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Contemporary Geopolitical Transformations and Their Impact on the Dynamics of International Tourist Flows

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ABSTRACT

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Tourism is an extremely vulnerable sector to external and internal crises. The current state of international tourism development is determined by the influence of dynamic geopolitical transformations that significantly change the structure, directions, and intensity of the tourism industry. Geopolitical processes determine the spatial structure of international tourist flows, their dynamics, and the direction of development of the global travel market. The purpose of this article is to analyze the impact of geopolitical challenges on international tourist flows and to identify the main trends in the world. As a result, geopolitical challenges are defined as a multifaceted set of factors, including political conflicts, military actions, economic sanctions, migration crises, the threat of terrorism, and a number of transformations in the system of international relations between different states. These factors lead to a reduction in tourist flows to the affected regions and a redistribution of tourists to more stable countries. The increase in international tourist flows is ensured by stable regions where favorable conditions for the development of tourism have been created and are maintained. Geopolitical risks are identified as one of the key determinants of global tourism development. Their impact manifests itself through changes in tourist flows; the growing role of security as a factor in the competitiveness of destinations; the intensification of regionalization in tourism; and the integration of politics, economics, and tourism into a single global context. General trends in the impact of geopolitical challenges on the development of international tourism are considered. International tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic is showing a significant but unstable recovery. Global shocks can instantly halt the mobility of millions of tourists and cause significant losses in the tourism industry, highlighting the need to integrate geopolitical risks into destination management strategies. Armed conflicts and regional instability cause an immediate reduction in tourist flows to risk areas and lead to a redistribution of demand between countries. Geopolitical challenges are changing the structure of demand: there is an increase in the regionalization of travel and a partial redirection of tourists to "safe" and politically neutral destinations. This phenomenon is accompanied by an increase in the importance of factors such as a country's digital reputation, safety indices and the presence of insurance/evacuation mechanisms in tourism offers. At the same time, some countries are benefiting in the short term from the "substitution effect" by welcoming tourists who have abandoned risky destinations. Sanctions and airspace closures, visa complications, and banking restrictions create practical obstacles to normal travel routes and logistics. This not only reduces the volume of international travel to and from sanctioned countries but also increases transaction costs for tour operators and heightens uncertainty in long-term investments in the tourism sector. Thus, geopolitical challenges are significantly transforming the global tourism landscape. They not only reduce the number of trips to high-risk areas but also affect the structure of the tourism market, logistics processes, and long-term investment decisions.

KEYWORDS

geopolitical challenges, tourism market structure, international tourist flows, tourist trip, tourism industry, investments.



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Геополітичні трансформації сучасності та їх вплив на динаміку міжнародних туристичних потоків

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Туризм є надзвичайно вразливою сферою до зовнішніх та внутрішніх кризових явищ. Сучасний стан розвитку міжнародного туризму визначається впливом динамічних геополітичних трансформацій, які істотно змінюють структуру, напрями й інтенсивність туристичної індустрії. Геополітичні процеси визначають просторову структуру міжнародних туристичних потоків, їхню динаміку та напрям розвитку глобального ринку подорожей. Метою статті є аналіз впливу геополітичних викликів на міжнародні туристичні потоки, визначення основних його тенденцій у світі. У результаті геополітичні виклики визначено як багатогранний набір факторів, що включає політичні конфлікти, воєнні дії, економічні санкції, міграційні кризи, загрозу тероризму та ряд трансформацій у системі міжнародних відносин між різними державами. Ці фактори призводять до скорочення туристичних потоків у постраждалих регіонах та перерозподілу туристів у більш стабільні країни. Збільшення кількості міжнародних туристичних потоків забезпечується завдяки стабільним регіонам, де створено та підтримуються сприятливі умови для розвитку туризму. Розглянуто загальні тенденції впливу геополітичних викликів на розвиток міжнародного туризму. Міжнародний туризм після пандемії COVID-19 демонструє значну, але нестабільну відновлюваність. Глобальні потрясіння можуть миттєво зупинити мобільність мільйонів туристів і призвести до суттєвих збитків у туристичній індустрії. Збройні конфлікти та регіональна нестабільність спричиняють негайне скорочення туристичних потоків у зони ризику й викликають перерозподіл попиту між країнами. Геополітичні виклики змінюють структуру попиту: відбувається посилення регіоналізації подорожей і часткове перенаправлення туристів у «безпечні» та політично нейтральні дестинації. Це явище супроводжується зростанням значення таких чинників, як цифрова репутація країни, індекси безпеки та присутність страхових/евакуаційних механізмів у туристичних пропозиціях. Санкції та закриття повітряного простору, ускладнення візового режиму й обмеження банківських операцій створюють практичні перешкоди для звичних маршрутів і логістики подорожей. Таким чином, геополітичні виклики істотно перетворюють глобальний туристичний ландшафт. Вони не лише скорочують кількість поїздок у зонах підвищеного ризику, але й впливають на структуру туристичного ринку, логістичні процеси та прийняття довгострокових інвестиційних рішень.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

