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INNOVATIONS IN TOUR OPERATIONS AS A RESPONSE TO GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES IN CREATING TRANSCORDON ROUTES

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Abstract: *This article examines the innovative strategies employed by tour operating companies in response to geopolitical challenges, particularly focusing on the creation of transborder routes. In a world marked by geopolitical transformations, the tourism industry faces diverse risks that necessitate adaptive measures from tour operators. The study assesses the risks linked to transborder tourist routes and investigates the proactive role of tour operators in mitigating these challenges.*

Geopolitical factors, such as political and economic instability, terrorism threats, diplomatic disputes, migration crises, and changes in infrastructure and access, significantly impact the safety and stability of transborder routes. The article highlights the dynamic nature of these challenges and emphasizes the need for flexible and responsive strategies from tour operators.

In this context, the research delves into the role of technological innovations, including digital technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain, in enhancing the quality, safety, and adaptability of transborder tourist routes. It explores how these technologies contribute to efficient logistics, personalized tourist experiences, and real-time analysis of geopolitical risks.

Furthermore, the article discusses the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in the tourism industry. It underscores the significance of information exchange and best practices among tour operators to overcome geopolitical challenges effectively. The study concludes by emphasizing the critical role of innovation in ensuring the sustainability and success of tour operators amidst geopolitical uncertainties.

Keywords: *innovations in tourism, tour operating, geopolitics, transborder routes, tourism industry, technologies, blockchain.*

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where geopolitical transformations not only become an inevitable reality but also emerge as a defining factor in the global economy and international relations, the tourism industry finds itself at the epicenter of these changes. Open borders and

transborder routes, serving as bridges between cultures and nationalities, often become subjects of strained geopolitical relations, necessitating a balanced and innovative response from tour operating companies.

There is an escalation of conflicts, shifts in political alliances, and economic instability that impact the tourism industry through restrictions, sanctions, and other geopolitical challenges. In this context, innovations in tour operating are identified as a key element for successful resilience and adaptation to changes, ensuring the stability and efficiency of transborder tourist routes.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Geopolitical factors significantly impact the tourism industry, shaping the circumstances and conditions for the development and functioning of transborder tourist routes. Some key aspects include international relations, political conflicts and instability, trade and economic factors, trade agreements, economic relations, and geographic changes.

Changes in political alliances and diplomatic relations between countries can affect tourist flows. Simultaneously, political events such as the imposition of visa restrictions or political conflicts may restrict access to certain regions. Positive changes in international relations stimulate tourist flows by promoting transborder cooperation and the development of joint tourism initiatives.

In the context of unfolding political conflicts, key factors are the safety of tourists and the mitigation of various risks. The deployment of political conflicts, terrorist threats, or economic instability leads to a reduction in tourist demand and restrictions on the movement of tourists through specific transborder routes. Additionally, the imposition of international sanctions often limits the opportunities for tourism enterprises and affects their collaboration with other countries.

Trade and economic factors also play a crucial role in tourism. Changes in exchange rates and economic difficulties impact the cost of travel and the choice of transborder routes for tourists. Furthermore, trade agreements and economic relations between countries can stimulate tourism by facilitating visa regimes and increasing tourist services.

Therefore, relying on numerous studies in the field of tourism conducted by UNWTO, the international share of all trips is expected to reach an impressive figure of 1,800 billion by 2030, from 1.4 billion since COVID-19. It is noteworthy that despite this, international travel was only accessible to 5-7% of the world's population at that time, as indicated by small print publications [2].

Geopolitical transformations sometimes provoke geographical changes, leading to specific environmental and migration processes. Climate change and natural disasters adversely affect the accessibility and attractiveness of certain transborder regions for tourists. A negative phenomenon in these processes remains population migration, influencing the cultural and social dynamics of regions, which may impact tourist interests and demand. Therefore, geopolitical factors shape and define the tourism industry, including the consideration of transborder routes and the response of tour operating companies to these challenges.

In the modern world, where geopolitical turbulence is not only the focus of politicians and diplomats but also a significant factor influencing the global economy and sociocultural relations, the tourism industry finds itself in a particularly complex situation. Political conflicts, sanctions, terrorist threats, and economic instability can have a considerable impact on transborder routes, which serve as the foundation for the operation

of tour operators. Changes in international relations, political conflicts, and other geopolitical phenomena can trigger not only economic and political challenges but also force tour operators to reconsider their approaches to safety and route planning.

