economic recreational resources (2000);
- conducting a comprehensive study, as well as an inventory and evaluation of recreational resources, combined with the spatial delimitation of tourism-recreational regions and collecting wide-ranging data about all recreational resources, using the example of Almaty (2001);
- establishing a methodology for preparing topographic tourism maps of Kazakhstan provinces and regions [*Tourism map of the Almaty Province, at a scale of 1:800 000* (2002)].

In 2009, the Faculty won a ministerial grant again, which was used for three-year (2009-11) research entitled ‘Establishing the geographical foundations for the sustainable development of tourism, on the basis of the Kazakhstan potential tourism and recreation assessment’.

In the following years, the Faculty of Tourism at the Al Farabi University was transformed into a major research centre dealing with tourism in Kazakhstan. In 1998, at the Geography Department, the first PhD thesis was defended in the field of economic, social and political geography, a sub-discipline of which is tourism geography – a discipline new to both Kazakhstan and the whole Commonwealth of Independent States.

The founder of the Dissertation Council for Academic Degrees and Titles was Professor Erdavletov – the author of the first theoretical works, as well as student textbooks, where he laid the foundations of Kazakhstan’s tourism geography. He is the leader of the Kazakh school of tourism geography – a discipline of the future, oriented towards solving problems through research-based rules for tourism development and national spatial organization.

Over the years when the Council was functioning, PhD theses on tourism geography were defended by seven students: Musin (1998), Szabelnikova (2000), Alijeva (2001), Mamadiarov (2002), Tursinbajeva (2003), Kubiesova (2004) and Titova (2007).

A noticeable contribution into the development of tourism research has been made by other universities and organizations such as the Tourism Department at Turan University (Nazartchuk, Korabliov and others), Tourism Department at the Kazakh Academy of Sport and Tourism (Vukolov & Makagonov), Abai University Faculty of Tourism (Bejzenov, Masbajev & Saipov), and Auezov South Kazakhstan State University Faculty of Tourism (Zoldasbekov, Pychariev & Mamadiarov). Recently, research into the tourism economy has been taken up by the Institute of Economics, at the Ministry of Education and Science. Each of the institutions mentioned above contributes to developing tourismology in Kazakhstan, for instance, the Kazakh Academy of Sport and Tourism and Abai University – in the field of tourism pedagogy, sports theory and practice, as well as children’s and school tourism; Turan University – in the field of the tourism economy. The dissertation councils at these universities admit doctoral and habilitation theses concerning various areas of tourism. The dissertations by Vukalov (tourism pedagogy) and Makagonov (theory of sports tourism) were defended at the Kazakh Academy of Sport and Tourism. The list of other dissertations on tourism in Kazakhstan shows topicality in the problems presented, as well as the role of researchers representing various disciplines in academic development. Tourism has been put on the Kazakh Accreditation Council list of disciplines. Creating a modern effective tourism industry in Kazakhstan will be impossible without conducting tourism studies. Therefore, it is necessary to include at least three new disciplines on the Accreditation Council list: tourism geography, tourism and recreation, tourism economics and organization; as well as tourism pedagogy and psychology, following a division into geographical, economic and pedagogical-psychological sciences. This would mean studying the

development and spatial organization of tourism as a socio-economic and spatial phenomenon, as stated in the 'Conception of tourism development in the Kazakh Republic' in 2001.

When writing this article, the author tried to analyse the whole of Kazakh tourism literature, which showed that it predominantly consists of tourism guide-books (to regions, cities and individual tourism attractions), while the number of theoretical works is definitely smaller. However, the first steps have been already made. Authors of theoretical works include Vukolova, Girovke, Zoldasbekov, Kim, Korabliov, Makogonov, Nazartchuk, Popov, Pychariev, Rajev, Saipov, Tyntcherova, Jagofarov and others.

The responsibilities of the state organ (equal to a ministry) dealing with tourism, established in 1991, were limited to merely coordinating the activity of all the tourism enterprises and organizations, guaranteeing their state's support and establishing the regulations governing tourism. Regrettably, it must be said that the present Kazakh Ministry of Tourism and Sport is unable to cope with these tasks successfully, and that includes patronage over the development of tourism research.

It would not be fair, however, to say that the Ministry and its regional divisions ignore the problem of research-based tourism development in the country altogether. An example of its actual involvement was the foundation of the Tourism Department of the City of Almaty (Kajsenov), which published the *Guide to Kazakhstan: Almaty – the centre of Kazakh tourism* in 2002. The book, published in Russian and English, is an element in creating the image of the country on the global tourism market. Moreover, the Tourism Department deals with the preparation of films and brochures advertising the most attractive sites in Kazakhstan, TV programmes about such places and about the current issues in tourism development.

We should also mention the activity of the Almaty Tourism Department (Bekbergenov), which in 2002 published a tourism guide entitled *Zhetysu – a land of tourism*, as well as a *Tourism map of the Almaty Province, at a scale of 1:1000 000* (ed. Nazartchuk). There are also bi-lingual materials, which together with publications about Almaty are a part of current tourism policy in Kazakhstan, focused on the development of international tourism as a source of foreign currency.

We should also mention the contribution to tourism development made by some workers of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Nikitinskij & Bekbergenov). In 2008, they published a very interesting *Tourism schematic map of the Kazakh Republic, at a scale of 1:3 500 000*, in both wall and pocket sizes.

It might be said that these are only the first steps. The Ministry should promptly create organizational and financial opportunities to establish a State Institute of Tourism Research which would take responsibility for research guaranteeing tourism development and its spatial organization in the Kazakh Republic. The country already has the human resources to do that. An Institute of Tourism might soon move from a stage of dispersion and dilettantism to a focused, scientific approach to the study of national tourism problems.

FOOTNOTE

¹ In Kazakhstan, tourism science (tourismology) has been put on the list of official scientific disciplines. In Poland, it is being discussed whether making tourism science or sciences a separate discipline is necessary. Another controversy concerns the naming of the potential new science. It appears that 'touristicology' or 'tourismology' are not highly approved by scientists. Since the 1930s geographers have been using the term 'tourism', which fully reflects the nature of this more and more frequently isolated scientific discipline (translator's comment).