геополітичні виклики, структура туристичного ринку, міжнародні туристичні потоки, туристична поїздка, індустрія туризму, інвестиції.

1. Introduction

The modern development of international tourism takes place in the context of dynamic geopolitical transformations, which significantly affect the formation of the structure, the choice of destinations and the intensity of tourist flows. Geopolitical challenges are a complex of factors that include political conflicts, military actions, economic sanctions, migration crises, terrorist threats, as well as changes in the system of international relations between states. These factors determine the level of security of regions, the availability of transport infrastructure and the overall attractiveness of certain territories for tourist travel. International tourist flows are defined as the movement of tourists between the countries of the world, which reflects the scale and directions of development of global tourism under the influence of various political, economic and social processes.

2. Literature Review

Various aspects of the development of international tourism have repeatedly been the subject of research by both domestic and foreign scientists. In the article N. Barvinok [2] the dynamics of changes in tourist flows of different countries due to the influence of geopolitical instability are studied, the causes and obstacles in the development of tourism (the impact of political coups, terrorist acts and military actions) are analyzed. Also, in his other work [1], the researcher assessed the impact of global security factors on the development of international tourism in Ukraine over the past decade. M. Bashchak [3] highlighted the factors of geopolitical instability (political coups, terrorist acts, military conflicts) that affect the development of international tourism. P. Shukanov and A. Kopyltsa [15] established how geopolitical events (conflicts, terrorism, political instability and border changes) affect tourist flows, the safety of travelers, the economy, and the development of the tourism industry in general. The article discusses negative consequences (a drop in demand for visiting certain regions) and positive aspects (the development of domestic tourism in the context of international travel restrictions).

O. Shymanskyi et al. [14] based on a comprehensive network analysis, we studied the global networks of tourist flows. E. Papagianni et al. [10] found that geopolitical fluctuations are the main driver of tourist demand. With geopolitical tensions rising, most countries are experiencing a persistent negative impact on their tourism demand. R. Grigoriadis et al. [5] identified a close relationship between political stability, social conditions and demand for tourism. Political factors directly affect the social environment of the destination, which in turn shapes visitors' perceptions of safety, quality of service, and overall impression. Ch.-Ch. Lee et al. [8] examined the causal relationships between geopolitical risks and tourist demand. Geopolitical risk negatively affects tourism demand, and pandemic outbreaks exacerbate the negative impact of geopolitical risks on tourism demand. I. Raheem S. Roux [12] noted a surge in waves of geopolitical uncertainty around the world. Geopolitical risk, in particular acts of terrorism, war risk, nuclear threats and tensions related to military action, has an impact on travel and leisure companies.

3. Problem Statement

The article is aimed at analyzing the impact of geopolitical challenges on international tourist flows, determining its main trends in the world.

4. Methods and Materials

In the course of the study, general scientific and specialized methods of cognition were applied. The theoretical basis of the study is the works of leading domestic and foreign scientists, who are devoted to the concepts of "geopolitical challenges", "international tourist flows". In the course of the analysis, system and dialectical approaches, methods of analysis and synthesis, comparative method, methods of generalization and systematization of knowledge were used.

5. Results and Discussion

At the present stage of development of the world economy, the tourism industry occupies one of the leading roles, activating numerous processes that contribute to the strengthening of economic indicators of countries. In particular, the tourism sector has a significant impact on the growth of the gross domestic product, stimulates progress in such sectors as transport, construction and services, creates a significant number of new jobs, and also serves as a powerful tool for attracting foreign investment. For many countries, tourism is a determining source of economic income, which creates a significant dependence of their budgets on the number of international tourist flows. However, tourist services do not belong to the category of basic life needs, so the demand for them is extremely sensitive to changes in socio-economic and political circumstances. This demand is considered elastic and can fluctuate significantly depending on the action of both objectively statistical and dynamic factors, such as the level of income of the population, seasonality, changes in air travel policies, or even fashion trends in travel. In turn, certain regions and countries of the world, having favorable climatic or cultural conditions, become world leaders in the field of tourism, while others, due to unfavorable circumstances, face a significant decrease in the tourist flow.