The most complex and multi-stage process is the innovative implementation of the tourist product (updating the manufactured product) and the technological process of creating the tourist product (updating the technology). It is during its implementation that the features and difficulties faced by tour operators are most fully defined [5].

In the context of contemporary geopolitical instability, tour operators face challenges that require not only adaptation but also strategic reconsideration of their activities. Geopolitical turbulences, such as political conflicts, sanctions, terrorist threats, and economic instability, inevitably impact tourist routes, determining both their safety and stability.

Despite geopolitical challenges, there is a group of tourists who can always afford to travel. According to a UNIDO study conducted earlier this century, three groups of travelers are distinguished: the elite, the banking circle, and those effectively excluded from the global system (Henryk F. Handszuh, 2023). Global events and conflicts influence the choices of such tourists and shape their expectations. Tour operators are tasked with ensuring the safety of their clients and maintaining the attractiveness of routes even in unpredictable conditions.

Tour operators, in turn, seek to respond to geopolitical transformations by developing strategies aimed at preserving the safety and resilience of their routes. This includes reviewing partnership relations, implementing security technologies, and developing crisis management plans [6].

To overcome geopolitical challenges and effectively adapt to changes in modern tour operating, various innovative approaches are utilized. The aspects studied and employed in this field are outlined in Figure 1.

The use of modern technologies allows tour operators to ensure more precise tracking of routes and tourist safety. IoT can be utilized to monitor group movements, control safety conditions, and exchange real-time data. Artificial intelligence algorithms are employed to analyze geopolitical trends and forecast potential impacts on the tourism industry. Additionally, data analytics enables tour operators to make informed decisions and adapt to changes in real-time.

The use of geodata for personalizing marketing strategies is relevant for the work of tour operators. Furthermore, location data analysis allows tour operators to create targeted offers and individual routes, considering geopolitical conditions.

In the era of digital technologies and big data, the use of geodata becomes a key element of an effective marketing strategy in tourism. This approach allows tour operators not only to better understand their clients but also to create personalized and targeted offers, taking into account geopolitical and location conditions. Geodata allows collecting client location data. Tour operators can use this information to create personalized offers, considering individual interests and needs of tourists. Geodata helps identify demand and popular locations, which can be used for effective audience segmentation and the creation of specialized tours.

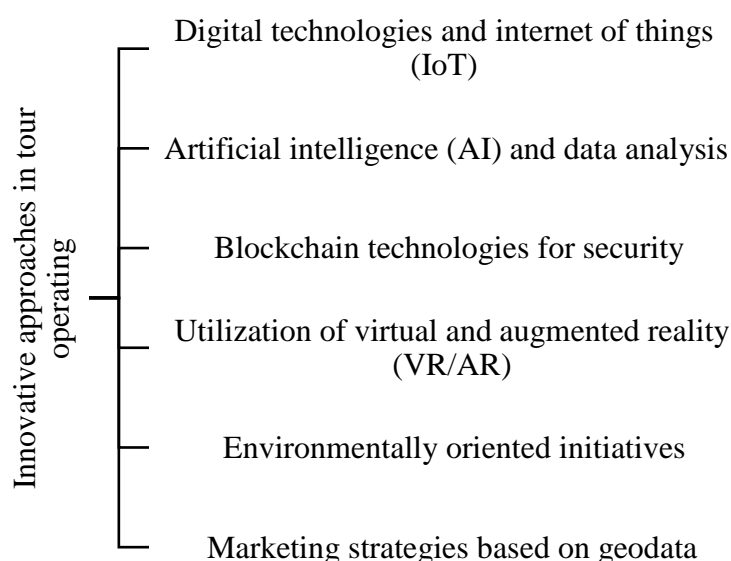


Figure 1. Innovative approaches in tour operating amid geopolitical challenges

Source: author's development

Geodata also allows analyzing and predicting changes in geopolitical conditions and adapting marketing strategies accordingly. This facilitates a more responsive approach to challenges and opportunities. The use of geodata for creating interactive routes and excursions that can be accessed through mobile applications or websites. Through geodata, advertising campaigns targeting specific locations can be organized, making them more effective and ensuring a higher level of interaction.

Geodata can be used to interact and attract the audience through social media, utilizing geotagging and location-based features. The use of geodata in the marketing strategies of tour operators contributes to the increased effectiveness of advertising campaigns, audience expansion, and the creation of unique personalized routes that meet modern tourist demands and expectations.

The use of blockchain technology for ensuring the security and tracking of transactions is beneficial in providing information transparency, preventing fraud, and enhancing trust in tour operator services. Blockchain technologies are known for their reliability, resistance to manipulation, and the ability to create decentralized and secure systems. The use of blockchain in tourism can significantly improve the security and tracking of transactions, influencing trust and information openness. Additionally, blockchain can establish a secure and transparent mechanism for processing and storing tourists' personal data, ensuring their confidentiality and integrity.

Recording all operations and rewards in the blockchain makes the loyalty system more transparent and resistant to manipulation. Blockchain allows tracking the supply chain of products and services, determining their origin and quality. It also enables the creation of unique and immutable records of tours and packages, avoiding falsification and ensuring the accuracy of information. Recording personal data and documents in the blockchain ensures their security and immutability. Using blockchain for forming secure and immutable contracts in booking systems. Nowadays, most tourist and transportation organizations have transitioned to electronic documents, enabling the creation of contracts and issuance of travel documents to tourists without leaving home or the office [1]. All

these aspects contribute to ensuring a high level of security in tourism, reducing the risk of manipulation and fraud, and enhancing trust among participants in the tourism process. Creating virtual tours and interactive explorations for tourists remains relevant today to increase interest and attractiveness of transborder routes, even during periods of geopolitical turbulence. In modern tourism, virtual and augmented reality technologies play a crucial role in creating unparalleled tourist experiences and drawing attention to transborder routes, especially during periods of geopolitical turbulence. Key aspects of using VR/AR in tourism include virtual tours and excursions, interactive explorations, virtual museums and architectural objects, promoting lesser-known places, tourism marketing and advertising, tour products, and route planning.

The creation of virtual tours allows tourists to visit landmarks, museums, or natural areas without leaving their homes, which is particularly relevant during periods when physical mobility is limited. The use of AR to overlay information on the real world enables tourists to obtain additional data about the history, architecture, and cultural features of a specific region. Additionally, creating virtual museums and architectural objects allows tourists to enjoy cultural heritage without being physically present.

VR/AR can be used to present lesser-known or exotic places, contributing to the expansion of the tourism potential of different regions. Creating immersive virtual stories and advertising campaigns enhances emotional engagement with a specific route or region. Using AR for virtual placement of objects and determining optimal routes for travel.

Given the limitations of physical movement during geopolitical turbulence, VR/AR serve as important tools for attracting tourists and maintaining interest in transborder routes. These technologies create opportunities for impressive and safe virtual journeys, contributing to the preservation and development of the tourism industry amid uncertainty [3].

Modern tourism is confronted with a growing understanding of the importance of nature conservation and sustainable development. In response to this, tour operators worldwide are increasingly focusing on the development of environmentally friendly and sustainable routes that not only meet the needs of tourists but also actively contribute to the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems. Key aspects of development include environmentally friendly transportation, energy-efficient hotels and infrastructure, water resource conservation, local cooperation, and social responsibility, education and ecopedagogy, as well as environmentally friendly activities and experiences. The ecological efficiency of tourist movement and entrepreneurship helps preserve and gradually restore the integrity of the environment and cultural heritage [5].

The development of eco-friendly routes not only ensures the sustainability of natural resources but also creates competitive advantages for tour operators actively implementing such approaches. Tourists are increasingly interested in vacationing in places where ecological cleanliness is maintained, and nature is supported and protected. The development of environmentally friendly and sustainable routes is an important step towards more responsible and ecologically sustainable tourism. The balance of all components of sustainable tourism development as a socio-ecological-economic system. There are limitations in the exploitation of natural tourist-recreational resources in developing countries, to some extent relative, as they are related to the biosphere's ability to cope with the consequences of human activity [4].

These innovative approaches enable tour operators to effectively counter geopolitical challenges, ensuring the safety and stability of transborder routes while simultaneously creating new opportunities for development and competitiveness. Any innovative

processes in the tourism industry at the regional level serve as a mechanism for investment activity throughout the tourism sector. For the tourism sector, the implementation of innovative processes should be based on the concept of project management as the most flexible system that adequately influences changes in the external environment, especially in a market economy [4].