International tourism is a form and process of spatial activity at the global level, due to socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as the general dynamics of the development of political systems. Tourism has repeatedly served as an effective means of establishing trust and building interaction between states, regardless of their socio-political structure. It has played a powerful role in economic and political modernization, while helping to maintain political stability in various countries [11, p. 20].

International tourism is closely interconnected with a number of global security factors that can pose a threat to tourism activities and the development of the travel industry in a particular country. Among the main global factors that can negatively affect the development of the tourism sector, it is necessary to single out geopolitical instability in the countries where tourists live or rest (political coups, terrorist acts, armed conflicts); outbreaks of epidemics or pandemics in the regions where tourists live or stay; unfavorable natural and environmental circumstances in the places of rest of travelers; negative general economic situation both in the countries of residence of travelers and in the countries of their vacation [2, p. 142].

Geopolitical challenges are a set of political, economic, military and social factors that arise as a result of changes in international relations between states and affect stability in the world or in certain regions. In other words, they are situations or processes that pose threats or obstacles to the normal functioning of states, regions or the world community. They can manifest themselves in the form (Fig. 1) of armed conflicts and wars that violate security; international sanctions, economic pressure or trade restrictions; terrorist threats and political instability; mass migrations and refugee crises; competition for resources (energy, water, food); information wars, cyber threats and propaganda; global epidemics or environmental disasters that have political consequences. In the context of tourism, geopolitical challenges mean external circumstances that affect the tourist mobility and attractiveness of countries. They can reduce tourist flows to dangerous regions, change travel destinations, and even transform the international tourism market.

Geopolitical risk is currently classified as one of the top five business threats in the world [8]. Geopolitical risk is relevant with aspects such as political stability, security and protection. Events related to wars, conflicts, terrorism or human rights violations increase the level of this risk. As a result, this significantly affects tourists' choice of travel destinations and causes a decline in tourist activity in the affected regions. The tourism sphere of states that share a common border or are in proximity to each other is characterized by high sensitivity to geopolitical shocks of neighboring countries [10]. In addition to those discussed above, the researchers point to factors such as tourist income, overall quality of destinations, demographic structure, public tourism policy, and tourism attractiveness [14].

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of geopolitical crises, in particular, armed conflicts, economic sanctions, terrorist threats, mass migration and information wars. All these factors significantly affect the structure and intensity of international tourist turnover.

International tourist flows should be understood as a dynamic process of movement of people between countries of the world for the purpose of temporary stay outside the place of permanent residence. These flows are formed under the influence of economic, political, social and geopolitical factors, reflect the scale and directions of global tourism development [16].

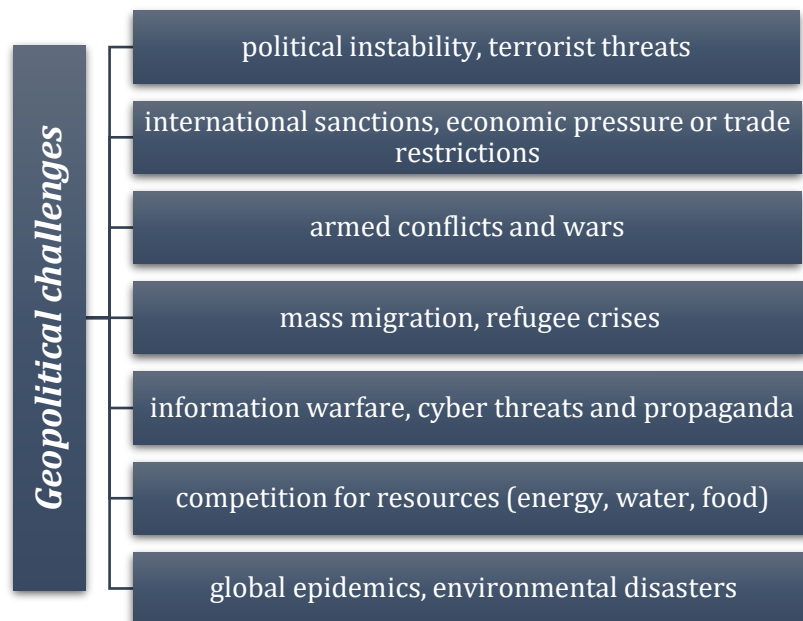


Figure 1. Geopolitical Challenges: Factors

Source: generated by the authors.