In a world undergoing constant geopolitical and economic changes, tourist routes become vulnerable to a vast spectrum of risks. Transborder tourist routes, extending across country and regional borders, pose unique challenges and dangers, particularly in times of geopolitical tensions. Recognizing and properly addressing these risks are crucial tasks for the tourism industry, governmental structures, and tourists themselves. In the context of geopolitical tensions, travel can become not only a source of pleasure but also a challenge to safety, stability, and comfort. Furthermore, tour operator activities are controlled by global corporations and conglomerates, typically having the character of integrated structures [1].

Geopolitical tensions can significantly impact tourist routes, creating challenges for their safety and stability. In a climate of uncertainty and changes on the global stage, tourism becomes an industry that requires not only creative approaches to development but also sophisticated risk management strategies. Effective management of these risks demands concerted efforts from authorities, tour operators, and local communities. National and regional authorities must study and respond to changes in the geopolitical environment, developing strategies aimed at supporting and protecting tourist routes (table 1).

Table 1. Risks of transborder tourist routes in conditions of geopolitical tensions

Risks	Description
Political and economic Instability	Political and economic turbulence affect the safety and stability of routes, altering conditions for tourists and businesses.
Terrorist threats and security	Geopolitical conflicts increase the risk of terrorist threats, casting doubt on the safety of tourists on transborder routes.
International relations and diplomatic disputes	Diplomatic disputes lead to restrictions on transborder routes, causing uncertainty for tourists and businesses.
Migration crises and border security	Migration crises put pressure on border security and result in changes to routes.
Infrastructure and access changes	In conditions of geopolitical tensions, there may be alterations to infrastructure and restrictions on access to certain territories, impacting tourist routes.
Currency risks and economic limitations	Changes in the economy and currency exchange rates affect the cost and availability of tourist services.
Environmental and conservation issues	Geopolitical conflicts worsen the environmental situation and lead to restrictions for tourists.
Changes in migration and visa policies	Changes in migration policies complicate the travel process and reduce the attractiveness of transborder routes.

Source: author's development

Tour operators, in turn, must be flexible and responsive to geopolitical transformations, seeking new opportunities, and implementing innovative methods to ensure the safety and stability of their routes. Collaboration among tour operators, based on information exchange and best practices, can prove crucial in overcoming geopolitical challenges.

The diversity of our world unites us and provides an opportunity to explore, utilize, and experience the best that local cultures and communities have to offer. This is especially true for developing countries, contributing to job creation (especially for women

and youth), enabling people to build better lives, generating resources for the protection of cultural heritage and the environment, fostering the revitalization of rural and urban areas, bringing people together, and making us better [5]. Therefore, local communities also play a crucial role in ensuring the stability and safety of tourist routes. Involving citizens in planning and problem-solving processes can contribute to mutual understanding and support, promoting the development of sustainable tourism that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders. Thus, the harmonization of efforts among various stakeholders in the tourism industry is a significant step in preserving and developing transborder tourist routes in times of geopolitical turbulence.

In today's world, where geopolitical turbulence and changes in international relations pose a considerable challenge to the tourism industry, the use of technology becomes a crucial factor in ensuring the stability and quality of transborder tourist routes. In the context of geopolitical challenges, technology plays a vital role in creating safe, accessible, and exciting transborder routes. Digital tools allow not only the optimization of logistics and marketing for tour operators but also the improvement and personalization of the tourist experience itself.

Technology plays a defining role in the development of transborder tourist routes amid geopolitical challenges, and its impact is crucial for enhancing the quality and safety of the tourist experience in conditions of geopolitical instability. Studying the role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and other innovations becomes a necessary aspect of scientific research in this context. Digital technologies, such as mobile apps, web platforms, and geospatial systems, enable tourists to receive up-to-date and personalized information about transportation, attractions, restaurants, and other objects on the route. This contributes to the convenience and safety of travel, helping tourists avoid potential dangers and difficulties associated with geopolitical turbulence.

Artificial intelligence, in turn, can be used to analyze large volumes of data on geopolitical events and risks in real-time. Machine learning algorithms can predict possible consequences and provide recommendations for the optimal route in conditions of geopolitical instability, thereby ensuring effective risk management for tourists.

Innovative approaches, such as the use of virtual and augmented reality to create secure virtual tours or blockchain technology to enhance the security and transparency of transactions, are also crucial aspects that can improve and ensure the tourist experience in geopolitically unstable conditions. In the context of geopolitical transformations, the tour operator business is presented with significant opportunities that can contribute to the development and strengthening of their positions in the market. Examining the advantages and opportunities for tour operators in geopolitically complex regions can serve as a foundation for forming strategies that promote the sustainable and successful operation of the agency (figure. 2).

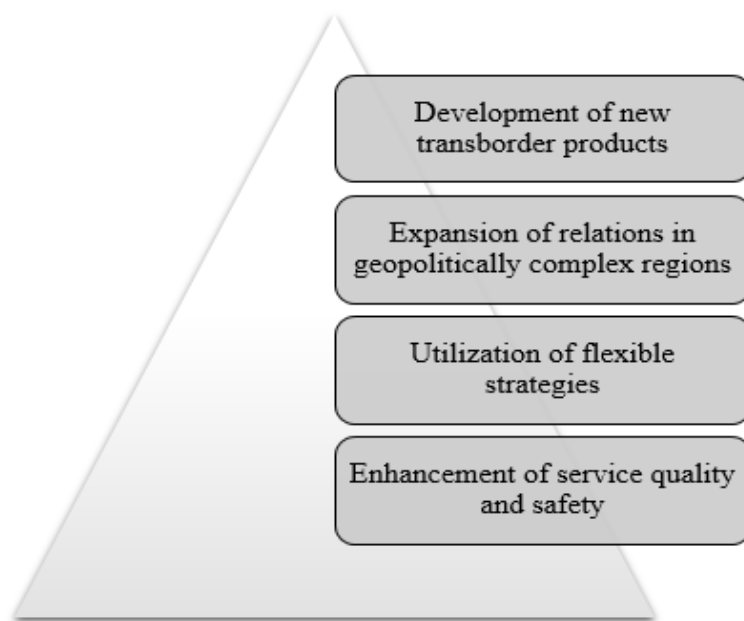


Figure 2. Opportunities for the operation of tour operators in geopolitically complex regions.

Source: author's development

Geopolitical transformations can serve as a stimulus for tour operators to develop and offer new transborder products. Identifying unique routes that take into account changes in political and economic conditions allows not only to increase competitiveness but also to attract a new segment of tourists.

In the context of geopolitical transformations, tour operators have opportunities to expand partnerships in regions where others may see only risks. Establishing and improving collaboration with local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and governmental structures can contribute to resolving difficulties and ensuring stability in the business.

Geopolitical transformations require flexibility and quick responsiveness to changes from tour operators. The use of flexible strategies allows adapting tour packages to changing circumstances, quickly entering new markets, and adjusting products to meet tourist demands. In times of geopolitical transformations, tourists prioritize the quality and safety of their travels. Tour operators can leverage innovative technologies, such as security and monitoring systems, to ensure a high standard of service and protect tourists from potential risks. All these opportunities create perspectives for the tour operator business in geopolitically unstable conditions, demanding not only adaptation but also active formulation of strategies to maximize positive outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, geopolitical factors exert a significant impact on the tourism industry, determining the conditions and opportunities for the development of transborder routes. International relations, political conflicts, sanctions, and other geopolitical phenomena create a turbulent environment in which tour operators and other industry participants operate.

Tour operators, in turn, respond to geopolitical turbulence by implementing innovative strategies and practices. They actively leverage new technologies, study market trends, and adapt their services to changing conditions.

Innovations in tour operating become a key tool for overcoming geopolitical challenges. The use of advanced technologies, marketing strategies, and innovative approaches helps tour operators adapt to changes in the geopolitical environment and ensures the stability of their business processes.

Transborder tourist routes, despite their development potential, carry risks in the conditions of geopolitical tensions. Analyzing these risks is necessary for effective management and minimizing potential negative consequences. Meanwhile, technologies emerge as a crucial catalyst for the development of transborder routes in the face of geopolitical challenges. Using geodata, blockchain technologies, virtual and augmented reality allows ensuring safety and providing an innovative experience for tourists.

Overall, geopolitical transformations pose challenges for the tour operator business, but at the same time, they open a wide range of opportunities for those who are ready to respond innovatively to changes in the global tourism environment.

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