Taking into account the processes of globalization, the dynamics of international tourism are constantly undergoing changes, which is manifested through transformations in the flows of international tourists. The analysis of the structure and trends in the development of these flows is extremely important for comprehending historical changes and developing reasonable strategies for the further development of the tourism industry [Shao]. The roles and functions of countries or regions in the tourism system reflect the level of economic development of the state, the degree of its openness to international interaction, the index of price competitiveness, the features of state policy, as well as the volume of population. At the same time, roles and functions in the structure of inbound tourist flows are determined mainly by the competitiveness of the tourism sector, the presence of tourist attractions, cultural heritage and other similar factors [5, p. 2].

During periods of increased danger, the intensity of tourist trips within and outside countries tends to decrease sharply, and the issue of tourist safety always remains relevant and requires significant attention from tourism enterprises [1, p. 113]. Situations such as political coups, strikes, protests, or aggravation of relations between countries significantly affect the development of tourism and the formation of interest in certain destinations. It is only natural for people to avoid traveling to regions with low security. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in evolutionary mechanisms and is directly related to the instinct of self-preservation. Despite the development of society and the complexity of the modern world, the human perception of life's threats remains similar to what it was thousands of years ago. Tourists tend to prefer safe destinations when trying to avoid risky places where they experience increased levels of danger. That is why perceived danger can be considered one of the key deterrents influencing a tourist's choice and overall travel decision. This effect is especially noticeable for inbound tourism, as it forms a negative image of the destination in the imagination of potential visitors [6]. Among the main obstacles to the development of tourism during military conflicts are hostilities, which pose a danger not only to tourists, but also to the entire population of the country, especially in the zones of occupation and active hostilities; loss of a significant part of tourist and recreational resources (historical monuments, cultural and architectural sites, religious and tourist places, nature protection zones and medical and health complexes) due to their complete or partial destruction as a result of hostilities or their location in the zones of occupation; destruction of infrastructure in regions where active hostilities are taking place (hotels, catering establishments, entertainment complexes, etc.); closure of airspace for civil aviation; disruption of transport logistics due to the destruction of communication routes or the location of the occupying forces on these routes; occupation by the occupying forces of territories that are important as tourist centers; significant loss of labor resources due to the departure of employees, their displacement or involvement in hostilities [1, p. 113].

The deterioration and instability of the political situation create significant obstacles to the sustainable development of international tourism. The impact of the political environment on the industry cannot be ignored, so stakeholders need to respond quickly and effectively to political events. In the event that instability threatens the safety of tourists, it inevitably affects their travel preferences and destinations [17].

Terrorist acts are also one of the critical security factors that significantly affect the development of tourism. Modern terrorism has transformed: it has become a larger, more organized and widespread phenomenon. Most often, popular tourist destinations become the objects of attacks, which is due to the desire of terrorist groups to draw maximum attention to their actions. In such cases, tourism becomes a convenient mechanism for achieving this task. In addition, citizens of different countries often become victims of terrorist attacks, which emphasizes the international nature of the problem. The largest terrorist attacks mostly take place in states that are popular with tourists. Due to the international nature of tourism, terrorist groups can easily adapt to the tourist environment and use it to realize their goals [2, pp. 116–117]. Countering the consequences of terrorist attacks is usually carried out quite quickly, and there are numerous mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of such attacks. However, military conflicts are of a longer nature, can maintain their presence for years and cause significant damage to the country's tourism industry. The process of restoring and restoring attractiveness and a positive image requires significant efforts and resources from states.

Migration crises caused by the mass displacement of people due to military conflicts, economic difficulties or climate change can affect the tourist attractiveness of certain regions. The growth in the number of migrants often creates an increased burden on the local infrastructure, which negatively affects the quality of services for tourists. In addition, such crises can exacerbate social tension in society, which can discourage travelers from visiting regions that serve as transit zones for refugees. Some tourists deliberately avoid traveling to such places due to fears for personal safety and comfort during their stay [15, p. 117].

A serious challenge for world tourism is the sanctions policy and restrictions on movement. The ban on direct flights, complication of visa procedures and currency restrictions reduce the mobility of the population and the volume of international travel. This is especially noticeable after 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with political factors, changed the usual routes and behavior of tourists.

For the most part, international and local tourists prefer to travel to countries or regions with a high level of social, economic and political stability. In addition, consumers of tourist services tend to spend more money on goods and services in places where security is ensured. In this regard, geopolitical risks may have a negative impact on the development of the tourism industry both in the short and medium and long term, affecting the profits of this sector and the overall economic growth [8].

Since the tourism industry is a complex and multifaceted industry, it faces serious challenges in the face of modern economic and social changes. Another of the key problems is information asymmetry, which makes it difficult to coordinate activities between different market participants, such as tour operators, investors and tourists themselves. This problem is especially acute in times of crisis, since information inequality significantly increases risks, causes disruptions in the tourism market and creates additional difficulties for effective risk management. Of particular importance is state policy, which turns out to be an effective mechanism for streamlining the work of inefficient market segments. It contributes to the coordination of actions of tourism entities, improves risk management and ensures the stable functioning of the industry even in difficult socio-economic conditions [7, p. 85].

Political instability, current security issues and negative media coverage pose significant barriers to tourists. At the same time, well-organized communication in crises, effective management and quality public services can significantly improve the image of the destination and contribute to its revival. Therefore, future tourism strategies must proactively address these risks, moving from reactive crisis management to proactive integration of risks into core business and policy planning [4].

Geopolitical challenges are driving operational and strategic changes in the tourism industry: increased attention to risk management, diversification of source markets, development of domestic and short-term tourism, investments in digital marketing and early warning systems. Government agencies and the private sector are increasingly integrating scenario approaches, insurance products and evacuation plans into the business models of tour operators, which increases the overall resilience of the sector, but at the same time requires coordination at the international level and investment in the country's image.

Table 1. General trends in the impact of geopolitical challenges on the development of international tourism

Reducing tourist flows in conflict zones	Geopolitical instability leads to a reduction in the number of trips to regions where there is a security threat. Classic examples are the decline in tourist flow to the Middle East, Eastern Europe, or North Africa during periods of conflict. Tourists tend to replace risky destinations with more stable countries – this phenomenon is called the "substitution effect".
Shifting tourist flows towards safe and politically neutral countries	Destinations such as Switzerland, Slovenia, Portugal, and the United Arab Emirates are gaining popularity because of their image of stability, security, and political neutrality. This is shaping a new geography of tourism, in which safety becomes a key criterion for choosing a trip
Strengthening the role of regional tourism	During periods of global crises and restrictions (such as COVID-19 or sanctions regimes), there is a regionalization of tourist flows, with people more likely to travel within their region or neighboring countries. This contributes to the development of local tourism and interregional partnerships.
Impact of sanctions and visa restrictions	Political conflicts are often accompanied by visa barriers, transport restrictions, and sanctions against airlines or hotel chains. This directly affects the volume of international tourism, changing travel routes and logistics.
Information and media factors	The influence of the media, social networks and risk indices (e.g., Global Peace Index, Geopolitical Risk Index), which form an idea of the security of countries, is growing. Tourists are increasingly focused on the digital reputation of destinations.
Diversification of tourism markets	States seek to reduce dependence on certain tourism markets (for example, the EU or the Russian Federation) and focus on expanding cooperation with the countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This contributes to the globalization of tourism, but in a different, multipolar form.
Development of the concept of "sustainable and safe tourism"	Geopolitical challenges stimulate governments and international organizations to develop crisis management programs in tourism, risk insurance, evacuation protocols and partnerships between states to guarantee the safety of travelers

Source: Formed by the author based on [5; 8, pp. 28–30; 9, pp. 876–877; 10; 12, pp. 3–4].

6. Conclusions

Geopolitical challenges (armed conflicts, political crises, economic sanctions, migration waves and information wars) are transforming the global tourism landscape: they not only reduce the volume of current trips in risk areas, but also change the structure of markets, logistics and long-term investment decisions. Geopolitical factors are now actively influencing the formation of a new structure of the world tourism market. In these conditions, the key strategy for states and travel companies is adaptation to global changes, an emphasis on the development of safe destinations, the introduction of digital technologies in services and the expansion of the range of tourism products. The future stability of the tourism industry will largely depend on the ability to respond quickly to geopolitical challenges and effectively create a positive international image of the country.

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